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## ECOLOGIES OF MATERIALITY AND AESTHETICS IN BRITISH MODERNIST WAR-TIME LITERATURE, 1890-1939

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ECOLOGIES OF MATERIALITY AND AESTHETICS IN BRITISH MODERNIST  
WAR-TIME LITERATURE, 1890-1939

BY

MOLLY VOLANTH HALL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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OF

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines landscape representation in English novels, memoirs, manifestos, and poetry between 1890 and 1939 responding to World War I and the larger dynamics of imperialism of which it is a part. Analyzing how such works reflect and reshape dominant environmental perception during the early twentieth century's marked acceleration of mass warfare and ecological change, it reads for the way images of mud, stone, land, and soil—collected under the term base matters—express the entanglement of environmental and national structures of feeling ranging from fear to dissociation. These base matters dominate characters' and authors' changing perception of the material world that surrounds them—especially what one might call the “natural” environments in which they used to, but no longer, feel at home. Close readings of authors with a sense of “native” attachment to English soil include Max Plowman, Virginia Woolf, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, Joseph Conrad, Rebecca West, Wyndham Lewis, Nancy Cunard, and Helen Saunders. Such writers reveal the environment to primarily be a site of disconnect and alienation.

Furthermore, this environmental alienation amplifies the ethnocentric discomfort pervading English culture at the time, mirroring a sense of the “too-closeness” of colonial Others. Because of their aesthetic and affective entanglement, therefore, the environmental and ethnic national structures of feeling that pervade English modernist works surrounding this first global, imperial war of which the base matters analyzed in this study are evidence, a racialized environmental discourse emerges. This entanglement of environmental aesthetics of base materiality in racialized ethnic national ideologies of empire, then, in turn, infects English citizens' understanding of their relationship to both

local and global environments with a parallel sense of disconnect, also de-realizing ecological processes and one's agential sense of connection to and embeddedness in an intra-active global environment. The continuation of the feedback loop created by these two mirrored discursive and affective dynamics further reinforces the entanglement of racialized and natural epistemologies, representations, structures of feeling, and public discourses as the twentieth-century marches on and the former British empire lays the foundation for our globalized Anglo-American dominated world, allowing it to contribute, this study concludes, to our own present-day struggles with both the global precarity of an anthropogenic climate crisis and the revival of violent ethnic nationalisms the world over. Neither of these dynamics can be tackled without addressing the other, just as we cannot effectively address any present and future issues without understanding the cultural history that bore us this moment.

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## Homefront: Grounding England in Modernism's Base Material Aesthetics

Let us start with a representative image. In *A Subaltern on the Somme* (1928)<sup>1</sup> Max Plowman begins his memoir of the First World War with a vision not of the trenches but of his home in the English countryside. “There is peace outside, there in the fields of Kent. Nature knows nothing of the war.”<sup>2</sup> Across the channel and within the trenches of the Somme, Plowman’s protagonist describes these foreign fields as Kent’s antithesis—“earth that has lost its nature, for, pitted everywhere with shell-holes, it crumbles and cracks as though it has indeed been subject to an earthquake.”<sup>3</sup> Dividing “earth” from “nature,” Plowman removes the idea of Nature—symbolically entangled in ideas of home—from its baser materiality: the raw matter of earth.<sup>4</sup> As the war progresses, a more permanent rent in soldiers’ access to “Nature” translates “cracks” in the “earth” into a widening chasm between human subject and natural object—a psychic trench to mirror the one that scars the land and envelops him. He opines: “[w]as it Ruskin who said that the upper and more glorious half of Nature’s pageant goes unseen by the majority of people? . . . Well, the trenches have altered that. Shutting off the landscape, they compel us to observe the sky . . . the earth below a shell-stricken waste . . . recalling perhaps the days when, as a small boy, one lay on the garden lawn at home counting the clouds as they passed.”<sup>5</sup> In aligning this moment with an English tradition of landscape aesthetics, Plowman’s reorientation of the war-time subject skyward is described not as an expansion of environmental apprehension but as a unilateral shift: a “shutting off [of] the landscape.” It is thusly that World War I’s landscapes appear to reorient subjectivity itself away from earth, despite their still being objectively cognizant of that environmental reality whereupon “the earth below [is] a shell-stricken waste.” If landscape is predicated on what is apprehensible to the viewing subject—a perception attenuated by what is

rendered visible through the textual or visual aesthetics of a work, painting, poem, and prose alike—then Plowman’s imagery suggests a muting of the materiality of earth, a base materiality that is bound up in the land’s mutation and mutilation by war. Turning from base matters, Plowman’s memoir attempts instead to illuminate and preserve “Nature” as an uncontaminated ideal elsewhere. Like a Virgilian shepherd, the “boy” is linked to the pastoral “garden lawn at home” in England, an imagined idyllic past of “cloud” counting, and a version of nature as much created by World War I environmental aesthetics as it is pined for within them. On his return, Plowman’s text does not represent visions of a present England, only aesthetic annihilations of “Nature” from abroad in France. While some authors dwell in nomansland, others write the war from within the home landscapes of England itself. In both cases, the remaining authors under analysis in this dissertation envision, though variously, such subjective environmental reorientations as Plowman has above.

This study examines landscape representation in English novels, memoirs, and poetry between 1890 and 1939 responding to World War I and the larger dynamics of imperialism of which it is a part. Analyzing how such works reflect and reshape dominant environmental perception during the early twentieth century’s marked acceleration of mass warfare and ecological change, I read for the way images of mud, stone, land, and soil—what I term a tropology of base matters—express the entanglement of environmental and national structures of feeling ranging from fear to dissociation. These base matters dominate characters’ and authors’ changing perception of the material world that surrounds them—especially what one might call the “natural” environments in which they used to, but no longer, feel at home. My close readings of authors with a

sense of “native” attachment to English soil include Max Plowman, Virginia Woolf, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, Joseph Conrad, Rebecca West, Wyndham Lewis, Nancy Cunard, and Helen Saunders. Such writers reveal the environment to primarily be a site of disconnect and alienation. Furthermore, this environmental alienation amplifies the ethnocentric discomfort pervading English culture at the time, mirroring a sense of the “too-closeness” of colonial Others. Because of their aesthetic and affective entanglement, therefore, the environmental and ethnic national structures of feeling that pervade British modernist works surrounding this first global, imperial war of which the base matters analyzed in this study are evidence, a racialized environmental discourse emerges. This entanglement of an environmental aesthetics of base materiality in racialized ethnic national ideologies of empire, in turn, infects English citizens’ understanding of their relationship to both local and global environments with a parallel sense of disconnect: also de-realizing ecological processes and one’s agential sense of connection to and embeddedness in an intra-active global environment. The continuation of the feedback loop created by these two mirrored discursive and affective dynamics further reinforces the entanglement of racialized and natural epistemologies, representations, structures of feeling, and public discourses. As the twentieth century marches on and the former British empire lays the foundation for our globalized Anglo-American dominated world, modernist English racialized environmental discourse contributes, I hypothesize, to present-day struggles with the global environmental precarity produced by an anthropogenic climate crises and with the revival of violent ethnic nationalisms the world over. Neither of these dynamics can be tackled, therefore,

without addressing the other, just as we cannot effectively address any present and future issues without understanding the cultural history that bore us this moment.

*Far from Home*

Involving thirty different nations across the globe, “the unequaled material destruction and loss of lives of World War I surpassed those of any other war [thus far] in human history. Casualties numbered about 8.5 million killed and 20 million wounded,”<sup>6</sup> though some put that number higher still at over ten million.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the death did not end with the armistice in November 1918: “[m]illions of other human beings would die in an influenza pandemic whose impact owed much to the physical and emotional effects of a war that left Europe in shambles.”<sup>8</sup> Nor was the loss of life limited to combatants: approximately “6.6 million civilians also perished.”<sup>9</sup> For England specifically, losses were catastrophic (though no nation’s matched those of Russia at almost two million). The speed and quantity of death seemed to defy the very laws of nature. On only “the first day of the Battle of the Somme (1 July 1916),” for example, “the British army lost approximately 20,000 soldiers,” and gross British empire deaths totaled 959,000, of which the United Kingdom individually lost 761,000—more than double that of World War II losses.<sup>10</sup> And still, these numbers do not account for the psychic wounds inflicted by the war.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the uncontainability of the war’s damage goes beyond the astounding numbers of those people wounded and killed. Still visible from an aerial view to this day, the trenches of the Western Front stand in metonymically for the widespread ways that the earth itself bears the scars of war-time: great chasms in the earth belch smoke and soot, swallowing both ecological vitality and countless lives of laborers at mining operations in the English Midlands; once bucolic

fields and forests of France are reduced to up-ended tangles of roots and jagged man-sized splinters, deep sucking muddy craters, and soil so soaked in poison gas and riddled with unexploded ordinance that the area remains uninhabitable in most sectors to this day; lush Indian forests disappear, being replaced by noisy, mechanical train cars rattling through a now-empty landscape enabled by timber whose loss has displaced native communities and devastated their livelihood. These scenes form a distributed ground zero for the war-time subject's imagined dissociation from nature, an alienation begun during the Victorian golden years of empire that is codified in the violence of World War I and the interwar years that follow. Reading numerous works from English modernists, this study argues that the symbolic annihilation of Nature depicted on *Plowman's* pages has wider epistemic effects on the post-war subject's ability to see itself in an embedded, ecological relation to the material environment—a myopia with increasingly disastrous consequences for ecosystems the world over. As both authors and characters, those who inhabited post-war England—though returned to their civilian lives, jobs, and families—frequently felt an uncanny sense that they were still very far from home.

### *Modern English Environs*

In his global analysis, environmental historian Donald Hughes declares: “[h]uman exploitation of the natural world increased on an unprecedented scale in the period between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the 1960s.”<sup>12</sup> This period is concomitant with modernism in the arts, especially in the United Kingdom. For England, 1890 to 1939 in particular is a period marked also by world war and empire. In order to ground this dissertation's analysis of a base material environmental aesthetics, I must first situate this aesthetic history in its material one. Within British Studies, this environmental

project delimits itself by focusing specifically on the modernist era, World War I, and the dynamics of empire. This Introduction looks first, then, to a brief environmental history of those three singular events, asynchronous and geographically distributed though they may be. Moving forward, Chapters 1, 3, and 5 will then flesh out the phenomenological impacts implicit in the ontological happenings discussed in these sections using corresponding theoretical and critical discussions to outline key terms and ideas needed to place the literary analyses in the close-reading chapters with which they are paired in conversation with their historical contexts. Like Plowman, then, we shall set the war aside and begin at home with an overview of the environmental history of modernist England.

Many of the changes occurring in English environments during the period are inherited from, begin in, or are reactions to nineteenth-century patterns of human-environmental interaction.<sup>13</sup> The twentieth century, however, produces widespread increases in the scale of environmental impact, the speed of which accelerates exponentially at mid-century. Despite the frequent invisibility of forces animating environmental change—like the slow dissolution by polluted air of the now smog-blackened, chemically-atrophied stones of London’s historic buildings<sup>14</sup>—the environmental history of modern England is recorded in the material surrounds of its average citizen and the aggregated, quotidian facts of its populace. Taking an exclusive look at the domestic environs of this so-called island nation, modern English environmental history between 1890 and 1939 is shown to be marked primarily by three ecomaterial dynamics: air and water pollution, biodiversity and habitat loss, and soil erosion.



Effluent, or waste products from industry, released into local ecosystems' atmosphere and water tables combine with increasing concentrations of urban populations and general population growth to disastrous effect. By the end of the twentieth century, "[a]pproximately nine-tenths of the total population of England [would] liv[e] in urban and suburban areas."<sup>15</sup> Residents increased from 2.3 million in 1854 to 6.6 million in 1901 in greater London alone.<sup>16</sup> The dumping of their liquid and solid wastes into waterways created hazardous health conditions for humans.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile the resultant search for untainted water drained habitats elsewhere, contributing to biodiversity loss.<sup>18</sup> Lung diseases were caused by the increased smoke per cubic meter that in London in 1900 had almost doubled over the last century.<sup>19</sup> Increases in air pollution resulted from spikes in coal consumption, that, from 1856 to 1900 to 1913, rose nationally from 60 to 167 to 189 million tons per year.<sup>20</sup> As a result, multiple acute events allowed smog to cause deaths to spike into the thousands in a matter of days.<sup>21</sup>

Overcrowded cities largely represented migration from rural to urban spaces and its attendant depopulation of the countryside.<sup>22</sup> While the toxic environs above are difficult to ignore, an urban denizen might have imagined that the more "natural" England of the countryside was protected by the concentration of dangerous natures in the city, or, contrariwise, a purer nature may have ceased to be imaginable at all under the dark cloud of polluted skies in London, Manchester, and other cities. Either way, a growing blindness persisted to the living complexity of the ecosystems in which all English people still found themselves inextricably embedded. For good or for ill, "nature" was out of sight, and so, out of mind.<sup>23</sup> Planned land development<sup>24</sup> and industrial

extraction operations proliferated in England's rural spaces. Scars on the land, like, for example, "linear strakes of overburden in the landscape" from ore extraction, are often "still visible today."<sup>25</sup> Here, soil erosion (and therefore decreased arability) alongside loss of habitat (and therefore decreased biodiversity) become increasingly critical issues placing the sustainability of English ecosystems at risk. Hence, there is a general pattern of "environmental disintegration" as a result of English extractive practices.<sup>26</sup>

Surrounding areas witnessed the "atmosphere" as it "toxified most of the ecosystem within sight."<sup>27</sup> The key industries with large environmental impacts at home in England were the smelting and mining extraction of iron, lead, copper ore, coal, tin, clay, steel,<sup>28</sup> stone, sand, and gravel.<sup>29</sup> These mining and milling operations polluted and scarred the landscape. "[D]rainage tunnels" "emitted mine-water" miles away into "watercourse[s]"; "heaps of slag" piled up; "waste lead" poured from refinery chimneys; and stone quarrying "removed whole hillsides or, in the case of sand and gravel, whole valley bottoms" for construction materials.<sup>30</sup> These literal losses of ground matter for England's rural areas were compounded by the degradation of its topsoil. Erosion occurs in modernist England due to four primary causes: afforestation for mining props, railroad tracks, new home furniture, and war trenches, monocropping of non-native tree species in an effort to disafforest areas,<sup>31</sup> alterations to moorland to increase leisure sport opportunities, and changes to existing arable lands to increase crop production efficiency respectively.<sup>32</sup> In the decades preceding and following World War I, those who remained in rural areas or had attachments to what they held to be England's "wild" lands increasingly witnessed radical transformations to or reductions of emblematic national environments.

The simultaneous invisibility and totality of environmental change and degradation for both common and nationally symbolic landscapes in England discussed above contribute to the imagined dissociation from the environment that appears across English modernist war-time literature. This dissertation argues that the lack of visual access to “Nature” as well as the unreliability of rapidly shifting physical realities together underwrite the importance of aesthetics to the evolution of environmental affects and epistemologies in early twentieth-century England. Their development owes as much to the arts as it does to the scientific knowledge and public policies of the period.<sup>33</sup> The land itself has always been at the core of English national identity. The erosion of the English environment’s positive physical presence in the lives of the average citizen—its perceived loss—makes landscape as a purely aesthetic and symbolic object newly available for political, philosophical, and artistic renegotiations of the idea of nation in the face of a “modernizing” world. Ironically, this evolution of national ideology via an environmental aesthetics is necessitated by the very role that British military and imperial activities played and continue to play in the undermining of sustainable environments and ecological attitudes. As a historically rural, agrarian nation, England has long made special use of environmental representation in its literature. Modernist literature, despite presumptive criticisms of its hyper-urban cosmopolitanism, has been no different.<sup>34</sup>

*Nomansland: Ecotone of World War*

Nowhere is this dissociative environmental orientation more noticeable than in texts surrounding the Great War. The English environmental history of World War I that serves as its context can be traced along four overlapping trajectories. Together, these demonstrate the reification of localized warfare beyond those specific landscapes and

ecosystems in which battles were literally fought.<sup>35</sup> Firstly, environmental impacts occur in the war zone itself as a result of direct combat on battlefields in which English citizens are embedded for months and years; this is mostly restricted to the fields and villages of Belgium and France along the Western Front.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, there are direct impacts to the environment of England at home as a result of the mobilization of natural resources in support of the conflict. Third, both direct and indirect impacts exist to British colonial and neocolonial territories, such as India and the British African colonies. These result from the accelerated activation of global supply chains for the importation of natural resources to theaters of war<sup>37</sup> as well as from needs arising out of mobilization's effect on the homefront. Finally, after the official end of the conflict, indirect ecological impacts on domestic and global ecosystems result from the legacy of economic, political, and cultural shifts catalyzed by and normalized during the war. These trajectories demonstrate the interplay between the witnessing of material devastation and the experience of psychospacial distance with regard to places of attachment and enmeshment in the summative historiography I present below. Such dynamics are shown to shape war-time subjects' perception of ecological change—as soldiers abroad and entrenched, citizens at home, and global denizens of empire.

Any tracing of the ecological impact of World War I's characteristic trench warfare begins with an examination of the residual scars on the terrain itself.<sup>38</sup> “In the storm of steel, vegetation disappeared and was replaced by a different mixture of soil, body parts, and military debris,” “alter[ing] the composition of the land,” until “scenic landscapes” had all but “disappeared by November 1914.”<sup>39</sup> Due to advances in weaponry and the newly combined military strategies of total war and attrition, the

“disruption by war of agricultural and wild lands, and thus of the ecosystems these regions support” took place on a greater scale than ever before seen in human history.<sup>40</sup> In France, the war was fought in the most productive agricultural region, which witnessed the loss of 100,000 hectares of farmland and 200,000 hectares of forest.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, total ecosystem destruction, or at the very least human uninhabitability, becomes the war’s legacy along the former Western Front. Soil and water are made toxic by chemical warfare as gases killed plant and animal life en masse alongside countless humans.<sup>42</sup> Old tunnels continue to collapse threatening buildings and roads built over them today.<sup>43</sup> And unexploded “landmines” make it so that “farmers in France continue to be blown apart by mines laid there long ago.”<sup>44</sup> The land itself even registers a geologic change: “in Flanders there are places where the amount of iron in the soil has created a geologic ferrous layer upwards of a metre thick, a kind of man-made iron pan created by the ‘rain of steel’ that fell on these fields between 1914-1918.”<sup>45</sup> For a soldier in the trenches during those years, in addition to surviving the seeming transformation of nature itself, to live in the uninhabitable zone was to be engulfed in rampant disease, to live as if the surrounding environs made attack on the body, and to be in almost constant battle with one’s ultimate environmental foe—mud.<sup>46</sup> Ubiquitous mud presented several threats to the lives of soldiers: one could get stuck and drown; one’s wounds were more easily infected by mud’s release of soil-borne bacteria such as tetanus, anthrax, and gas gangrene (a bacillus originating from horse manure); stretcher bearers had more difficulty attending to the wounded on time; and struggling in it, over time, could cause fatal exhaustion.<sup>47</sup> In addition to mud, the trenches’ poor sanitation and crowded confinement together with disease vector species such as rats and lice led to outbreaks of typhus,

trench fever, and most dramatically, the influenza epidemic that began in 1917.<sup>48</sup> In these ways, the environment of the front seems both to disappear and to become a noxious, inescapable presence for soldiers.

Though there was some direct combat damage to London and the English countryside from Zeppelin bombings,<sup>49</sup> on the homefront in England domestic ecological changes wrought by the war were characterized primarily by rapid and large scale deforestation. Loss of tree cover led to decreased biodiversity of forest ecosystems alongside increases in the development of rural lands. England's existing dependence on timber importation before the war, an increased need of lumber for military purposes, and the blockading of imports to England by German naval forces<sup>50</sup> all converged to produce "accelerated" "deforestation . . . among the belligerents."<sup>51</sup> The English "overharvest[t]" wood to: line three hundred and fifty miles of trenches, meet other military construction needs, and generate pit lumber for mining operations at home (in order to extract minerals and coal for weapons manufacturing and transport fueling).<sup>52</sup> As a result, "50 percent of Britain's productive forest was cut in the span of four years."<sup>53</sup> This loss totals "450,000 acres of domestic woodland."<sup>54</sup> The lasting impact of such losses on forest ecosystems is a resultant decrease in biodiversity as many of the "deciduous and coniferous" "old-growth forests . . . had been damaged or destroyed" to the extent that they "could not be returned to their prewar species diversity."<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, forests were "slaughtered irrespective of the interests of silviculture," risking the "entire future of the woods" rather than cutting for sustainable management.<sup>56</sup> It could, however, be said that the war time uptick in deforestation "did little more than catch up, for some woods, with the neglect of timber felling between 1860 and 1914" when importation had allowed the

use of wood at domestically unsustainable levels.<sup>57</sup> In actuality, then, military deforestation only makes visible locally a global deforestation trend long underway but only now brought home by the war. While England loses tree cover, the war also contributes to accelerated rates of non-urban land development. After the increase in death duties in 1894, more large country estates were sold off and portioned up to individual tenant farmers and developers since aristocratic families could no longer afford to keep up large estates with shrinking fortunes.<sup>58</sup> The death of twenty percent of the aristocratic male population (compared to only eight percent in the general population) during World War I makes the transition from parks and gardens to industrial and civic development occur at exponential rates over the interwar decades.<sup>59</sup> With no real conservation plan in place, when agricultural depression strikes again in the 1920s and 1930s, still more former estates are translated from tenant farmer to developer holdings.<sup>60</sup>

The timber and agricultural crises plaguing an England that had too long relied on colonial imports to feed its industries and populations have a further global ripple effect as military actions in France and Belgium reverberate in England and echo across the vast British empire in East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.<sup>61</sup> As England, along with the other nations, looked to their colonies to supply natural resources, “[i]mperial networks turned the war . . . into cataclysm,” for “imperial exploitation transformed landscape cover, upset disease ecologies,” and “further destabilize[d] food systems” in areas already impoverished by colonial management.<sup>62</sup> Abroad, rapid deforestation causes a reduction in “land cover,” increasing “run off” or erosion in several colonial territories.<sup>63</sup> As colonial natural resource demands increase, “additional stands of virgin timber

permanently opened new forests to production, in the tropical colonies,” and “new uses for previously ignored tree species . . . permanently broaden[ed] the range of timber harvesting in [such locales as] the Indian subcontinent.”<sup>64</sup> This increases destructive deforestation and subsequent monocropping in colonies as it had done at home in England.

Global ecological disruptions resulting from the war came in many forms. Several of these, though less materially obvious in the immediate aftermath of the war, created longer-lasting, more dangerous threats to local and global environments in the twentieth century and beyond. Already environmentally exploitative industries sped up their production (and therefore polluting byproducts); these also increased the efficacy of their natural resource extraction practices and systems.<sup>65</sup> In the drive to fuel an ever more efficiently mechanized warfare and “win the day,” oil emerges as central to the energy industry decades (at least) before it would have and industries developed oil-dependent advancements in the war years that would not concede a return to coal and wood fuel afterwards—including those manufacturing automobiles, industrial equipment used in natural resource extraction, and other combustion engine related technologies.<sup>66</sup> These developments set the world on a path towards the fossil fuel dependency that accelerated global warming to its current threat level today. In addition, the rapid extraction of trees in colonies leaves behind the infrastructure to accelerate industrial deforestation in previously inaccessible areas.<sup>67</sup> Another legacy of World War I is the role played by research and development for new industries in accelerating environmental destruction moving forward. Chemicals developed for war become chemicals in a war on nature during the interwar period and beyond. For example, “[t]he industrialization of war in



Europe,” Edmund Russell declares, “hastened the industrialization of pest control.”<sup>68</sup> In addition to the war’s development of the chemicals themselves, the rhetoric used to market them in peacetime borrows its belligerent language. Edmund Russell notes that “[t]he scale of killing in Europe supplied a ready-made comparison for the scale of insect threat.”<sup>69</sup> Similarly, in England one also sees environmental language shift from “nature” to “resource” in the years surrounding the war—a shift from viewing lands as entities to be preserved and maintained for their own sake to a sense that their value is reducible to the raw capital they provide as resource for national security, especially in forestry. Tait Keller notes, therefore, that “[t]he unspoken military-industrial,” and therefore nationalist, “angle of nature conservation remained a tacit feature of environmental agendas long after the war’s end.”<sup>70</sup>

At home, a loss of familiar rural landscapes contributes to the sense of nature’s disappearance felt in warscapes abroad, while a sense of dependence on foreign environments for raw natural materials needed for survival undermines the sense of home-land as a bounty of security and protection. The invisibility of damage done to colonial ecosystems for England’s benefit further contributes to this dynamic of perceptual erosion. Environmental exploitation comes to be seen as a national necessity and early environmental policies define nature increasingly in economic and military terms, entangling nature and nation on a base material level through discourses of global war. These reshapings of the English subject’s war-time environmental perception cumulatively create a sense of distance between subject and environment, while simultaneously expressing an increased sense of urgency surrounding the need to control the material foundations of nation. This tension between a nature that is simultaneously

unseen and depended upon is felt most acutely in English modernist literature surrounding the war, where such writing reproduces this ironic combination of distance and dependency in its derealized environmental aesthetics.

*British Empire: A Global Ecosystem*

The communities and environments destroyed in the midst of European expansion . . . are lost forever, and we cannot be sure that any larger universal good has compensated us for this loss.<sup>71</sup>

Even the briefest survey of the environmental historiography of British empire disabuses us of any hope that commensurate compensation has been made.<sup>72</sup> David Arnold summarizes the situation thusly: “[t]he overseas expansion of Europe became the ‘rape of the world’, with the wholesale destruction of native wildlife, the introduction of alien species, and the creation of a resource-reckless global economy.”<sup>73</sup> Though the scale of environmental damage itself resulting from World War I was grosser, given the wider temporal scale encompassed by British empire (even just in the modernist period from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries), empire as a whole amassed more global environmental degradation than the highly visible material rending of the war itself. However, more is gained by their historiographic synthesis than comparison, for “the thread of colonialism and resource extraction . . . ties together the environmental histories of war and empires.”<sup>74</sup> On “the Malabar coast of southwest India” and elsewhere increasingly “distinctive military dimensions of Europe’s ecological imperialism had begun to reach the forests of the tropical world.”<sup>75</sup> The environmental effects of World War I can be seen, then, as metonymically representative of the larger global impact of British empire on environments and on collective, western human-environmental

relationships. This is made possible primarily by the planetary scale of the British empire. “At its height in 1922 the British Empire included around 458 million people, one-quarter of the world’s population at the time, and covered more than 33,670,000 km<sup>2</sup>, approximately a quarter of the planet’s land area.”<sup>76</sup> The inheritance of those generations following the mid-century decay of European imperialism—of which Britain is the largest exemplar—is an environment where, globally, “[w]e depend on a dwindling variety of food crops, on soils which are in decay, and aquifers which are running dry.”<sup>77</sup> In short, the legacy of empire is environmental crisis itself, a planetary struggle for sustainability—for survival.

The primary effect of British empire on the world’s terra firma is catalyzed by colonialism. Under colonialism, “[t]he land as a resource was central because it conferred wealth and strategic advantages” to the colonizer.<sup>78</sup> Land is a resource insofar as it enables the “conver[sion of] raw materials into profitable products which would enrich the colonial power whilst at the same time helping to secure new territories,” the earliest ethos of an unsustainable endless growth model.<sup>79</sup> Such global resource consumption and conversion is driven by a growing paucity of natural resources at home in England, where over half of all timber and food needed to be imported by the turn of the century.<sup>80</sup> Hughes notes that “[t]he difference was made up by imports from continental Europe, the United States, and the British Empire” but “there are ecological costs to such replacements. . . . draw[ing] raw materials from ecosystems abroad” meant “subjecting them to monoculture, simplification, and deterioration.”<sup>81</sup> The tropics are of central economic and ecological importance to imperial British territorial holdings at the height of empire, especially India in the late nineteenth and Malaysia in the early twentieth

centuries.<sup>82</sup> As a result of British incursion, in addition to the massive, often irreversible, environmental alteration and destruction of the land itself, these colonial spaces also experienced impacts on human ecologies through the correlative exploitation of economically precarious labor and indigenous disenfranchisement from the land.<sup>83</sup> Colonial environmental management came primarily in two forms: first, natural resource management of such raw materials as forest timber and, second, plantations of vegetable crops such as rubber, sisal, coffee, tea, cotton, and cinchona; together these fuel a systemic network of complementary economies based on extraction, importation, manufacturing, and re-exportation between colonial lands and England.<sup>84</sup>

In India specifically, British methods of environmental control created mass deforestation and a decline in biodiversity.<sup>85</sup> The production of Peruvian cinchona on Indian plantations furthered British conquests in India and Africa, protecting imperial soldiers with the anti-malarial quinine, which is made from the plant.<sup>86</sup> Diverse ecosystems were reduced to exclusively agricultural uses.<sup>87</sup> In order to support these increases in crop production, canal systems for irrigation were constructed on a massive scale totaling 75,000 miles of ductwork and irrigating some 33 million acres by the mid-twentieth century.<sup>88</sup> Canal systems resulted in “water logging and salination,” which is “the impregnation of the soil by salts brought to the surface by the seepage of water from canals and irrigated fields.”<sup>89</sup> Such agricultural adjustments also contributed to food insecurity in the region through the reorientation of food production towards import markets.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, forests “were not so much conserved as commercially managed or even transformed in the search for profit maximization by, for instance, replacing mixed forests with plantations of teak, sal or other valuable hardwoods.”<sup>91</sup> A good

portion of forests were, however, lost—primarily to the construction of the 32,000 miles of railways built in India around this time, wood being used for sleepers beneath metal tracks and for fuel.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, the land upon which these railways were built was also directly affected as “a great deal of forest and other natural vegetation was cleared and the soil exposed to erosion.”<sup>93</sup> In addition, the land to which railroads now gave hitherto impossible access soon suffered similar fates.<sup>94</sup> The problem, like all alterations to the vastly interconnected ecosystems that govern the natural world, grows exponentially as effects ripple through connected systems and lands.

In Malaysia, the plantation farming of rubber is at the core of British environmental incursion. While it begins as “small holdings,” the scale of rubber farming increases after the turn of the century due to “the rise of the motor car” whose creation of a massive rubber market made Malaysia “Britain’s most valuable tropical colony.”<sup>95</sup> As demand shifted from balls and raincoats to tires and manufacturing, the 20,000 hectares of Malaysia being planted with gutta percha and other latex producing plants in 1905 magnified to over 1,000,000 hectares by 1922.<sup>96</sup> Such wide scale monocropping leads to erosion and biodiversity loss. Once synthetic rubbers begin to be produced in mid-century, Malaysia’s environs fare no better as production shifts to the “exporting [of] timber and palm oil” whose effects are similar.<sup>97</sup> Though India and Malaysia form the foundation of British imperial natural resource extraction networks when measured by gross product or profit, other colonies experienced equally devastating environmental results under British colonization—such as Egypt, Australia, Africa, and the Caribbean. The damming of the Nile in Egypt created soil salinization and fostered increases in toxic agricultural chemical uses to replace pre-dam silt deposits in the absence of seasonal

flooding.<sup>98</sup> Large scale farming of sheep (an invasive species) for wool in Australia displaced indigenous populations, exhausting the soil of natural pastures through overgrazing and promoting “severe run-off and erosion” when shepherds attempted to re-enrich the soil with controlled burns but they are only stripped further by heavy rains.<sup>99</sup> These reshaped environs become inviting habitats for additional invasives, such as the rabbit, who, in turn, furthers the decrease in sustainable, arable lands.<sup>100</sup> Finally, sugar plantations in the Caribbean and coffee in Africa continue to lead to the destruction of “an enormously diverse flora and fauna,” though this process began centuries earlier.<sup>101</sup>

Seeing the efficiency of environmental exploitation (which they termed the “improvement of the world”)<sup>102</sup> as proof of their natural mastery compared to the previous indigenous lords of the land, British imperial policy and rhetoric becomes increasingly racialized, depicting native populations as racially inferior and such inferiority as the evolutionary product of their tropical climate and environs.<sup>103</sup> Ecological and conservation sciences themselves emerge from the opportunities imperialism gave to natural scientists. Imperial science, however, tended to privilege only knowledge useful to empire and not the understanding of nature for its own sake, and certainly not that of the indigenous populations. For example, British imperial scientist A.G. Tansley first coined the term ecosystem to describe the mechanistic functioning of whole organic systems.<sup>104</sup> He developed his theories, however, “with the issue of management of Africa and the political status of native populations at stake,” for he believed that “[t]he aim of human knowledge . . . was to use ecological research to support colonial expansion and management . . . and thus naturalize imperialism.”<sup>105</sup> Several scientists take colonial superiority a step further and use ecological sciences to

found theories of racial superiority, such as John William Bews combination of hereditary biology and ecology to create an ecology of human evolution in which the “humans self-segregate” into “ecological classes” wherein “[c]ontrol of the environment was the yardstick of these divisions” and therefore white colonizers are considered superior to brown and black natives.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, the concretizing of imperial racial ideology through environmental terminology is not a unidirectional dynamic and racial othering springs up alongside similarly structured environmental otherings as well. While the initial unchecked environmental devastation of colonialism is tempered by “early efforts at environmental protection and management,” commercialism under the guise of conservation does more damage than good to the long term sustainability of such ecosystems.<sup>107</sup> For one thing, “nature conservation gave additional momentum to existing processes, particularly the alienation of land from indigenous people.”<sup>108</sup> Despite colonialism’s initial exposure of the potentially detrimental links between human activity and environment,<sup>109</sup> the deracination of people from land remains its true legacy, for “if imperial expansion provided the opportunity for environmental awareness, the empires rarely gave support to positive efforts springing from this awareness.”<sup>110</sup> Instead, Shalini Randeria argues, the very idea of environment, as it emerges from a sense of division between nature and culture, is created by colonialism.<sup>111</sup> Racial and environmental othering, then, have common roots in British imperial parlance and practices.

What I have been tracking throughout this condensed environmental historiography of Modern England, World War I, and British Empire is the reification by magnitudes of the (already by the modernist period) deeply entangled material ideologies

of nation and nature with regard to Englishness. Analyzing the impact of the above histories on the English national imaginary at home thus far reveals the repetition of several dynamics: spatial distance, aesthetic (in)visibility, and a sense of loss or destabilization. These reorientations within the human-environmental relationship amount, I argue, to a perceptual erosion of imbricated environmental materiality. When we consider the role of imperialism from the perspective of the English subject, we can see how this perceptual erosion is further reinforced through the sense of separation between England and the environs upon which it is materially dependent (its colonial territories) as well as between the English colonizer and the environment more generally. This is because of the superiority England feels is gained in their perceived mastery over nature—a sense of control expressed in colonial environmental management policies and practices. This separation between England and the lands on which it depends begets a pattern of environmental invisibility, for colonial environments are not visibly connected to English landscapes, though they are, in reality, ecologically and economically interdependent. England had long since surpassed the limits of their own environment. To support England, a land mass larger than the nation itself is needed—an empire full of globally distant lands to fuel English development and lifestyles at home. Raw matter comes from an out of sight, “out there.” This “out there” comes to conceptualize both the racial, colonized other—they who are external to England and closely bound to the land as matter—and also nature itself, as an environmental other external to England and English culture.

Furthermore, England’s perceived superiority and control over colonized natures and peoples reinforces this disconnect, reifying the belief in humanity’s ability and



imperative to transcend nature. In this case, Englishness is separated from nature by its ability to assert control over it. Control of nature is seen as the material precondition of England's success, power, and survival. In detaching itself from materiality, it cannot see its own imbrication in it. The impact in the colonies of actions predicated on ideologies of control, too, remains unseen. Control of nature implies the ability to maximize extraction and production from the land as natural resource commodity only. This is made possible through the ideological translation of nature into natural resource: the reduction of matter to abstraction. In such a paradigm, maximal extraction and production is viewed as the mark of racial superiority. Racial inferiority is marked, inversely, by a visible dependency on one's environs and also the "wasting" (non-maximalization) of nature's productive potential (despite such practices often being more sustainable). In the English mind a link is then reinforced between racial and environmental othering as both are distanced and distorted through similar patterns of thought. The reduction of matter to abstraction acts to privilege aesthetics over matter. Imperialist ideology's orientation towards and apprehension of the environment through an aesthetic economy of vision and blindness, distance and control reinforces the English subject's dependence on an aesthetic negotiation of the material world, often derealising ecological materiality.

### *Base Matters*

This dissertation seeks to intervene in conversations surrounding the effect of World War I on the social history of England, specifically with regard to its environmental epistemologies. Hence, while I take modernist literature as the representative object of this study, I am less interested in theorizing modernism as a style or movement than I am in the way certain repeated stylistic practices continually re-

present the idea of environment between 1890 and 1939 in England. When examined through the lenses of war and empire, English modernism evokes a base material aesthetic in order to orient its national subjectivity relative to the destabilizing experience of World War I and its implications for England's identity as an imperial nation. Hence, matter itself becomes an operative term in this study's focus on environmental aesthetics as the core tropology of English modernism responding to the war. Matter is both a verb and a noun, defined variously as "[a] thing, affair, concern," "physical objects, vaguely characterized," the state of being "something of great importance or significance," and also "to care or be concerned about; to regard, heed, mind," and "to be of importance; to signify."<sup>112</sup> In its instantiation as both physical matter and ideational significance, matter functions doubly as a base for English national identity and for the subject's mediation of war-time and imperial experience.

In the following chapters' examination of English modernist texts, I trace four key base material images that together form the tropological network that is base matters. These are, as noted above: mud, land, stone, and soil. In addition to the more obvious correlation to base matters as literal grounds, these images of mud, land, soil, and stone are termed base matters for their constitution of the nation as both base and material: base because they enact a concretizing (making literal and reliable) of imagined national foundation and material for they represent nation as the product of a story that looks back to the base or foundation of the nation, seeing it as having emerged organically (materially and naturally) from English lands themselves. As I trace the base matters of England from its nationally situated contexts into war zones and spaces of empire, base matters are, I explain, transformed—*debased* by the war and become *negative matters* in

the colonial encounter that reveals England's foundational relation to lands outside itself. Hence, although the environmental focus of this dissertation may suggest an expected focus on specific places and landscapes, it traces instead an aesthetic mattering of environment to the nation of England and the deracinated affects produced by English attempts to mediate the disruptive force of World War I through an environmental aesthetics. While much ecocritical modernist scholarship has, until recently, examined texts primarily for their divergence from or faithfulness to a referential realism, the distorted landscapes of World War I call for, I claim, a focus on base matters not as the real lands of England, France, or Africa, for example, but instead for a closer look at the aesthetic-epistemological network that this literary tropology both reveals and creates for the English national subject.

### *Subjectivity and Literature*

Because my dissertation analyzes the impact of literary aesthetics on the actual readers that comprise the imagined aggregate figure of the English national subject, this study places itself within an intellectual lineage that assumes, as Catherine Belsey states, that "subjectivity . . . is linguistically and discursively constructed."<sup>113</sup> By subjectivity I mean the structure and formation of the mind or subject, especially as it relates to the society, culture, or nation of which it is a part. The arguments that follow draw their methodological hermeneutics for reading the impact of modernist literature on subjects—by which I mean people, psyches, or minds—from three key French post-structuralist theorists of subjectivity. These theorists are Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault.

In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Louis Althusser articulates how hegemonic histories are created and maintained through cultural objects and our engagements with them.<sup>114</sup> This occurs through ideological state apparatuses (ISAs). ISAs maintain social dynamics conducive to the reproduction of state power and constitute subjects through ideology via the repetition of socially sanctioned rituals and practices. Moreover, our enculturation into these ideologies is deeply rooted in language as well as material habits. Since the individual is inarticulate without the concept of “I” or “you,” Althusser explains that language hails us, calls us by name and in doing so, calls us as subjects into being for the first time—interpellating us as linguistic subjects.<sup>115</sup> The linguistic constitution of the subject is extremely important to my project, which seeks to understand the way modernist environmental aesthetics help to change the subject’s orientation towards the environment during war-time. The material basis of ideology and of historical narratives—their rootedness in repeated practices and cultural traditions—is also of importance, as it links the material and the linguistic in ways very similar to those found in modernist entanglements of materiality and aesthetics throughout literary war-time landscapes.

Similarly, in his “Structures and Habitus,” Pierre Bourdieu theorizes the importance of repetition in the constitution of socio-political environments—or habitus as he terms it—in which subjects find themselves.<sup>116</sup> The habitus is external to the subjects residing within it but it is also internal in that it functions to internalize externalities through the repetition of shared practices—to make what is socially learned feel, in practice, like it is internally chosen. This controlling of subjective agency via the habitus also has the effect of making history—understood here as a series of actions and events—

seem natural, or inevitable. I read English modernist texts, then, for the way in which their aesthetics reflect the habitus that helps to shape the English modernist subject, while also being attentive to the materiality in which such linguistic products participate and how ways of knowing and being in environments are transmitted or disrupted from within these aesthetics and discourses.

Furthermore, in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Michel Foucault’s genealogy of the present reconfigures the constructivist diagnostics presented by Althusser and Bourdieu by moving beyond a symptomatic paradigm of textual analysis, instead asking us what our particular view from the present allows us to see that was not always inevitable or inescapable.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, in seeing world and subject as constituted discursively—from without by systems of power maintained by public discourse—Foucault allows, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, for a mutability or responsibility that is not quite agential but that creates possibilities beyond hegemony none the less.<sup>118</sup> Hence, Foucault looks slantwise at the present, asking what dynamics must exist in the past in order for the present to have been constituted thusly rather than diagnosing the present based on the past. Our identity is then constructed by social desires and expectations rather than being inherent to or natural in us. The way we as a society talk about the world and how we design the spaces we inhabit shapes the way we conceive of ourselves as individuals and so we in turn confess ourselves as being that thing and behave accordingly.<sup>119</sup> This discursive and spatial constitution of identity and subjectivity is crucial to my understanding of the role that the texts I interrogate play in remaking the world inhabited by English modernist authors and readers. Such worlding is a material effect produced by a specific subjective view and propagated by potentially every book,

painting, and architectural structure people encounter: every park, garden, and trench inhabited by English subjects during the modernist period.

### *Chapter Summaries*

Broken up into 4 Parts, each Part of this dissertation takes up the instantiation of the base matters of mud, stone, land, and soil through the English encounter with Nation, War, and Empire, before examining base material aesthetics' complex invocation of all three in Part 4's more explicit ecological approach. Each Chapter throughout explores the specific way such base matters contribute to the aesthetic-affective feedback loop described above as I examine how England's base matters variously: 1) construct the environment as a site of disconnect and/or alienation; 2) express an entangled environmental and national structure of feeling; 3) respond to such environmental representations with varying degrees of fear and/or desire for re-connection/new belonging; 4) amplify ethnocentric discomfort/too-closeness as a result of empire and war, and; 5) appear connected to concurrent ethnic and environmental patterns of destruction that are the precursors of today's issues.

*Part 1* focuses on the foundational idea of Nation through which the three Parts that follow—War, Empire, and Environment—will be understood. English modernist environmental aesthetics of base materiality surrounding World War I negotiate the relationship between discourses of nation and environmental affects and epistemologies. In order to better understand this relationship, *Chapter 1* defines the contours of a constellation of terms binding nation to nature in the modern English imaginary. The chapter outlines how a specific temporality of nationhood emerges from the spatiality of England's relationship to land as articulated by the aesthetic landscapes of its national

literature. This aesthetics is marked by the tropology of base matters discussed above. I term this temporality a genetic temporality for its tendency to articulate a story of nativity upon the natal land, an origin myth that naturalizes nations. This naturalization is, in other words, a sanctioning of the nation's sovereignty through the historiography depicted upon the land—manifested, embedded, and embodied, *in* it and *as* it. I claim, then, that landscape is a complex repository for national mattering—as both a thing or object and a value or feeling. Hence, Chapter 1 demonstrates how landscape articulates and enables a recursive process by which the aesthetic entanglement of nation and nature constitutes the subject's environmental epistemology (or lack thereof)—its way of knowing the environment in which English subjects, and their nation, are enmeshed. This tradition is inherited by modernist authors, being both transmitted and interrupted by their works. Finally, then, Chapter 1 outlines the broad strokes of modernism's encounter with nature, suggesting that the base material aesthetics which become increasingly prominent in the period expose an affective-aesthetic pattern that is detrimental, rather than revelatory, to a burgeoning environmental awareness in England. Such affects tend to evoke instead a dissociative orientation towards environmental belonging.

Offering an extended reading of three interwar texts—*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *Between the Acts* (1941), and *Three Guineas* (1938)—by preeminent English modernist Virginia Woolf, *Chapter 2* diagnoses the recursive relationship between environment, nation, and English subjectivity discussed in Chapter 1 as being crucial to Woolf's articulation of various embodiments of post-war and imperial nationhood within the English imaginary. She does so via base matter, or rhetorics and images of ground. Revealing and often ironizing the nation's discursive imbrication in and constitution by

land, Woolf's texts expose the way the experience of World War I is both colored by and instructive of ideologies and historiographies of British imperialism. Chapter 2 analyses the imaginative (but also historical) merging of war and empire at the most basic material level that occurs through Woolf's marking of their presence upon England's domestic grounds with images of mud, land, and stone. Furthermore, I read the presence of such palimpsestic base matters throughout her works as representing the simultaneously hegemonic and unstable grounds of the English nation. Close readings demonstrate how Woolf frequently exploits that instability to better expose and interrupt what she casts as the retrogressive and hypocritical characteristics of hegemonic Englishness—its war mongering and imperialism. The chapter concludes that privileging the agency of mud from within the lexicon of England's more settled base matters allows Woolf to suggest possibilities for alternative manifestations of Englishness, multivocal and inclusive rather than monolithic and hegemonic.

*Part 2* focuses on the way public and literary responses and reactions to World War I grow out of, are transformed by, and in turn transform the environmental epistemology of the English nation's concretization and naturalization through tropes of base matter. Parts 3 and 4 will then trace the imperial echoes and environmental implications of the English subjectivity actualized by this war. Beginning with *Chapter 3*, I argue that the English subject's experience of World War I—both at home and on the front—produces a spatio-temporal state of exception that allows for the actualization of the long-unacknowledged erosion of oikological orientation within the national imaginary. In other words, the experience while in the war zone of a base material environment comprised of what seemed like distortions and inversions of familiar



English landscapes effects a permanent reorganization of spatial and temporal perception for the English subject—a new way of apprehending home spaces and one’s relationship to them. This disorientation lasts beyond the war, begins long before it, and persist at home in England. Hence, I argue, it marks war-time as something temporally boundless and spatially uncontainable with regard to the literal trenches of France between 1914 and 1918. I conclude that such affective and epistemological reorientations towards one’s environs amount to an entrenched subjectivity—an over-identification with the experience, either literal or metaphorical, of inhabiting the world of the trench. The ubiquitous environmental aesthetics of war-time literature—their base matters of mud, land, soil, and stone—both reflect and reinforce, I claim, the dominance of the entrenched subject within the English national imaginary. The entrenched subject is in many ways governed by the fear produced by their entrenchment, by the growing sense that war’s debasement of matter threatens to erode the agency of the individuated, civilized, universal human—which is to say, English—subject.

*Chapter 4* brings together readings of the World War I memoirs of English veteran writers Siegfried Sassoon with his *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (1937) and Edmund Blunden with his *Undertones of War* (1928) in order to trace the senses of environmental detachment and national loss that become entwined as a result of the emergence of England’s entrenched subjectivity. I argue that the environmental affects and aesthetics of the second and third books of Sassoon’s *Memoirs*—during and after the war—invite the reader to retroactively ironize the national subject’s intimate connection—depicted in the first book—to the idyllic landscape of England. This idealized intimacy is replaced as the narrative progresses with a sense of environmental

detachment that now appears immanent to English national landscapes. Similarly, Blunden's memoir depicts a new nature that inverts the agency of human and nonhuman actors through his depictions of base matters that align themselves not with the stability of nation, but, rather, with the destructive forces of the war itself. Throughout *Undertones*, I claim, England's characteristic sense of the land as site of insular stability is refigured through the imagined decaying of agricultural lands. Those become a regressive primordial landscape where human agency is displaced by the agency of nonhuman matters of war, such as mud and metal. Reified as universal national subjects, these two protagonist's experience of the destructive environment of war suggests that where before, rootedness in and intimacy with one's native environs evoked senses of safety and stability, after the war the identification of one's self with an England that is tied to the land becomes tantamount to accepting a threatening and disorienting entrenchment in (de)base(d) matters.

*Part 3* examines the aesthetic affinities between the troping of base matter in responses to World War I and those dealing with England's imperial identity. I claim that modernist attempts to gird Englishness against the growing spectre of empire share affective resonances with works seeking to resituate Englishness after the perceived rupture of the war. While Parts 1 and 2 together explicate the way in which England's founding of its national stability on tropes of solid ground left subjects open to subjective destabilization as a result of the war's destabilizing base materiality, Part 3 explains that the resultant transition from an overidentification with imaginary national grounds to an overidentification with the experience of entrenchment is enabled by the imagining of those grounds as simultaneously imperial and national, global and local, boundless and

bounded. Examining the foundations of Englishness through the lens of empire exposes a deracination of English subjects from actual grounds that *pre-exists* the war itself. This is why Part 2 suggests the war *actualizes* rather than *initiates* such subjective reorientations, exposing what was always already there but that was hidden by the fiction of a bounded, stable national ground that excluded the base matters of empire.

*Chapter 5*, therefore, argues that the base material aesthetics of World War I and empire are similar not by coincidence but because the war mobilized an existing doubt of the reliability of stable English grounds. This causes the English subject to encounter suddenly the imbrication of its own national grounds in empire—the constitution of the imperial English subject by colonial matters. The chapter, then, theorizes the imperial nature of England's base matters, demonstrating that base matters are in fact what I call negative matters—the ghost acreage of invisible colonial environments that appear as shadow matters within the falsely insular stability of English national grounds. Reading imperial base matters thusly, I argue that the entrenched subjectivity of World War I is in fact coterminous with the extractive subjectivity of empire. Furthermore, the anxiety of too-close matters I analyze in the World War I trenches of Sassoon and Blunden in *Chapter 4* are inseparable from the anxieties produced by England's dependence on the matters it must extract from colonial environs to substantiate its own national solidity— anxieties I also find embedded in the base material aesthetics of works examined in *Chapter 6, 8, and 9*. Finally then I suggest that in understanding the entrenched national and extractive imperial subject as one and the same grounded English national subject, we must understand England's increasingly racialized discourses of ethnic nationalism as entwined in its environmental discourse. This discursive entanglement can be seen, I

explain, in the proliferation of primitivist discourses surrounding both environmental and colonial others in modernist works. I conclude that the use of base matters to express English national identity then reinforces both racial and environmental othering through the same aesthetic-affective process.

While Chapter 5 explains the aesthetic substitution of the real colonial matters that form England's environmental and socio-economic basis for those negative matters on which the nation imagines itself to be founded, *Chapter 6* explores how this substitutive aesthetics contributes to the production of racialized discourses of ethnic nationalism in the English imaginary. Empire reinforces the notion that "wild" spaces marked by the presence of "excessive," uncontrolled (not yet unexhausted by imperial extraction) environmental matters are also primitive—and therefore anachronistic. I argue this reifies cultivated England as a postnatural place and the English subject as transcendent of nature. I demonstrate the reification of such racialized environmental discourse through my analysis of Joseph Conrad's depiction of Africa's supposedly primitive material environs in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), tracing Conrad's literalization of the replacement of knowledge with matter. This substitution conjoins the two through the trope of darkness as indescribability, unknowability, and also, material density and agency. In doing so, Conrad's text manifests the image of an imperial English self that is constituted through an aesthetics that abstracts those matters extracted for consumption by England. The novel then suggests that the mud, dirt, and other environmental matters of the Congo invade and consume European bodies causing words—the building blocks of the English imaginary—to become like air: empty and weightless. Reversing the invisibilizing of matter that I explicate in Chapter 5, the environmental and colonial

realities of empire in Conrad's novel expose the naturalizing logic of imperialism. Yet, in the end, Conrad attempts to contain that reality within a frame narrative that recasts African environs as anachronistically primitive, denying English lands' historical coevalness with such colonial spaces.

*Part 4* consolidates the entanglement of war and empire for the English national subject in the modernist period, arguing that base, debased, and negative matters respectively perform the solid and insular, entrenched, and extractive national subject. The tropology of base matters under analysis in Parts 1 through 3, I argue, locates a dissociative environmental affect that emerges from the English national subject's material proximity to mud, land, soil, and stone in English modernist memoirs, novels, poems, and manifestos. Circulating around an anxiety and fear of porous boundaries between self and environment as well as England and its colonies, environmental epistemologies characterized by ecological enmeshment become occluded as celebratory feelings of attachment are increasingly thwarted in such texts. *Chapter 7* proceeds, then, by sketching out key ecocritical and new materialist concepts and methodologies that will be employed in the analyses of Chapters 8 and 9. These chapters look at the too-closeness of or desire for dissociation from base matters after the war. Locating modernist environmental aesthetics in conversations about the nature of human culture in the Anthropocene, I claim that World War I, as an extreme manifestation of British imperialism, is in fact a hyperobject akin metonymically to global warming itself, as well as contributing to it. Like climate change, in helping to bring about a sense of the end of a world, the war ungrounds the English subject, allowing it to further instrumentalize matter and reformulate the relationship, as I explicate in my closing reading of Wyndham

Lewis's vorticist manifesto, between nation and nature whereby one (nation) consumes and replaces the other (nature). New materialist understandings of matter as simultaneous substance and meaning lead me to claim, in the end, that the story told by the base matters of England is no longer one the nation is willing to hear. As a result, cultivating an affect of environmental dissociation becomes a matter of perceived evolution and survival rather than the dangerous threat it actually is.

*Chapter 8* read's Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) as revealing the mutual, though unacknowledged, constitution of the grounds of England via colonial, domestic industrial, and embattled foreign lands. West's novel, I claim, also chronicles the English desire to forget such foundational instabilities—this national forgetting being represented by Chris, the amnesiac soldier. Hidden within the surface narrative's invocation of war's muddy matters, (neo)colonial and industrial dirt is also shown to stain the surface of England's "natural" spaces, exposing them as the constructions they are and denaturalizing English solidity from within. Each landscape marked thusly by negative matters—appearances that evoke the displaced or occluded material environments of Wealdstone and Mexico—is animated by an ideology of English imperialism that, I argue, the novel makes legible through its environmental aesthetic. In addition to using ecological materiality as a trope for the negative and debased matters of spaces of war, empire, and the working-class, the landscapes that the novel links together point also to the ecologically devastating impact of such ideologies of nation on local and global environments. Having missed why Chris's departure for Mexico *matters*—for the fate of himself, Baldry Court, England itself—the novel, I conclude, points to Mexico as what traumatizes him into forgetting, rather than the war. This missed encounter with

what has truly traumatized him—his experience in Mexico’s mines and England’s dependence on neocolonial extraction—repeats itself in the *material seeming* of England throughout the novel: first in the shell shock of World War I and second in Jenny’s image of the shattering of her world. An image that reverberates everywhere in traces of England’s invasion by colonial matters. In this case, the traumatic repetition is found in the war’s repetition of the wounds of empire. This time, however, the shattering of worlds is felt and seen as if for the first time, as it is only now registered by the mind or national imaginary, which Jenny supplies.

*Chapter 9* discusses two divergent uses of the negative English matter exposed in Chapters 6 and 8. I begin by reading Nancy Cunard’s use of primitivist aesthetics in her *Negro Anthology* (1934) essays. I argue she exposes English imperialism’s detachment from the real matters of English soil, a detachment that allows them to exploit racialized matters across the globe and at home. The second half of the chapter traces what I claim is the inverted effect of such primitivist negative matters when projected at home instead of towards the colonies. In my reading of Helen Saunders’ “A Vision of Mud” (1915), I claim her use of mud reveals the perceived threat of base matters turned debased matters by the war. Furthermore, I demonstrate that her muddied aesthetics do so by relying on the absent referent of the racialized colonial Other. Though not depicted directly in the poem, the “dark” matter of a colonial populace is re-encoded as Other through the experience of war. The breakdown of body-matter boundaries in war is shown to invite, in Saunders’ poem, the infiltration of the English national body by other, racialized colonial bodies that are nonetheless inexorable because of England’s need for the raw materials their labor helps to extract.

I close the dissertation with a conclusion that reexamines the argument made by the above chapters in the context of their contemporary echoes in the present, offering a representative reading of English-Polish mixed-media artist Joanna Zylinska's photo-video *Exit Man* (2017). Situating World War I and English imperialism in the context of contemporary hyperobjects such as climate change, and, I argue, coronavirus, I claim the spatially and temporally distributed effects of the war are still with us today with regard to our current climate crisis and the rise, once again, of racialized ethnic nationalisms.

As the chapters that follow will show, in order to understand the environmental impact of World War I on England and the world largely shaped by its imperialism, we must consider it in light of the concepts of both nation and empire by tracing the intersection of these two environmental epistemologies and the aesthetics that enlivened them as they meet in the slow motion historical cataclysm that was that war.



## **Part 1: Nation**

## Chapter 1—Nature and Nation: Genetic Temporality and the Concretizing of England

In order to best understand the role modernist representations of material, natural environments have played in the development of English national identity surrounding World War I, some working definitions for the constellation of terms that tie nation to nature in England will be of use, in particular: nation, land, and landscape.<sup>120</sup> In the western European history of which England is a part, the relationship between nation and nature is founded upon the deep ties connecting a nation to its land. Raymond Williams states that for England “‘country’ is both a nation and a part of a ‘land’.”<sup>121</sup> A nation, then, has both a land and a landscape. These are not interchangeable. Nation exists in excess of both of these, in its social, political, and economic senses. Even these valences of nation are, however, inflected and shaped by the land on which it sits, literally and symbolically. In the scholarship on nation and landscape that is brought together below, while the *land* of a nation is the solid, ontological, physical, material thing itself—the literal ground of a national territory, *landscape* invokes a way of seeing, perceiving, apprehending, and also, therefore, representing land *and* (or, more importantly, I argue, *as*) nation. This chapter sets out the ways in which this *as* concretizes (and secularly consecrates) nation as solid (and sacred) ground, a concretization whose material and environmental valences have been largely overlooked and footnoted by scholars of nation thus far. While land evokes a national territory—the spatial realm which a nation encompasses—landscape expresses an image or view, a national portraiture and perspective. In other words, land is the foundation on which nation is built and landscape is the view it projects of itself, onto itself. The chapter demonstrates, then, that land and

landscape make up the environmental and aesthetic aspects of a nation as spatio-material entity—that together, they found a national environmental aesthetics that exceeds the material nation while linking it to the cultural, social, and political instantiations of the nation.

*Naturalizing Nation upon the Land*

Nation is a term that resists simple definition. And yet, national publics and the individuals who defend or critique nation often take for granted the stability of those communities, identities, histories, and geographies that it invokes. This position has been variously inhabited and exposed throughout the long history of scholarship on nation across multiple disciplines—from sociology to history, political science to literary studies. In more recent decades, theorists of nation, such as Anthony Smith, Leah Greenfield, and Homi Bhabha, have worked to radically destabilized “the nation.”<sup>122</sup> They responded to figures such as Elie Kedourie, who, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, brought forth uncountable treatises on nation—usually through the biases of their own national mythology—in an effort to ground its storied status in a more stable, scientific-seeming methodology.<sup>123</sup> While much of that early scholarship, such as that of Hans Kohn and Ernst Renan,<sup>124</sup> contained the seeds that would allow later scholars to effect more nuanced and rigorous studies of “the nation,” writing on nation since the 1970s has trended more towards the complication and problematization of the term we know today than older attempts which sought to stabilize and legitimate it. This is especially true of the emphasis on considerations of the postcolonial perspective that emerged in the later years of the twentieth century and beyond, such as that of Partha Chatterjee, Homi Bhabha, and Pheng Cheah.<sup>125</sup> Though he speaks mostly of the

metaphoricity to which national spaces necessarily lend themselves, Homi Bhabha's discussion of the "problematic boundaries of modernity [that] are enacted in these ambivalent temporalities of nation-space" notes "the recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity."<sup>126</sup> Such landscapes "emphasiz[e] . . . the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to *naturalize* the rhetoric of national affiliation and its form of collective expression" so that "[n]ational time becomes *concrete* and visible in the chronotype of the *local*, particular, graphic, from beginning to end."<sup>127</sup> It is from Bhabha's "the disjunctive time of the nation's modernity," embedded as it is within the "recurrent metaphor of landscape"<sup>128</sup> throughout English national literature, that this chapter proceeds, taking up below the works of several such theorists of nation in order to build a lexicon of nationhood as it relates to that key term of importance to this dissertation's study of the environmental materiality of the modernist English imaginary: land.

Because nationhood straddles the ontological and the phenomenological—both an idea and a place, it is always both land *and* landscape. The spatial and the imaginary are, therefore, both crucial to our understanding of the nature of nation and its landedness. Though Benedict Anderson's representation of the origins of the modern nation contain within them a problematic misreading of the temporality of nationhood,<sup>129</sup> his consolidation of previous work on nation's imaginary nature as well as his examination of how such imaginative constitutions play out within modern print culture will be of use to us here.<sup>130</sup> The nation has its roots in a specifically European history though it is gradually transported across the globe, largely through European colonialism.<sup>131</sup> Though a nation's roots are often ethnically envisioned, national communities never arise

organically from an inherent linguistic or racial homogeneity within a given space. Instead, as Anderson notes, “they had [to] b[e] imagined into existence.”<sup>132</sup> A *nation* is, first and foremost, an imaginary entity, a way of talking and thinking about the community and territory over which a state holds power, and, therefore, a discourse with particular nationalist rhetorics and aesthetics.<sup>133</sup> In other words, like Tinkerbell, without a community to believe in it, the nation is only “emptiness” for “there is ‘no there there’.”<sup>134</sup> Hence, “the nation” is “an imagined political community” and it “is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>135</sup> Hence, “nationalism . . . *invents* nations where they do not exist’.”<sup>136</sup> As imaginary, in this sense, it emphasizes its etymological affinity with the image—the nation is pictured without being known. In this way, as both a territory and an idea—a heterogeneous collectivity of those subjected to a state and a widely-distributed, shared communal identity—a nation’s spatial imaginary stands on the boundary between the literal and the immaterial, the political and the cultural, respectively.

Ernst Gellner cites the eighteenth and nineteenth century transition from an agrarian to an industrial society as inciting “the rise of nationalism” by creating the “ability to shrink distances metaphorically” within a territory, an imagined spatial shrinkage that “concomitantly required and produced a cultural homogeneity.”<sup>137</sup> This fiction of unity becomes the foundation for nationhood. However, the nation and those imagined forms of national community do not “begin” with “the modern” or the Enlightenment and are not “invented” out of thin air at any particular moment in

European history. This is what is most crucial to my study of the function of land in the national imaginary, in the creation—or rather recreation—of imagined communities as nations. Literary landscapes, like many other cultural forms, depict the nation as having an origin that is always projected into the past. In its very act of doing so, however, the nation rejects a further past as pre-national, a past against which the nation is founded and from which it distinguishes itself.<sup>138</sup>

The nation is then not only imaginary, as Anderson says, but also contains within its images and rhetorics an imaginary history. Homi Bhabha explains: “the concept of ‘the people’ emerges” as a discursive “double narrative movement” whereby “the nation’s people must be . . . the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past” as well as being “the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the People as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process,” as a “recursive strategy of the performance.”<sup>139</sup> It is this strangely simultaneous elongation and foreshortening of national history that I read within the images of land on which England seeks to rest its national sense of self throughout its long history, and not simply in the so-called modern age. I build on Bhabha’s theorizations through my focus specifically on the base matters of land in order to diagnose a concomitant impact on environmental epistemologies that exists alongside and is also entangled in those imperialist ones Bhabha and other postcolonial critics have elucidated. The chapters that follow will closely examine that tension between the instructive, pedagogical functions of images of land and their

performative, creative essence that marks the textual matters (which continually re-present the nation), rather than looking to actual lands or environs (which pre-exist and exceed any notion of national belonging or possession) as that through which the English national identity founds itself by putting something else (or several some things) under erasure, out of sight.<sup>140</sup> While the nation is not the product of spontaneous generation in the modern moment, something does begin to shift during this modern era. Though there is no birth of a consolidated nation out of a backwards and distant past, but instead a change in the behavior and attitudes towards the non-human environment in England and, increasingly, across the globe—a change, I argue, that has much to do with the temporal fallacies and spatial distortions promulgated by images of *the land* in the English national imaginary.

Literary landscapes become increasingly accessible to a wider number of people around the same time that, ironically, English industry and government become major players in large scale environmental exploitation—during the eighteenth and nineteenth century ascent of print culture. This dissertation draws attention to the fact that land becomes an increasingly imaginary construct in service to national reimaginings in precisely the moment that the nation’s elite build national wealth and power through the gradual exhaustion of that land’s material resources. The rise, noted by Anderson, of larger vernacular print culture markets within correlative national territories at a time when literacy itself continued to increase allows for the speedier and more ubiquitous dissemination of the national imaginary in England.<sup>141</sup> Individuals living in a shared territory under the control of a given state “became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only*

*those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged.”<sup>142</sup> Yet, because it is structured by a language that is tied to a particular territory, the community’s imaginary constitution does not make it boundless.<sup>143</sup> In the end, the nation is always delimited by the land itself: “the nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them . . . has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations.”<sup>144</sup> In the national imaginary, a nation, therefore, has a specific spatiality of territory, embedded in its foundation upon land. *The land* as nation comes to represent a wide expanse that has been imaginatively reduced to a convenient, but seemingly sovereign, singularity.<sup>145</sup>

#### *Genetic Temporalities of Homeland*

The sovereign spatiality of nation, derived from the sacred boundedness manifest in the territorial boundaries of its land, contains within it also an implied temporality of nation. This national historiography articulates a story of nativity upon the natal land, an origin myth that *naturalizes* nations, sanctioning their sovereignty within and over that space.<sup>146</sup> Like an indigenous flower, it envisions itself as having grown organically in that territory to which it is native. The temporality of nationhood constructed by the spatiality of its relationship to land is then, I argue, primarily *genetic*.<sup>147</sup> Hence, Pheng Cheah notes that the “gaze” of “nationalism” is “fixed on the past.”<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, he points to the paradoxical modes of identification that are enabled by a genetic temporality of national land: “nationalis[m] . . . guarantee[s] an eternal future because the nation stands as the enduring substrate through which individuals are guaranteed a life beyond finite, merely biological life. This alleged organic power of origination is intimated by the nation’s etymological link to ‘nativity’ and ‘natality’.”<sup>149</sup> By focusing on a nativity rooted in and bound by the spatiality of the land—its “enduring substrate,” the nation garners a sense of



permanence, what Cheah calls an “eternal future.” Although the connotation of foundations or grounds (“substrate”<sup>150</sup>) are spatio-material in nature, the identity they enable is ironically “beyond finite” and more than “merely biological.” It is this sense of national permanence that retroactively creates a sense of antiquity in order to open up a stable teleology that lends the state an imaginary “organic power,” naturalizing its sovereignty, materializing the immaterial. I argue that national destiny, extending into both the future and past ad infinitum, becomes perceived in this way as quasisgeologic in its interchangeability with the land.<sup>151</sup>

The spatiotemporal imaginary that begets nation from a territorial concept to a cultural one—from a land to a people—employs then this trans-spatial simultaneity to unite all members of a nation in a unified historiography, a single grand narrative in which everyone takes part, through the medium of textual cultural objects.<sup>152</sup> Anderson cites the generic qualities of the novel and newspaper as contributing to the maintenance of the trans-spatial simultaneity of national consciousness. Both offer the omniscient perspective of many events happening in different places at the same time within one text—the reader of novels can watch several characters all live though the same day in detail and the reader of newspapers can read about goings on all over the country on the same page.<sup>153</sup> Specific to the national community, the novel addresses the reader indirectly as one who already knows this or that generalized aspect of their national community.<sup>154</sup> By identifying generalities within the novel as aligning with the specifics of their own existence the reader accepts membership into the nation, is interpellated as citizen or subject.<sup>155</sup> While the nation was not invented in the eighteenth century, beginning in this period, the newspaper itself is newly ubiquitous in national spaces and

the tandem nature of readership is everywhere visible to readers, “continually reassure[ing them] that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life . . . creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity.”<sup>156</sup> Hence, the nation is imaginary not only in its immaterial nature. It is also enabled directly by the imaginative linguistic arts, such as literature.<sup>157</sup> Because this “print knowledge lived by reproducibility and dissemination” and “print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language,” literature “helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of nation.”<sup>158</sup> Like the land, literature creates a sense of permanence (“antiquity”) and stability (“reproducibility,” “fixity”) surrounding national identity: “the printed book kept a permanent form, capable of virtually infinite reproduction, temporally and spatially.”<sup>159</sup> In 1935, Walter Benjamin also highlighted the role of “mechanical reproduction” in increasing the mass distribution of such reproducible texts.<sup>160</sup> Homi Bhabha calls this reproduceable antiquity the “attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of nation as a continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present of the *Volk*.”<sup>161</sup> Just as this allowed citizens to feel they had access to their national ancestors’ words, to a shared memory in literature,<sup>162</sup> so too, I suggest, do the literary landscapes within such texts attach a stable national history and identity to the groundedness of the physical land—bridging once again the imaginary and spatial elements that undergird nation.

Across Europe, and in England especially, I argue that literary landscapes enabled the furtherance of the genetic temporality that *naturalizes* nation by binding the bounded and rooted spatiality of the land with the simultaneous temporality of dispersed communities in a shared national historiography depicted upon the land—manifested,

embedded, and embodied in it and *as* it. As the ideal or real entity thought to inform and inspire landscape description, Nature has always been important to English literature and culture, even in the centuries preceding the rise of nationalism in Europe.<sup>163</sup> In particular, one cannot engage with the English tradition without accounting for the role of climate and countryside.<sup>164</sup> In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams narrates the literary history of England as it relates to the juxtapositioning of rural and urban spaces in its social imaginary. Two perceptual patterns regarding the centrality of Nature emerge: one having to do with loss and the other with separation. The melancholy sense that the countryside is being lost remains. Ironically, throughout English literary history since at least the fourteenth century, a simultaneous increase in the self-styled separation from the land itself is consistently represented. This distancing occurs, paradoxically, the more closely authors focus on nature as the materiality of the land itself. These elegiac and nostalgic tones are always already present in English literature about the countryside, then, from its earliest beginnings. F.R. Leavis' and Denys Thompson's English literature textbook for schoolchildren declare it so in 1932: "[t]he 'organic community' of 'Old England' had disappeared; 'the change is very recent indeed'."<sup>165</sup> But, each writer, Williams posits, bases their work on that of their predecessor who, ironically, had raised a similar clarion call. Each author argues that "[t]he decisive change . . . had happened during their lifetimes," all the way back to the sixteenth century when even Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) made the same case, or further still William Langland's *Piers Plowman* in the 1370s.<sup>166</sup> These "successive Old Englands," however, do have specific, historically contingent meaning to the national imaginary.<sup>167</sup> Always located "in the childhoods of their authors" and ringed with "Nostalgia," "Old England" becomes a

trope, a blank template that is able to “mean different things at different times” and that makes landscape an image meant to stand in for the land itself as the central image for English self-definition in literature and beyond.<sup>168</sup> Reinforcing this substitution of matter for image, is Old England’s frequent aesthetic composition as unpeopled, rural, and in a State of Nature.

Directly or indirectly, English literature’s employment of writings about nature and the land as “Old England” situates new perspectives and orientations, Williams’ analysis demonstrates, in times of change and often itself contributes to the enacting of such changes to ways of thinking and seeing England. Beginning in the seventeenth century, poems—and later novels—address the settlement of the countryside as a way to increase agricultural production.<sup>169</sup> This colors settled landscapes with an ideology of improvement that goes hand in hand with the increase in country house estates as well as the evictions, clearance, and enclosures that they necessitate.<sup>170</sup> In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, works engage with industrialization and its resultant increase in landless labor and urban growth through an increased apprehension of country places as sites of retreat and rejuvenation.<sup>171</sup> This perspective favors supposedly natural landscapes over cultivated ones and solidifies the country house estate as a scene rather than a habitation.<sup>172</sup> As a scene, the country house becomes available as a symbolic landscape, one that can serve as a compass for Englishness, directing national subjects towards a land-ward orientation: the “heart and centre of the national identity . . . without [which] no man will be able to tell his whereabouts.”<sup>173</sup> Across these various orientations towards working and scenic, settled and wild landscapes, Nature in English literature both influences and is defined by “where you were looking from,” one’s “[p]oints of view.”<sup>174</sup>

Orientation and perspective are shown to be central to the way the land is represented through landscape, creating what Williams calls an “alteration of landscape, by an alteration of seeing.”<sup>175</sup> This alteration suggests that “[t]he very idea of landscape . . . implies separation and observation.”<sup>176</sup> By the twentieth century, whether in appreciation or instrumentalization, a detached orientation toward the land becomes commonplace, so that “[t]he land, for its fertility or for its ore, is in both cases abstractly seen.”<sup>177</sup>

### *Landscape as a Repository for the Mattering of English Environments*

Modernist literature is known for its dealings in abstraction. British modernist environmental aesthetics no less so in what I claim are its depictions of *landscape* as a complex repository for matter. Landscape is a sort of “quasi-object,” neither solely material nor cultural, neither natural nor social, but rather a matrix constituted at the nexus of the two and structured by the perceiver’s perspective.<sup>178</sup> Landscape is, therefore, a repository for the mattering of English environments in two, interdependent ways. Landscape *matters* in the sense of its being partially dependent on the *irreducible thingness* of land. Landscape also matters in the sense that it *means* something socially, culturally, and politically. Such meanings also beget their own material consequences and so one sense of mattering is never entirely separate from the other. Hence, Karen Barad notes, “matter and meaning are always already immanently enfolded and transitional.”<sup>179</sup> As an aesthetic repository for environmental matter, landscape, I claim, contains and constitutes the base matters to which this dissertation’s analysis turns its focus in texts surrounding World War I. As both a site of socio-political meaning and a referent for real environs, the literary landscaping of rural England offered above echoes the political history of the modern state’s relationship to domestic environments. James C. Scott notes

that orientations toward “nature” as an object of “mastery” subjected to “administrative ordering” are a fundamental element of the statecraft practiced by most modern nations.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, he adds, modern states “tended to see rational order in remarkably visual and aesthetic terms,” a view wherein the “legibility” of lands and peoples determined state management policies towards populations and environments.<sup>181</sup> Like the author who reshapes perceptions of the land through their textual landscape, national discourse often enacts a translation of natural objects from things-in-themselves to things categorized based on their utility to the state and its biopolitical needs.<sup>182</sup> “[N]ature” becomes “natural resources,” “plants” become “crops” or “weeds,” “trees . . . timber” or disposable “underbrush,” “animals . . . game” or “pests.”<sup>183</sup> Landscape’s mediation of the legibility of lands and populations by the modern state is made possible, I argue, by the entanglement of national matters or meanings with environmental matters or the land itself and the ecosystem of which it is a part. As will become evident in my analysis of environmental aesthetics throughout this study, this entanglement occurs at the level of landscape as a process for national identity formation via ways of seeing the land—via, in other words, aesthetic orientations towards the base matters of England.

National ideologies rely on “shared . . . territory” as much as cultural and political commonalities for “[n]ations are by definition territorial entities, laying claim to defined portions of the earth’s surface.”<sup>184</sup> National ideology is then, at its base, a territorial ideology in which “landscape *circulates*” as a process of identity formation through what Paul Readman calls the “associational value” of landscape.<sup>185</sup> Landscape is defined variously as a symbolic image, a codified text, a structure, and a distanced way of seeing.<sup>186</sup> In this way, landscape is both an object of perception and a method of

apprehension—the “principle material foundation of” which is “land.”<sup>187</sup> Existing as it does at the intersection of the material and the aesthetic, landscape is best understood as “raw matter” translated into “landscape” by “our shaping perception.”<sup>188</sup> Because, as W.J.T. Mitchell notes, landscape is as much a “process” as it is an aesthetic or material object, one must concern one’s self as much with what landscape *does* as with what landscape *is*. Landscape as a process possesses multidirectional shaping capabilities, allowing lands to form nations and nations to transform lands. One can, therefore, attach a series of verbs to landscape.

In each instance, one should note that while the direct recipient of the action may be nation, land, or both, ways of seeing take on an epistemological valence, morphing consistently into ways of knowing. Landscape *represents, structures, and symbolizes* its “surroundings.”<sup>189</sup> Landscape is “*superimposed*” as a cultural “structure” onto “the natural environment,” onto a “natural area [a]s medium,” or onto the “remnants of an older” “cultural landscape.”<sup>190</sup> Landscape effects an “*axial transformation* in world view,” wherein a “semantic convergence of the terms nature, landscape and scenery [*demotes*] Nature as (vertically arranged, transcendental) cosmos to nature as (horizontally aligned, culturally determined) landscape.”<sup>191</sup> Landscape is subject to “as much an *encoding* as *decoding* process,” wherein “[t]he perceiver does not merely *decipher*; he *alters* what is *perceived, imposing* on it the weight of his personal and cultural preference.”<sup>192</sup> Landscape, as “the *use* and *perception* of land,” *represents* “the world about [one] and [one’s] relationships with it” to one’s self “and to others.”<sup>193</sup> Landscape enacts the social “*appropriat[ion]*” of “land.”<sup>194</sup> It is that through which “societies . . . *experie[n]c[e]* their present and *narrat[e]* their past.”<sup>195</sup> Landscape

presupposes a “*detachment* from the land” for people “appear and communicate to us as eyes, largely *disconnected* from any other corporeal or sensual aspects of their being” and therefore also performing a “detachment from their own bodies.”<sup>196</sup> Landscape, as a symbolic entity, *disconnects* “social relations” from “the material earth.”<sup>197</sup> And, finally, as a result of this series of aesthetic-epistemological processes, landscape “*shap[es]*” the “nation state” as a “territorial and political structur[e].”<sup>198</sup> Landscape, therefore, engenders a relationship between land and individuals or unified national communities that is characterized primarily by knowledge as mediation, transformation, and distance. As such, the creation of something called national land translates, I submit, nature as matter into nature as idea. Yet, as this dissertation will demonstrate, modernist images of nature continue to be haunted by the matter they erase in the process of constituting themselves aesthetically.

The presence of this ghost matter is related to the tendency in the list above towards a pairing of verbs. Always, in such epistemologies, a double action is achieved. This doubling is frequently linked to the simultaneously aesthetic and material qualities of landscape, as well as its entanglement *in* and *of* both nation and land. The aesthetic is evoked in the acts of seeing and representing by nations and peoples, the material in the transformations and uses of land these reflect and effect. Despite the effect often given by a landscape painting, landscapes are not frozen and static across time. They, therefore, represent an aesthetic-material dialectic between nation or culture and environment. This dialectic, I claim, presupposes another process in which, either individually or collectively, the human subject acts as catalyst: the aesthetic-affective feedback loop between landscape and subject. Together, this dialectic and feedback loop constitute the



subject's environmental epistemology (or lack thereof)—its ecological way of knowing the environment in which they, and their nation, are enmeshed.<sup>199</sup> Though the constitution of environmental ways of knowing through the entanglement of aesthetic, material, and affective national and environmental interactions is not limited to the modernist period, Cosgrove notes that “nationalism” “found intense artistic expression through landscape representations . . . precisely at the moment when ‘Modernism’ emerges as a self-conscious cultural and artistic project.”<sup>200</sup> Concomitantly, “‘Being Modern’” resulted in “altered relations with the land.”<sup>201</sup> Because of this, attention to landscape aesthetics is crucial to environmental critiques of the modernist period. In the twentieth century, “notwithstanding the assumption . . . that Western culture has evolved by sloughing off its nature myths, they have, in fact, never gone away” but rather morphed.<sup>202</sup> Our “way of looking” still contains an environmental epistemology “which somehow eludes our recognition and our appreciation”—an epistemology that this study helps to unearth.<sup>203</sup> “[I]t is thus in land that perhaps the most deeply rooted” environmental epistemologies are embedded, “the most powerful of [which] concern *rootedness*, ideas of home and belonging, of locality and identity,” a rootedness of, I argue, a specifically national identity and its relationship to “the social and environmental dangers of change and modernisation.”<sup>204</sup> The effects of a modernist environmental aesthetic present, then, a similar urgency regarding the need to understand the relationship between nationhood and environmental epistemology within English cultural history.

*Base Matters and the Concretization of Native Englishness*

During the early twentieth century, environmental representation contributes variously to the constitution and maintenance of a specifically English national identity. David Matless explains that in this period, “[t]he prevailing theme is the intertwining of landscape and senses of Englishness,” wherein “formulations of environmental conduct and citizenship” emerge from the English landscaping of a national identity, adding that it does so in specific racialized, classed, and gendered terms about which I will say more in Part 3.<sup>205</sup> As discussed in the Introduction, in this period such environmental representations tend towards a tropology of *base matters*, an aesthetics emerging from English literary patterns of “attachment to soil”—regardless of whether this affect is critiqued or valorized within a given text.<sup>206</sup> This aesthetics is *base* and *material* both in the sense that it is a *concretizing* (making literal and reliable) of imagined national foundations and also in that it is a product of *genetic* temporalities—a looking back to the base or foundation of the national story as emerging organically (materially and naturally) from English lands themselves. “Home is the place of authentic being,” writes Jonathan Bate, and base matters, I argue, authorize natality on English lands, encoding them as a national homeland.<sup>207</sup> English literature contains within its base material aesthetics, then, what Simon Schama calls “inherited landscape myths and memories,” a legacy that has endured “through the centuries” and still “shape institutions” such as “[n]ational identity” in the twentieth century.<sup>208</sup> For England, national identity is then “enchant[ed]” by the “mystique of a particular landscape tradition: its topography mapped, elaborated, and enriched as homeland.”<sup>209</sup> Embodied as this “‘sceptered isle,’” England, claims Schama, “invokes cliff-girt insularity as patriotic identity.”<sup>210</sup>

As part of the concretizing and genetic functions of English environmental aesthetics, landscape translates the linguistic community that forms the basis of national consciousness into a geographic collective. Just as the shared *language field* of English *print* culture makes visible the invisible fellow citizen-readers of one's imagined national community, literary landscapes also extend this fictional unity via the shared *fields* of English *homeland*. The citizen whose fellows share a common identification with English landscapes embodies what Matless calls a "geographical self," an identity that is the product of uniquely English "processes of subjectification effected through landscape."<sup>211</sup> Since the mid-nineteenth century, the "literaliz[ation]" of land as a conduit for English identity has increased alongside the correlative belief that "Englishness" itself "reside[s] within some type of imaginary, abstract, or actual locale."<sup>212</sup> In Ian Baucom's reading together of literary and political texts from the period, he notes how the result of this literalization is the belief that one is "English not by virtue of having been *born* in England but by virtue of having come into *contact* with 'English soil'."<sup>213</sup> This suggests that "English place . . . reforms the identities . . . of those [Britons] who are exposed to it."<sup>214</sup> The soil itself, therefore, presents an image possessing a cultivated slippage between its material and aesthetic valences, an image on whose slippery materiality founts, reforms, and maintains national structures of feeling.

Landscape, therefore, contains images of soil and other base material tropes that concretize the abstraction that is nation into a grounded, solid, and sacred entity. The grounding of nation in twentieth-century landscape aesthetics is, in many ways, a logical outgrowth of British political structures of belonging dating back almost a millennia. In English law, *ius soli*, which translates "[l]iterally [as] the 'law of the soil,' [has] survived

unaltered for the better part of nine centuries” as the “sole absolute determinant of British identity,” the foundational “rule for the determination of who was and who was not . . . a ‘British’—subject.”<sup>215</sup> Its origins are rooted in the medieval “concept of allegiance,” wherein “any individual born on a lord’s land, or ‘ligeance,’ owed that lord loyalty.”<sup>216</sup> Soil, in this sense, can often be read interchangeably with the land within the English imaginary.<sup>217</sup> The abstract power of this material metaphor is tested and proven when an inverse correlation between sites of habitation and sites of national meaning emerges in the twentieth century: “[a]s the population became increasingly urbanized, in terms of the sense of place and identity, the past seemed more fixed and the countryside,” or English land, “came to represent, superficially, eternal values and traditions.”<sup>218</sup> What I call the concretization of nation as and through the soil stabilizes the national imaginary through a mummification of national history, a fixing—as if eternally present—of the (stylized, idealized) past upon the countryside.<sup>219</sup> Literary landscapes affect this image across various media throughout the centuries. Kenneth Olwig notes that in the dramaturgy of the seventeenth century, for example, “Britain came to be envisioned . . . as the staged landscape scenery upon which a unified national narrative was performed. The theatrical landscape conflated the nation, as a people, with the landscape in a geographic body.”<sup>220</sup> This is the inheritance of the modernist period. Hence, it is still possible that Jane Austen points in the preceding nineteenth century to “‘English verdure, English culture . . .’” in her novels as a way of articulating the location of “‘authentic national identity.’”<sup>221</sup> This identity is “derived not from a set of political institutions based in London—monarchy, parliament and so forth—but from the harmonious play, suggested by verbal euphony, of

‘verdure’ and ‘culture’,” derived, in other words, from the enmeshment of nature and culture, matter and aesthetics that are wedded and rooted in rural landscapes.<sup>222</sup>

While the grounding of nation in English soil is an inherited impulse, it also belies the growing national consciousness of a people that, beginning with the Victorians, “worr[y] profoundly about their loss of ‘place’,” resulting in a “deep desire for stability.”<sup>223</sup> This need for stability produces the urge towards concretization, the impetus for an aesthetics that depicts Englishness with a solid-ground-like fixity. Such national images are “[a]n idealization” that “served to cover over and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time” regarding, among other things, national environs.<sup>224</sup> One such contradiction is England’s desire to be both a global, imperial power as well as a cohesive, insular island nation. Such tensions are often expressed in the concretization of a racialized Englishness through landscapes symbolizing health and purity. Whiteness and Englishness become unified through the exclusion of a blackness that is cast as an invasive and unnatural presence on English soil.<sup>225</sup> This elision of racial and environmental terminology in the national imaginary equates the native with the organic and blood with soil in the geographic body of England. As shall become obvious in Parts 3 and 4, environmental images invoking these tropes cannot then be separated from the racialized national ideologies with which they are imbricated. The image of “English earth, held by a strong and healthy [white] arm veined, we are to assume, with English blood” is inextricable from the “stress[ing] o[f] earth” in such images, a base material emphasis that “lends literal substance to the organicist claims to a physically ground[ed] Englishness,” wherein, ultimately, the “[e]arth is the key element of organic England.”<sup>226</sup>

*Genetic Grounds as a Mattering of National History*

Similarly, the chapters that follow will demonstrate how landscape naturalizes nation as land by thinking the rooted, bounded linkage of England and soil together with an England constituted as ancient, permanent, and solid.<sup>227</sup> This merger is enabled by a genetic historical perception. The genetic orientation of landscape aesthetics employs a transitive logic to transform England into the embodiment of national permanence by equating England to soil, soil to solid ground, and therefore England to solid ground. Material solidity, in this sense, increasingly stands in for temporal accrual—a sedimentary rather than erosion model for constructing and understanding the rock of nation. English national identity is then materialized *from the present* as always already ancient, as a geologic native. While emergent discourses of evolution may have destabilized notions of the progress of human (English, European) civilization at this time, a landed rhetoric emerges in response, striving to stabilize a sense of native English superiority upon the earth.<sup>228</sup> Ian Baucom notes that, consequently, in both public and literary discourses, “memory-haunted locales”—such as E.M. Forster’s Sherwood Forest, Virginia Woolf’s Regent’s Park, and the green fields of England in speeches by prime minister Stanley Baldwin and other politicians—are shown to “house . . . the nation’s past, and glorious, and true identity” within the land itself.<sup>229</sup> Hence, just as “localist discourse identified English place rather than English blood as the one thing that could preserve the nation’s memory,” “in preserving its memory,” English places “secure England’s continuous national identity.”<sup>230</sup> In this sense, within the English national imaginary the land itself comes to embody the past.<sup>231</sup> Through such imagery, the land becomes a blank slate for national projections, itself depicted and reinscribed as an unpopulated, anti-modern, and non-industrialized space.<sup>232</sup> Quite often this space is the

rural countryside but sometimes the suburban garden or urban park. This material embodiment of national historicity is, therefore, made possible by an addition of narrative and aesthetic traditions to the geographic and environmental matter of England itself. “[I]nherited tradition,” writes Schama, “made *landscape* out of mere geology and vegetation.”<sup>233</sup>

As repository for a fixed and authorized version of national history, English land is often represented as the aforementioned figure of *Old England*. The dominant trope of Old England is one of the more prominent products of the genetic, concretizing impulses of an English national orientation towards the land.<sup>234</sup> In the twentieth century, the passage of actual, clock time occupies an increasingly inverse relationship to the importance of images of English pastness. One sees this in the period surrounding World War I, wherein “so much of the past of the country, its feelings and its literature, was involved with the rural experience” that “many of its ideas of how to live well, from the style of the country-house to the simplicity of the cottage, persisted and even were strengthened” while those actual sites waned in use and everyday visibility.<sup>235</sup> Instead of the inherited Georgian “respect of authentic observation,” this sort of writing about the land is “overcome by” a “sub-intellectual fantasy” in the early twentieth century, taking the form of “the casual figure of a dream of England, in which” many divergent historical and cultural moments and affects “are indiscriminately enfolded into a single emotional gesture” so that “the figure was now fixed and its name was Old England.”<sup>236</sup> As the twentieth century progresses, the unification of England’s image of national past as natural landscape is employed more fervently than ever in service to the “self-regarding patriotism of the high English imperialist period [that] found this sweetest and most

insidious of it forms in a version of the rural past.”<sup>237</sup> By consolidating the national experience of “rural labor and rural revolt, foreign wars and internal dynastic wars, history, legend and literature” in the image of English verdure with “an unlocalized, unhistorical past,” early twentieth century national discourse “used rural England as an image for its own internal feelings and ideas.”<sup>238</sup> This makes “the land and people a scene . . . onto which anything could be projected.”<sup>239</sup> In the process, by “pretend[ing this] was a lost world” the English national imaginary causes “the real land and its people [to be] falsified” and “a traditional and surviving rural England [to be] scribbled over and almost hidden from sight.”<sup>240</sup> This effects, I contend, an erasure of the lived, ecological environment, replacing it with a one-dimensional national image of the land.

As I continue to demonstrate in the chapters that follow, this erasure has significant consequences for environmental epistemologies more generally.<sup>241</sup> Despite—or perhaps because of—“the anachronism of many rural representations, which ‘had either disappeared in the first wave of industrialization in the nineteenth century or [were] being changed beyond recognition,’ the ‘invoking [of] nostalgia for ‘Old England,’” allowed such “Englishness” to garner “support [for] a nation’s economic, military, and imperial pursuits.”<sup>242</sup> Changes to environmental ways of knowing are not only an effect of revisionist national nostalgia projects but also serve, then, as tools in the discursive empowerment of other functions of national power—like that to wage the Great War and colonize other lands and peoples. Invocations of Old England are part of a wider pattern in which English national discourse frequently translates land into an object of use and control for state power. For example, David Matless traces two key socio-political movements within England in the interwar and mid-century years: the preservationist and



organicist movements. Each used images of land and earth to authorize both territorial and biopolitical control. While the organicist movement most overtly allies itself with racialized and fascist tendencies within England, preservationist tendencies within the politics of the day prevail through the expression of subtler methods of control.<sup>243</sup> “[T]he emergence in the 1920s and 1930s of a movement for the planning and preservation of landscape” is typified by the “preservationis[t] argu[ment] that the state of the landscape was a reflection of the state of the nation.”<sup>244</sup> The “preservationist argument” can therefore “be regarded as evoking a wholefood Englishness, aligning natural and national values” in which “[b]ody and landscape are to move in functional harmony.”<sup>245</sup> For David Lowenthal, the “link” between “landscape” and an English “national ethos” is an ability to see, mirrored in native environs and geology, a national character that is inherently “insula[r]” and “artific[ial].”<sup>246</sup> In other words, the English nation is one whose base matter is itself bounded and ordered as an island paradise garden. This elision of national and natural is echoed everywhere in the literature of the modernist period when “Englishness was the project of English literature” and, for many writers, “country life offered modernists a template for English identity.”<sup>247</sup>

### *Irony and Displacement: Modernist Natures in English Literature*

Though Modernism is often best known for its urban, subjective absolutism, in England especially, modernist engagement with nature and environments writ large was not only extant but almost ubiquitous. Moreover, in those works that explicitly foreground landscape representation, modernist English literature often engages with the land by attempting to “reanimate and disseminate the experience in the” text.<sup>248</sup> Yet, these texts are haunted nonetheless by a sense of alienation from environmental matters,

for “*the material process of dissemination effects clearing of its own*. It can only occur through technology: the manufacture of paper and print commerce and consumerism which make the sale and reading of” literature “possible.”<sup>249</sup> And so, “*the reanimation is displaced from its geographic origin in deep England*,” “occur[ing]” instead only “in the human mind, the environment of the imagination.”<sup>250</sup> Displacement and irony, therefore, undergird even the most explicit of modernist environmental aesthetics. To relay the experience of environmental enmeshment, one must, in that pre-digital age, consume the very forests in which that experience oft-times takes place, a consumption needed to manufacture the printing paper that materializes the text. Furthermore, this material clearance echoes an aesthetic-affective absence as well: the reader can only encounter the environment *of the text* in the text and never truly in the flesh. This double bind lurks behind most modernist environmental aesthetics in some form. In this way, modernists both “resist assimilation into” as well as “participate in” the period’s “emerging discourses of nature.”<sup>251</sup>

Anne Raine, “group[s]” ecocritical approaches to modernism “into two broad categories”: “[t]he first reads modernism as a continuation of the romantic reaction against Enlightenment rationality and faith in technoscientific progress,” attempting to “resist the technoscientific objectification and instrumentalization of nature.”<sup>252</sup> “The second approach . . . foregrounds the ways in which modernism was actively engaged with, rather than primarily resistant to, the sciences of its time,” “build[ing] on the ways in which new sciences such as evolutionary biology and post-Newtonian physics” were felt to be “disrupting previous assumptions about human and nonhuman nature and offering new ways of imagining the more-than-human-world,” arguing, therefore,

through their artwork that “a more satisfactory apprehension of things might require thinking and writing in ways that seemed unrealistic or even unnatural.”<sup>253</sup> I find Raine’s appraisal of existing criticism apt and would argue that it continues to be accurate more than half a decade later. Yet, in examining the way the affective-aesthetic feedback loop between subject, text, and environment is mobilized in modernist works surrounding the war, a new approach is needed in order to fully grasp the implications of the landscape representation to war-time nationhood in England. I claim that we must move beyond the dichotomy between categorizing texts as romantic reactions against the Enlightenment project and anti-realist explorations of the implications of recent scientific advancements, tracing instead the way that both critical and celebratory uses of nature participate in creating potentially destructive environmental epistemologies. This is achieved, I argue, by spotlighting and reinforcing the aforementioned displacement and irony as primary environmental affects, reading them as more impactful than their celebratory peers.

Existing scholarship points to this possibility as well. In engaging the simultaneously inaccessible and endlessly fungible material aesthetics that natural representation offers to literary modernism, this generation of authors find themselves consciously in conversation with their pastoral, romantic, and realist predecessors. This despite the often defensive and defiant nature of their artistic dialogue. In such an unsettling representational paradigm, the land as avatar of English nature often paradoxically becomes a symbol of subjective alienation. Yet, it also serves as a medium through which to negotiate new cultural meaning within the national imaginary and other social paradigms. It is to this pattern of emplacement through displacement that we must now turn.

The modernist orientation towards (and away from, as it were) nature is characterized primarily by subjectivism and separation. J. Hillis Miller famously noted that the arrival of modernist aesthetics can be characterized by the belief that “nothing exists except as it is seen by someone viewing the world from [their] own perspective,” making its defining characteristic a “subjectivist relativism.”<sup>254</sup> Many English modernists sought to redefine nature through this hyper-subjective view. For example, in Woolf’s words, the new nature is “life or spirit, truth or reality.”<sup>255</sup> This view differentiates modernism from realism by seeking to “convey the interior movement of human consciousness” rather than “to depict the external world.”<sup>256</sup> This “inward turn” “abandons the project” of addressing “the problems of representing the outer world” (though not in a socio-political sense),<sup>257</sup> amounting to a “[m]odernist rejection of nature” that occurs alongside the seeming “vanishing” of “a world” where “people” are connected “*with nature*.”<sup>258</sup> More than assuming the vanishing of nature, “the English avant-garde defined itself against nature” out right.<sup>259</sup> Yet, a nostalgia for what is rejected or lost always creeps in as “modernists also discovered the impossibility of rejecting the natural world, given powerful early memories of place and sensation.”<sup>260</sup> This nostalgia becomes tantamount to a rejection, however, as it manifests primarily in the form of a proliferation of “pattern[s] of lost nature.”<sup>261</sup>

This vanishing nature and modernists’ simultaneous rejection of and nostalgia for it then, I claim, contain (much like land as an image for nation) an implicit, genetic temporality. Carol Cantrell explains: “modernist writers” felt that “profound changes in human relations with the planet [had] become visible in [their] century,’ sharing a sense of having experienced a ‘revolutionary change’ in ‘the “given” we call nature’.”<sup>262</sup> Such

changes were often “understood as a process in which nature recedes into the past or into the margins of modernity, destroyed or displaced by new technoscientific practices and by the large-scale changes to the material environment those practices enable.”<sup>263</sup> If nature was now thought to exist in only the past, England could no longer rely on actual land to hold the continuity of nation. Literature—many early twentieth century English modernists claimed—must now fulfill this role to prevent the imminent threat that, as D.H. Lawrence wrote, “[t]he industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another’.”<sup>264</sup> In this way, I argue, English modernism often participates in the mummification of matter in text rather than serving as testimony to living environments. In the erosion of nature as material grounds for meaning-making, matter as metaphor becomes more salient. We can see this with “[t]he “ghostly environs” of Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro,” where Pound’s imagism uses a wet flowering tree to activate a “mimetic referent” for the “jostling train cars in the underworld of the [Paris] metro” and we “practically forget that this is the last place we would find a bough, much less ones with petals and recently having been rained upon.”<sup>265</sup> The modernist subject, perceiving itself as divorced from nature, increasingly apprehends nature as metaphor only. Modernist nature is then experienced as “a paradigmatic other,” enacting a further erasure through the resultant “de-reification of the landscape.”<sup>266</sup> This derealization of material environments enables “[w]hat was formerly classified as familiar, homely and natural” to be seen now as “simulated, exploited, and destroyed.”<sup>267</sup> As an extension of that alienation, an eroded sense of at-home-ness in one’s native, English environs grows.

Despite the contested site of nature within English modernist aesthetics, environmental representation persists as a way of understanding, whether mimetically or metaphorically, the relationship between culture and nature.<sup>268</sup> Nature, if nothing else, remains a tool in the modernist epistemological-aesthetic toolkit. Heidi C.M. Scott has argued that in the nineteenth century, while the scientific understanding of environments advanced rapidly, it was literature that first allowed “British culture” to “develop a discourse around the natural world newly altered by industry.”<sup>269</sup> “[T]heoretical scenarios and frames of reference” first emerged “using the literary imaginary,” a way of thinking that eventually influenced scientific discourses of knowing.<sup>270</sup> Modernists continue to use nature, giving rise to many texts that “give nature a cultural function.”<sup>271</sup> This instrumentalization of nature demonstrates the way Modernism is often “keenly attentive to environs but ambivalent about environmentalism.”<sup>272</sup>

As a result, modernists are always engaging explicitly with the pastoral, romantic, and realist traditions more associated with environmental representation, though they never enact a simple continuation of these movements’ aesthetics.<sup>273</sup> Because “nature—in this case, defined as the external reality—has been posited as the ground of mimesis,” modernist disposal of realist strategies meant actual nature, too, must also be kept at a distance.<sup>274</sup> Modernists felt that “neither romantic naturism nor reductive realism was adequate to the goals of modern art.”<sup>275</sup> And so, “[t]he remaking of pastoral traditions [becomes] very much a part of [English] modernism.”<sup>276</sup> Hence, Williams notes that in early twentieth-century England, alongside the avant-garde modernisms, the “regional novel,” a persistence and degeneration of the ‘country-house novel’,” and the continuation of “landscape description and nature poetry” especially within “memoirs,

observations, accounts of rural life” all emerge, evincing the continued centrality of the rural with regard to ideal (but not necessarily lived) Englishness.<sup>277</sup> Because the erosion of subjective access to a shared reality made nature into an ideal symbol for such losses, these rural backdrops are self-defeating. Hence, they are “pervaded by a sense of the vanishing past.”<sup>278</sup> Though “the line from Rousseau to Romanticism runs on into the twentieth century,”<sup>279</sup> such “works . . . include nature while simultaneously resisting the romantic and pastoral models inherited from the literary past.”<sup>280</sup> This marks the reinvention of the pastoral as “satirical” rather than as a return to nature.<sup>281</sup>

Most crucially to this study, English ideational loss of and separation from nature combines with its ironic functional and aesthetic fixation on nature to support environmental representation as a key trope warranting further examination within modernist literary representations of nation and national ideologies. In the years surrounding World War I in particular, literary landscape aesthetics are the most common medium for cultural interventions into the national project. Jed Esty has noted that as the British empire “contract[s]” in the twentieth century, many modernists “measured the passing of British hegemony” via a “symbolic geography” meant to embody an “imagined reintegration of a shrinking national culture.”<sup>282</sup> This contributes to the “rise of an Anglocentric cultural paradigm” that seeks to “recove[r] cultural particularity” as an impetus for national “renewal.”<sup>283</sup> Alternately, Woolf notes in her journals that the “view” of the land, its shape as “bare bone of the earth” when you look out and are able to see “nothing but land,” “stands for many, as the symbol of their mother England.”<sup>284</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott notes that Woolf’s view is “assigning politics to the landscape.”<sup>285</sup> The national politics of such views of the land often resonate, in particular, with a vision

of England in which this small island is expanded via its imperial territories, for the “bare bone of the earth” is the English backbone allowing “[t]he kingdoms of the world [to] lay before me.”<sup>286</sup> Hence, images of nation as solid ground are “deployed to legitimate power or to generate authenticity.”<sup>287</sup> While England is often depicted in a hegemonic relation to the land, English visions of other lands, especially colonial ones, depict “landscape [a]s frightening to the English.”<sup>288</sup> Judith Paltin reads this affect into E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, where “because the English exist in such an exploitative relation to . . . the land,” the land’s seeming ability to be “fruitfully managed by the traditional [indigenous] human activities of the region” is perceived as a threat to Englishness itself as founded on its own domestic national grounds.<sup>289</sup> Imperial instantiations of nation though land imagery are frequent in English Modernism, about which more will be said in Part 3. However, the use of a landed tropology to open up the possibility of “alterative subjectivities and national identities . . . offers a material context” as well for the “discursive construction” of “[non]hegemonic versions of Englishness,” what McCarthy calls “a modernism of resistance founded on a green aesthetic.”<sup>290</sup> One example of this is Ford Maddox Ford and “Mary Butt’s confidence that English rural nature should define English identity.”<sup>291</sup> Their “reapprais[ing] cosmopolitanism and choos[ing], instead, a grounded national awareness located in rural England” calls “on English nature to found a new identity in small-scale, local practice.”<sup>292</sup>

One of the key projects of this dissertation is to demonstrate whether modernists’ ubiquitous uses of nature open up possibilities for, as Carol Cantrell says, the “‘involvement of the perceiver with what is perceived’,” allowing for the “foreground[ing] of] the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman beings and phenomena’,” or whether



“perception and language involve[e] . . . a predatory instrumentality” that would “posit a human subject detached from the world it perceives.”<sup>293</sup> While wider English modernist experimentation with environmental aesthetics may prove the former dynamics existed, those aesthetics that most impacted, I argue, the dominant English sociopolitical paradigms in which nation, war, and empire become this period’s watch words tell a different story. This study focuses in particular on the base material aesthetics that become increasingly prominent in the period. In foregrounding these base matters, this dissertation exposes an affective-aesthetic pattern that is detrimental, rather than revelatory, to a burgeoning environmental awareness in Europe and especially England.<sup>294</sup> While elsewhere environmental aesthetics may open up the possibility of an “embodied knowledge” or “environment-as-being,” the activation of base material aesthetics within discourses of nation repeatedly suggest that even in moments where *connection* to the material environment may be foregrounded, the affective response the text encourages may not be a wholly positive one, tending instead towards a *dissociative* orientation towards environmental belonging.<sup>295</sup>

## Chapter 2—Virginia Woolf’s Sidelong View of English Matters

Virginia Woolf’s interwar novels and essays articulate various embodiments of post-war and imperial nationhood within the English imaginary. She does so through her use of an environmental aesthetic relying primarily rhetorics and images of ground, through, in other words, tropes of base matter such as those discussed in Chapter 1. Specifically, Chapter 2 examines the ironic, critical, and alternative manifestations of Englishness within the novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *Between the Acts* (1941), and the essays *Three Guineas* (1938), and “Thoughts on an Air Raid” (1941). Revealing and often ironizing the nation’s discursive imbrication in and constitution by land, Woolf exposes the way the experience of World War I is both colored by and instructive of ideologies and historiographies of British imperialism. This occurs via the imaginative (but also historical) merging of war and empire at the most basic material level as Woolf marks their presence in with images of mud, land, and stone. Throughout her works, these base matters represent the simultaneously hegemonic and unstable grounds of the English nation. The close readings that follow demonstrate how Woolf frequently exploits this instability to better expose and interrupt what she casts as the retrogressive and hypocritical characteristics of hegemonic versions of Englishness—allowing the founding matters of the nation, as it were, to undermine themselves.

In doing so, Woolf employs an agonistic “*sidelong*” view to defamiliarize England’s image of itself—recasting the native as foreign and vice versa. One sees in the fictional spaces of *Between the Acts* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, that this “slantwise” perspective, about which I will say more in the coming pages, is manifested through presence of out of place matters such as dark and dirty mud on the neat clean grounds of country estate

and park as well as primeval environs that crop up in England's present. Within *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*, such transgressive images of ground are also aligned with narrators' simultaneously marginalized and privileged position within authorized, sacred national landscapes. Thus, Woolf exposes the hegemonic version of England that is concretized in aesthetics of land and stone to be the dominant ideology that I term below *native fascism*. Naturalized by such base material tropes under the guise of freedom and progress, Woolf employs the "sidelong" view of her "society of outsiders" to deconstruct such base matters from a national within. As discussed in *Three Guineas*, the society of outsiders is a "we" populated by those insider-outsiders within England. These insider-outsiders are here primarily represented by women, but, read across her works these native foreigners can also be associated with more explicit national outsiders like those of colonial territories. Existing liminally as both within England and materially excluded from it, such outsiders and their sidelong perspectives reveal England to be founded upon the aforementioned native fascism. An ethos manifested in the insular solidity of a landed and stony materiality. This perspective exposes the foundational illusion of a spatially bounded and historically stable Englishness, of an England contained within the sceptered isle whose history is represented as the irrevocable progress of (Anglo) civilization. Woolf depicts this revelation in her refigurations of English land as stained with the mud of its past, of its others, and of its elsewheres. In evoking the discursive permeability and mutability of mud, Woolf imaginatively breaks down those boundaries that have long been concretized through images of solid English earth and monumental British stone.

Privileging the agency of mud from within the lexicon of England's more settled base matters allows Woolf to suggest possibilities for alternative manifestations of Englishness, multivocal and inclusive rather than monolithic and hegemonic. Woolf, in short, evokes the base matters of England in order to use, as they say, the master's tools to deconstruct his house. If England is founded by stone and land, this representative ecosystem is exposed so that mud may be evoked in order to interrupt and decenter the bellicose and imperialist versions of Englishness that the former material metaphors represent.

This chapter begins, then, by analyzing the way *Mrs. Dalloway* represents mud as evocative of those elsewhere that interwar England imagines as external to itself—the closed and victorious past of World War I (which is anything but) and the supposedly less civilized spaces of colonial territories. In the dominant national imaginary, such lands frequently resemble primaeval England more than the contemporary London with which they are, in actuality, coeval. As noted above, Woolf employs mud as a transgressive element within the text—materially akin to the land and stone through which England imagines itself as stable and insular in time and space. Yet the trope of mud literally as well as associatively exposes the (often feared) permeability and instability of that network of base matters that ground the nation. This is especially prominent when considered within the contexts of World War I and empire as this chapter does. No ecosystem is closed and no matter changeless. The fear that is here exposed and redirected by Woolf is present in World War I with regards to soldiers' ability to survive in hostile and seemingly unnatural environments. It manifests in

colonial spaces with regards to England's anxious desire to see itself as separate from and superior to its colonies and imperial rivals.

I follow this argument into *Between the Acts*, where I claim that Woolf evokes a similar image of mud amidst her ironic and self-conscious performance of England's progressive, superior, and insular national identity. The nation is therein constructed via the lands and stones envisioned by characters inhabiting the Pointz Hall country house estate in which the novel is set. Here, mud and other primeval matters surface on the landscapes of contemporary England. Its presence undermines the ability of tropes of land and stone to solidify a unitary, imperial, civilized England. These qualities are as opposed to both a war-like and barbaric or unevolved version of England, characteristics that the national imaginary abjects as other to its modern national identity. However, mud's presence on the representative national landscape of the country house estate also suggests the possibility of more democratic, inclusive national futures through the unsettling of authorized national histories. This is made possible by the temporality implicit in Woolf's representations of mud as a more organic manifestation of time's accrual, resisting the logic of the static and totalizing view of English history figured in "the land" or those monumental stones laid upon it. As a material symbol for national historiography, mud represents a more muddled palimpsest of primeval and colonial times that are residual within England's modernist present.

Finally, I close Chapter 2 by demonstrating that what Woolf aesthetically performs in her novels is theorized more directly in the rhetoric of her essay, *Three Guineas*. It is here that the "collectivity" of "we" that populates her "society of outsiders" is introduced as a community of truth-tellers or parrhesiasts who can see England's own

fascism. Due to the inherent patriarchy of its founding structures, this “infantile fixation,” as she labels “Hitlerism” at home in England, is not external to that nation but native to it. The countryless Englishwomen—Woolf’s internal outsiders—are given their privileged “sidelong” sight by virtue of their position. This position amounts to an exclusion from material ties to the land itself as well as from the interiors of those stone structures that are symbolic of English freedom and progress such as Oxbridge and Westminster.

Reliant on the environmental aesthetics of base matters to both articulate and critique English nationalism, I conclude that Woolf’s modernism demonstrates the imbrication of environmental and national discourses. Their entanglement is displayed in their mutual emergence from the reliance of the English national imaginary on the trope of land as exclusionary matter. Furthermore, Woolf depicts base matters’ association with World War I and imperialism as a dynamic of both national destabilization and restabilization. In doing so, Woolf begins to show how the environmentally and socio-politically destructive effects of these two events marks an increasing elision of the nation’s affective responses to images of mud, land or soil, and stone and its ethico-political orientation towards those elements England perceives as its ultimate others—actual environments and colonized peoples.

*“All slipping consciously into a pit”*: *English Mud in Mrs. Dalloway*

Both Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and her *Between the Acts* take up the issue of national, global war from the domestic, civilian front. The novels digest the after-effects of World War I and the distant immediacy of World War II in those landscape aesthetics described and projected by characters whose internal lives populate their pages. Woolf’s environmental aesthetics focus most acutely on base material images of ground. Her

landscape aesthetics articulate an alternative to the predominant structures of national feeling found in the newspapers, political speeches, and pub stool or cocktail party chatter of Woolf's 1920s and 1930s England. Woolf's interwar writing redraws these ideological boundary lines, forming an (anti-)nationalist and anti-imperialist modernist ethos. This ethos is marked by an ecofeminist style that response to the events of World War by mobilizing existing material and historiographic tropes within the British imaginary to undermine them. Her landscape aesthetics work with and against competing threads of British national historicity. Boundaries made newly legible by the environmental aesthetics of Woolf's English spaces elucidate not only emergent conceptions of what it means to be British, also exploring future possibilities for more (to borrow a term from Karen Barad) "intra-act[ive]" ways of engaging word with world.<sup>296</sup>

Though WWII is not a topic of this dissertation, I turn to Woolf's 1938 and 1941 texts because Woolf often describes the coming of WWII in terms of WWI. John Whittier-Ferguson notes that she describes the coming Second World War in her diary through the material imagery of the First World War. "[I]n the middle of an incongruously 'fine summer day' in the second week of September 1938," she "contemplates the 'chaos' and 'public misery' that now seem unavoidable," as "1914 but without even the illusion of 1914. All slipping consciously into a pit'."<sup>297</sup> Noting that "[t]he first phrase firmly ties this coming war to its precursor, accomplishing in its shorthand both a comparison and a distinction," Whittier-Ferguson claims "its repetitive circling around 1914 speaks to a failure of historical progress."<sup>298</sup> It is on this "pit" and its regressive temporality that this chapter focuses. I trace the often-subterranean base matters evoked by Woolf in response to the experience of a national ground as seen from

below, within the depths of this “pit” of endless war-time. In doing so, I parse the environmental aesthetics that emerge from this muddy “pit” that eerily resembles a shell-hole in the midst of England. Being the most explicit response to World War I in Woolf’s oeuvre, *Mrs. Dalloway*’s images of ground circulate around England’s imbrication in both the war and empire, an entanglement expressed in an elemental primeval presence that seems not to be extinct or external to landscapes at home in England.<sup>299</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway* follows a constellation of individuals living in London, all of whom are connected with the eponymous central character of Clarissa Dalloway. The novel is written entirely from the first person perspective but jumps between the minds of these various characters as they come into incidental contact with each other across London, slipping between present apprehension of their surrounds and thoughts and memories of the past. The plot culminates in a party at Clarissa’s house and takes place over the course of the single day in June of 1922 in which she makes final preparations for the event. The temporary community created by Clarissa’s set and the party are positioned against the historical backdrop of a nation still recovering from the fractures caused by World War I. Narrative time is kept by the intermittent tolling of that larger than life national monument—Big Ben—punctuating, as it does, the stream of consciousness time of character’s internal dialogs.

The most obvious presence of the war comes in the form of the war veteran, Septimus Smith. Septimus is enmired from the first in his struggles with shell shock. We find him in the park having visions of his lost brother-in-arms, Evan. The moment is embedded less in a realistic flashback to the landscape of war, however, than it is in the flora of England’s own Regent’s Park. Septimus is observing the natural beauty of its



cultivated environs. He describes the leaves, birds, bugs, and sunlight, noting, “[b]eauty was everywhere.”<sup>300</sup> Amidst such peaceful surrounds, the violence of war still obtains. “The trees waved, brandished,” their boughs acting as swords brandished by soldiers.<sup>301</sup> Immersed in his surroundings, his wife Rezia’s question about time penetrates his imagined enmeshment in that cultivated landscape. The word takes on both the form of that place’s natural materiality as well as Septimus’ perceptions of a bellicose agency within it. “The word ‘time’ split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words . . . He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree.”<sup>302</sup> The war resides in such words as “split” and “fell like shells, like shavings from a plane,” echoing its violent rending, its weaponry, its machinery, and its motions. In the reference to shavings from a plane the naturalness of a wood that is carved via a man-made tool that act here like weapons upon the lumber is combined with the motion of bombs being dropped from an aeroplane. Words themselves become a material rendering of the otherwise immaterial presence of language. They are contained by a “husk,” have a body of sorts that can be “split,” are like a seed whose “riches” for regrowth are contained within and “pour[ing]” out, and are “hard, white, imperishable words” that echo again the seed metaphor. Amidst this mingling of life-giving and destructive natural forces, the husk and seed image is doubled in the landscape before Septimus: “[b]ut the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed.”<sup>303</sup> The parting branches mirror the splitting husk and Evans emerges as the spilling seed. He, too, appears born anew and is marked primarily by the absence of war “mud.” The presence of mud is here inversely associated

with “wounds” and the “change[s]” wrought by war (in particular Evan’s death), reinforced by the parallel structure of these three phrases. Melissa Bagley writes of *Mrs. Dalloway* that “the relation of the natural to [the human] functions to highlight and challenge the use of the natural to legitimize social and political constructions” such as those in support of “the militaristic activity of the nation itself.”<sup>304</sup> As representative of a wound and loss to the English national body, Evans’ unchanged body figures the wound of war as part of the natural environs of England in the present—unhealed.<sup>305</sup> Woolf marks, then, the way that England is still caught in this mud-stained time, substituting Evans body for the absent material stain of mud that should be upon him. This mud, however, resurfaces elsewhere in Regent’s Park, having not been washed clean but rather displaced. Because time is split, war-time spills onto the domestic landscape of England’s present, staining it with a war now four years past.

As Peter Walsh, a colonial administrator recently returned from India, passes Septimus in the park, the narrative flows after him. The mud hidden from Septimus’s view marks Peter instead, having been made visible in the translation of perspective from that of war and to that of empire. Peter embodies the imperial view, being an enforcer of its policies abroad. Yet his descriptions of the mud that marks England (like the bodies of the war dead such as Evans) are native and not foreign. Walking past Septimus in the park and connecting—like a mud stain—the stream of thought between them, Peter’s thoughts are interrupted by:

[an] ancient song [that] bubbled up opposite Regent’s Park Tube station still the earth seemed green and flowery; still, though it issued from so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses,

still the old bubbling burbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards Euston, fertilising, leaving a damp stain.<sup>306</sup>

The passage (as well as those that come before and after it) is constructed as a primeval scene in some ancient English landscape that once stood where the park now lies (“ancient,” “old,” and “infinite ages”) as a monument to the achievements of the imperial metropolis. Revealing these roots, the “song,” constructed as it is as a liquid substance, aligns easily in the reader’s mind with the “muddy” elements of the “earth” from which it “issues,” despite its issuing from the mouth of an elderly female street performer. It “bubbled up,” “bubbling burbling,” “soaking through,” “stream[ing] away in rivulets,” “fertilising,” and making the area “damp.” This liquid, which “stain[s]” is the “muddy” “song” that, being marked as primeval, seems to collapse time (between England’s native past and imperial present) but also, in its manifestation as mud, collapsing the space between England and the war that in fact had “changed” “Evans,” killing him. The “muddy” “song,” therefore, echoes at home in England something of the war written elsewhere.<sup>307</sup> As the passage moves forward, “Regent’s Park Tube station” morphs into a “mere hole in the earth, muddy too.” This site of technological advancement and urban ordering dissolves under the enchantment of the “ancient song,” “issu[ing]” from the “rude . . . mouth” now envisioned not as the street-woman’s, but as the earth’s. Its structure is characterized by underthings internal to English soil: “root fibres,” “knotted roots,” “skeletons and treasure.” The emphasis of this subterranea is on their being “matted with root[s]” like the matted vegetation that marks the colonial imaginary of

such sites as Africa elsewhere in the English imaginary—merging colonial and national space as it does war and peace time, eliding the two. The repetition of “roots” points also to origins, to a groundedness in this place, firmly placing the colonial in the heart of England. Though it “fertilis[es],” this “muddy” “song” also “stain[s]”—marking the landscape with a reminder of its own violent, primeval history and collapsing the distinction between the two in the English imaginary. Woolf suggests, then, that as a nation of colonizers, England is threatened by a historical regression. This regression is manifested in the materiality of the resurfacing mud that blots out the progress that the nation would like to associate with its imperial activities.

*The “deep center” and “black heart” of Mud in Between the Acts*

Lucy’s reveries in *Between the Acts* invite us to re-read the base matters of English countryside landscapes such as Pointz Hall. The Pointz Hall estate is itself a sort of “monumen[t]” to the persistence of the *primaeval* in the present, “stain[ing]” modern England in ways similar to the reconfigurations of an insular, progressive England that is marshalled by the stain of imperial and bellicose mud upon *Mrs. Dalloway*’s Regent’s Park.<sup>308</sup> Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* positions England on the stages of both world war and national history—between the acts of World War I and II. As Almas Khan adeptly summarizes it: “*Between the Acts* narrates the story of the Oliver family and a panoply of other characters who join their hosts at Pointz Hall to attend a village pageant encapsulating English history.”<sup>309</sup> The entanglement of national history in the base matters of national land, then, are crucial to our understanding of the way in which the narrative and its aesthetics make meaning. Just outside the house at Pointz Hall is a lily pond. Woolf writes, “[w]ater for hundreds of years, had silted down into the hollow, and

lay there four or five feet deep over a black cushion of mud . . . that deep center . . . that black heart.”<sup>310</sup> Manifest materiality of the accrual of time and an ancient residue in its own right, the depths of this “pond” are in direct contrast to the “lily” whiteness their name evokes. The grounds beneath this pond are stained with the mud of natural history’s material accrual: its floor a “black cushion of mud.” It seems more than a depth only—almost evoking a vortex, pulling the water down into the conical shape of the hollow, into the “deep center” and “black heart” of the pond. The “lily” white surface of the pond tellingly contrasts the “black” heart beneath as a material representation for English history. This light and dark imagery seems to echo aesthetically the novel-wide imagery evoked in Joseph Conrad’s depictions of a primordial present in *Heart of Darkness* (1898), about which more will be said in Chapter 6. In Conrad’s novel, there is a juxtapositioning of white and light imagery describing European sites such as the supposed Belgian city from which Marlow embarks as well as the contemporary British Thames with the black and dark imagery attached to the present of colonial, African lands and peoples and the primordial past of Roman and sub-Roman England. In contrast, Woolf’s own image actualizes the material placement of the darkness within the heart of present England itself.

The muddy vortex here resonates through a lexical inversion of the title of *Heart of Darkness*, inverting, also, its imperial resonances. Echoes of this literary forebear occur also in the closing scene of *Between the Acts*. There, Lucy reads the body of her brother, Bart, as a monument to the present persistence of England’s supposedly past primordial brutality: “[f]rom [Giles’ and Isa’s] embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the *heart of darkness*, in the

fields of night. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks. Then the curtain rose. They spoke.”<sup>311</sup> These final lines of the novel locate a Conradian “heart of darkness” in the midst of the English countryside, in the house at the heart of Pointz Hall as well as in the nearby lily pond. As Almas Khan notes, this allusion “suggests the futility of lasting serenity for [Isa and Giles] generation.”<sup>312</sup> Like the motion back in time that Marlow describes having felt when traveling deeper into the African landscape. In Woolf’s novel, England is instead the site of such temporal regressions. The earlier statement forebodes the latter by presaging these “fields of night” —where sky becomes soil—within the “cushion of black mud” that lay at the bottom of the hollow, in this vortex of history. Mud comes then to be an epitomal manifestation of the base matter of this heart of darkness, a material tropology begun with *Heart of Darkness* itself. Mud itself comes to stand in for those occluded connections between the English nation and its sites of foreign becoming—on the Western front, as we see in *Mrs. Dalloway*, or in colonial spaces to which both of Woolf’s novels allude. Here, foreign elsewheres are not separated from native England by space or time. They are part of its continuous base materiality. Quoting Woolf’s diaries, Elisa Sparks points to the crucial role of the land within Woolf’s aesthetics. Woolf writes how, “‘England consoles & warms one, in these deep hollows, where the past stands almost stagnant’.”<sup>313</sup> Sparks concludes that “[w]hile the [East Sussex] downs per se do not provide the explicit setting for any of Woolf’s novels, elements of their appeal are part of the complex composites that form her literary geographies.”<sup>314</sup> Hence, moments later, *Between the Acts* declares this central muddy hollow to be the site where the “lady had drowned herself.”<sup>315</sup> Here,

mud's darkness is mingled not only with England's constitution by seemingly foreign outsiders but also with death. Moreover, it evokes a gendered death, a drowning of certain forms of life in domestic England. The muddy hollow contains this dark history, this "stagnant" "past" to use Woolf's own words: of the silencing of women's voices, driven as they are to such acts. The novel suggests in its own narrative and aesthetic performance that in order to attain freedom from the oppressive patriarchal structures that still adhere in English national culture, a culture of which country house estates—such as Pointz Hall—are representative one, must render them unconcealed. In so doing, the text reveals, through a different way of seeing, the accrual of national matters in the aesthetics of the land itself.

Yet, not all mud in *Between the Acts* is suffocating. The mutability of muddy matters can be aesthetically reconstructed to suggest a different possibility.<sup>316</sup> Mrs. Manresa and Miss La Trobe are the two voices most representative of a resistance to patriarchal subjection through a tropology of mud. The first is a sensuous flirt who seeks the attention of men with her free-seeming behaviors and who only *attends* the play at the center of the novel. The latter is a masculinized, desexualized intellectual and artist-activist who writes and directs the play. Both women are, however, marked by foreignness, first via their Latinate names of Manresa and La Trobe and second in their social set-apartness. The women are also dually marginalized in their resistance to the dominant modes of gender performance. This divergence marks them as un-English. Their affiliation with a vital, embodied mud, then, problematizes this substance's unilateral association with an Englishness concerned only with anxieties of too-closeness with foreign others and spaces, with the creation of exclusionary boundaries. From the

margins, base matters can be employed, suggests Woolf's writing, to expose the hidden histories that they set apart and mark as Other and also to redeploy them. Mrs. Manresa is described as a "wild child of nature."<sup>317</sup> She aligns herself with the "servants" and is "nothing like so grown up as you are," "you" referring to characters such as Giles and Lucy et al.<sup>318</sup> Triply marked as inferior—in ethnicity, class, and gender—Mrs. Manresa embraces the jubilant attitude that (through her new money and active sexual energy) creates for her an excepted space as outside-insider amongst the stable, rooted aristocratic English of the countryside. Woolf writes, "[s]he preened, approving her adolescence. Rightly or wrongly? A spring of feeling bubbled up through her mud. They laid theirs with blocks of marble. Sheep's bones were sheep's bones to them, not the relics of the drowned Lady Ermyntrude."<sup>319</sup> Manresa's "mud" through which a "spring of feeling" may "bubbl[e] up" is substituted for her interior self, that matter of which she is made, mentally. This both materializes the invisible mechanics of the self and also repeats the image of a "bubbling up" of something primeval, historical from below—like the "ancient song" in Peter's Regent's Park. It also links her and these remnant base matters of England to "the drowned Lady."<sup>320</sup>

Hence, the mutability of the mud, its permeability, also allows an alternative view of the landscape history, of English national history. This view is available also to Lucy and Mrs. La Trobe, Peter and Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and English women in general in *Three Guineas*. Manresa is guided by feelings of belief in something that's more than the eye can see. Being "wild" and affectively connected to "nature," Manresa can access an alternative reading of the signs on the landscape.<sup>321</sup> In her reading of *Between the Acts*, Renee Dickinson writes that "[t]hrough the imagery of the text, Woolf portrays both the



deep, unavoidable interconnectedness of the people and the land, and, [often] the loss of this connection to the land. Writing from a nation at war, this novel then suggests the possible loss not only of land, but of culture, not only of place but of individual and national identity.”<sup>322</sup> Though Manresa’s mud feelings and Peter’s mud song are linked, the mud that bubbles up does so in contrast to the “blocks of marble” associated here with a masculinized, national “they.” This stony selfhood is what elides the ability to see “bones” in the mud as “relics” of a hidden history, instead absorbing them into the banal pastoral of “sheep’s bones.” Both denigrated and created by it, mud constitutes Manresa’s inner world and has a mirror darkly in the real ancient England around her, despite her vivacious “adolescence.”

Excepted differently, Miss La Trobe “was an outcast. Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind.”<sup>323</sup> Towards the end of the novel, feeling defeated by the reception of her play and unsure if the audience gleaned what she had wanted to express—had seen into the mirror she wanted to hold to the foundations of this community’s English identity—she is already thinking of the next play. Composing it in her mind, she sits down at the local pub and listens—half to the voices of villagers around her and half to the internal authorial voice composing her next work for them. “Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning—wonderful words.”<sup>324</sup> Like Septimus’ word-seed dropping its shells, public words are planted in La Trobe’s mental mud, this matter of her community. The first words of her next work appear to her in that mud. They are also echoed in the final words of the novel: “they spoke.”<sup>325</sup> These words, this “they” that speaks, is divided. “[T]hey”

are half a representation of Isa and Giles and half a fictional representation of the figure in the mirror La Trobe would seek to hold to England of its own history, an image of its own self. The “mud” into which the words around and within her “s[i]nk” is the mud of that land, of England, the heart of which is the lily pond. But, it is also like Manresa’s mud: the fertile mud of her inner self, digesting the past and present of this place, its populace, and weaving it into art. La Trobe here seems to function as an avatar then for Woolf’s own authorial agency within the text.

This slippage between linguistic creativity and base materiality such as mud and stone places the focus on the aestheticization of national grounds within Woolf’s literary world(s). Embedded texts in Woolf’s *Between the Acts*, therefore, create opportunities for conversations between past and present manifestations of English national environs—from La Trobe’s play arising from the mud of her mind to Lucy’s natural historical reading about primeval England. The comingling of the natural and the historical in Woolf’s base material aesthetics is portrayed most explicitly through the character of Mrs. Swithin, or Lucy, who continually imagines England’s present landscape as still layered with its own primeval past. “The narrator in *Between the Acts*,” Almas Khan remarks, “simultaneously invokes and undermines the deleterious origin narratives” such as “the patriarchal narrative of humanity’s origin that seems so often to culminate in war, both domestically—against marginalized populations in England—and abroad.”<sup>326</sup> I argue that the temporally-dense landscape of Lucy’s English countryside registers the presence of British imperialism upon her native land through visions of England’s primordial environs. In re-seeing England’s national historiography through a material layer of two separate moments in its natural history, Lucy’s visions naturalize the threat

of regression to civilization as a native presence and not a foreign one thrust upon England by war or colonial contact. Lucy lies in bed listening to the sounds of a country summer through the open window at Pointz Hall. Spilling into the interior domestic English space of her country house, Lucy's sensory experience of the natural world is fraught with violence. Given the context of the novel—set as it is on the eve of one war that metaphorically echoes the unwelcome return of another—this natural violence mirrors the coming home of global war to English landscapes. It literally echoes the looming return of aeroplane warfare that punctuates the novel, planes that themselves recall the novel fear and damage caused by the planes and zeppelins of WWI. Gillian Beer explains that Woolf writes in “a period at which the island can be seen anew, scanned from above.”<sup>327</sup> Woolf uses this new perspective to critique both domestic patriarchal structures and global British imperialist ideology.<sup>328</sup> Hence, Lucy senses the “birds” as a force of violence against the “dawn” to which she is “forced to listen.”<sup>329</sup> It is as if she is bearing witness to some trauma she would rather be kept outside. The bird-song is “attack[ing]” the morning “like so many choir boys attacking an iced cake,” consuming it with savagery.<sup>330</sup> Attack birds further allude to war planes and the collective of boys is reminiscent of the lost innocence of young soldiers who bonded in the trenches of World War I.

This “natural” aggression, evocative as it is of England's real historical aggressions abroad in the world wars and upon colonial sites, comesling in Lucy's mind with her readings on the primal violence born of England's own soil on a larger historical scale. This scale is staged by the geologic temporality provided in Lucy's book's evocation of both H.G. Wells' natural history in *The Outline of History* (1920) and G.M.

Trevelyan's national history in *History of England* (1926).<sup>331</sup> Reading these allusions together, Lucy's book becomes a natural-national historical discourse. In her reading—and the imaginative flight it allows beyond the page from this present and place—Woolf's imagery naturalizes violence as native to England. Normally relegated to the English past or colonial present, this native violence is depicted as materially located in the English present on its domestic isle. This focus on books conjures the art of the written word and literary works as living entities as well as calling attention to the act of reading itself. In doing so, Woolf's typical modernist self-reflexivity performs both a slippage between Lucy's reading of Wells' historical book and her English surrounds, as well as a slippage between La Trobe as a writer and director, the audience's experience of the production, and Woolf's own authorial ambitions for England. Lucy:

stretched for her favourite reading—an Outline of History—and had spent the hours between three and five thinking of rhododendron forests in Piccadilly; when the entire continent, not then, she understood, divided by a channel, was all one; populated, she understood, by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend.<sup>332</sup>

The passage moves in and out of eras, shifting from Lucy's present to an imagined primordial English past and back to the present of the novel again. The mental motion of departure and return is framed in the physical object of the window. The window is an object whose own physicality is less a material presence than a signifier of absence and sort of liminal marker of the boundaries between inside and outside, wild and

domesticated, non-human and human spaces. Metaphorically, I would argue, the liminality of the window also suggests the porousness between England and its global empire. The violence exists outside of both the human space of the house and also, Lucy imagines, the present of England. Yet, the imaginative layering performed by her reading of the book disrupts that boundary, just as Miss La Trobe hoped her play would for the villagers and Woolf may hope the reading of her own text will for her English contemporaries. The natural history of England with which *Outline of History* begins is one where such distinct boundaries do not yet exist. England and Continental Europe are then one, their environs more identical and life not separated into civilized humanity and wild, savage nature. Lucy's imaginative de-evolution of England mirrors and confirms in this way the concerns of the nation's present. Having survived the First World War, the present of this novel finds itself on the eve of another violent merging of the globe in savage conflict—World War II—and the present of the author—Woolf—already in the midst of it.

Furthermore, the space of Lucy's imagining is protective of the pre-dawn hours: the waning darkness, those "hours between three and five." Into the darkness of England's now she projects a regressive period of cultural and evolutionary darkness. These heaving, surging, slowly writhing creatures are constituted not through a typical descriptive aesthetics of surface—color, shape, and light—but rather that of materiality and motion. Woolf wants us to *feel* this primal past more than she needs us to be able to *see* it. Incapable of meaningful expression, life is defined by motions that elicit a "slo[w]" agency, one that is imbued with a heaviness, an excessive weight. The animals heave and surge like a group of oarsmen, sailors, the ocean, or a massive army. Such actions are

larger than a single life and a terrifying force appears to animate them. Additionally, they writhe. This again denotes not so much a motion forward as one that happens while staying in one place. It also connotes a body in pain, one that is unable to escape a violence that is one and the same as itself. Lucy's monsters' bodies are large and thick. She conjures them via animals identifiable in her present. Those chosen are associated primarily with environs outside of England. The elephant is associated with an assumed present, primeval of India, Asia, or Africa and, despite being native to the British Isles, seals live primarily in the ultimate unknown and externalized spaces of the seas. These creature being found largely outside of England, they depict her homeland as having a past that manifests as both foreign to itself while still residing in England's national present. Sam See argues that in *Between the Acts*, Woolf attempts a "violent purification on the model of atavism, or the reversion of biological forms to prior stages of development" in the style of Darwin, "extend[ing] this violation to a civilization whose efforts at domination betray, and threaten to destroy, its member[s]," "stripping individuals of the pretensions of civilization that constitute individual and national identities alike."<sup>333</sup> Such historical re-imaginings of primordial, geologic pasts as those utilized by Woolf give form to a natural historical aesthetics. This aesthetics becomes increasingly characteristic of Modernism's revelation of anxieties and imagining of new futures from within the crisis of stagnant presents through a base material tropology.

Lucy's visions are situated in the two material surrounds between which her mind splits itself—half in England's primordial swamps and half in England's present pastoral countryside. The "rhododendron forests in Piccadilly" locate the now-invasive species of rhododendron as native to London ("Piccadilly").<sup>334</sup> Its presence there represents the lack

of division between the Isles and the rest of the world, an overlap that mirrors the present-past temporality Lucy cohabitates. That she pictures this “primeval forest” in London repeats the bubbling up of primeval matters seen by Peter in Regent’s Park.<sup>335</sup> The English countryside is emblematic of pure Englishness, whereas London is the site of a modern wild being empire’s metropole. Here, however, both are equally prone to regressive returns.

Such images split times and places of the now into two: a palimpsestic past and present. This splitting is an extension of Septimus’ time-word husk-splitting image. Turning the genetic temporality by which the nation stabilizes its own sovereign nativity on its head, the text’s discourse of natural history manifests temporal rupture via visions such as Lucy’s, visions of an unpeopled geologic English past as unable to be contained from its present. Rather than residues of its past seen in stable lands and monumental stones, a more permeable and mutable muddiness mixes times together in the present. Woolf writes, “[i]t took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest.”<sup>336</sup> The division named as that between “actual” and “mind” “time” is what makes such cohabitation, and perhaps even coevalness, of “primeval” and present possible.<sup>337</sup> The “blue china on a tray” is contrasted with “green steaming undergrowth”: order with excess, dry fragile matters with moist bendy ones. “Grace herself,” a servant, is not easily “separa[ble]” from her ironic counterpart: “the leather-covered grunting monster” who “demolish[es] . . . whole tree[s].” The servant’s name, positioned reflexively as it is here, implies coyly that the

woman may be “Grace herself,” an embodiment of poise and refinement. Such a creature and the breakable “china” cargo she transports are in direct opposition to the “leather”-skinned creature who evokes fear and commits senseless violence (“demolish”) against the most humanoid of ancient botanical life: “tree[s].” The image is an avatar for acts of modern warfare and colonial destruction.<sup>338</sup>

And yet, Lucy’s inability to separate the two invites the reader to examine more closely their supposed distinctions. One must conclude, therefore, that there is a sense in which Woolf is suggesting a semi-synonymous association between the explicit primitivism of primeval England and the faux civilization of England’s orderly modern households.<sup>339</sup> This straddling of worlds is not only internal. Lucy “felt on her face the divided glance that was half meant for a beast in a swamp, half for a maid in a print frock and white apron.”<sup>340</sup> The primeval characterization of this past world emerges in its “beast[ial]” occupants and moist messy “swamp” environment, throwing into relief the civilized purity of the “maid,” symbolic of cleanliness and order, as well as the “white” garments against which it is constructed. The surface of Lucy’s body, her “divided glance,” reflects an internal-external liminality, a leaky boundary that mirrors the temporal permeability of English environmental-cultural landscapes. Instead of pure fear, however, there is a sense of desire and pleasure tangled up in Lucy’s anxious fascination with primitive English matters. Woolf writes that she is “[t]empted by the sight to continue her imaginative reconstruction of the past . . . she was given to increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future; or *sidelong* down corridors and alleys.”<sup>341</sup> Words such as “tempted” and “given to” suggest a desire to engage in these “imaginative reconstruction[s] of the past” that stretch (“increasing the bounds of”) the



present (“the moment”) in order to include in the now a “past or future.” Repurposing the internal logic of the nation’s trans-spatial temporality, Woolf further spatializes Lucy’s temporality, characterizing it also as a “sidelong” motion “down corridors and alleys.” This suggests a network of moments connected through an ecosystem of times and spaces that is resistant to the logic of denied coevalness between English subject and non-European or Nature. As opposed to images of stone and land elsewhere, it does not reinforce the boundedness of an insular nation typically created by the genetic temporalities of the English imagined community of nationhood. The Benjaminian notion of her view as a constellation of moments comprising a now complicates an easy assignation of such boundaries.

“Sidelong” perspectives, moreover, place Lucy in the position of one of Woolf’s outside-insiders—the “we” that forms the “society of outsiders” that Woolf theorizes both in her novels and with such essays as *Three Guineas* and the “deserters” from the “army of the upright” in “On Being Ill.”<sup>342</sup> Furthermore, it is helpful to think of Woolf’s “sidelong” view as the spatiotemporal cousin of Michel Foucault’s “slantwise,”<sup>343</sup> the position occupied by those alternate subjects discussed in “Friendship as a Way of Life” and theorized more deeply as “parrhesiasts” possessing an agonistic view in his lectures on the *Courage of the Truth*.<sup>344</sup> Such decentered positions elude power structures enough to expose them without ever escaping them—achieving a seemingly impossible feat.

Bookending the novel, just as the window of her bedroom frames her flight into the primaeval past of England, Lucy’s “imaginative reconstruction of the past” returns in the final pages of *Between the Acts* with a repetition of noticeable pleasure or desire for such pasts to be coterminous with her present.

It was time to read now, her Outline of History. But she had lost her place. She turned the pages looking at pictures—mammoths, mastodons, prehistoric birds. Then she found the page where she had stopped. The darkness increased. The breeze swept round the room. With a little shiver Mrs. Swithin drew her sequin shawl about her shoulders. She was too deep in the story to ask for the window to be shut. ‘England,’ she was reading, ‘was then a swamp. Thick forests covered the land. On the top of their matted branches birds sang . . .’ The great square of the open window showed only sky now. It was drained of light, severe, stone cold. Shadows fell. Shadows crept over Bartholomew's high forehead; over his great nose. He looked leafless, spectral, and his chair monumental. As a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered. He rose, shook himself, glared at nothing, and stalked from the room. They heard the dog's paws padding on the carpet behind him. Lucy turned the page, quickly, guiltily, like a child who will be told to go to bed before the end of the chapter.

‘Prehistoric man,’ she read, ‘half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones.’ She slipped the letter from Scarborough between the pages to mark the end of the chapter, rose, smiled, and tiptoed silently out of the room.<sup>345</sup>

Lucy's reading ushers the primitive landscapes of England's past back into Pointz Hall's present once again, making it impossible any longer to maintain the boundaries between those spaces of war and colonialism as external to England proper though their association with a brutal, regressive nature as foreign to England's civilized lands. John Whittier-Ferguson states that *Between the Acts*' final page “allusion to Conrad . . .

summons the shadows always haunting modernity, the threat of regression that Conrad articulated a dozen years before the First World War.”<sup>346</sup> Images (“pictures”) of “prehistoric” life are conjured off of the “page[s]” of her book—full of “[t]hick forests” with “matted branches” that “covered the land.” The environs of this England are marked by the same excessive growth as the creatures Lucy imagined at the beginning of the novel. Like Conrad’s African jungle, they are “thick,” “matted,” and “cover” rather than dot, fleck, or fringe this English land as now they would.

What drives these reclaimed images is Lucy’s own desire to see them before her, in her mind’s eye, and echoing in the world around her. Her reading is described as moving “quickly, guiltily, like a child who will be told to go to bed before the end of the chapter.” She reads greedily, following not the trajectory of anticipation (towards the future of that book’s plot) but of regression (towards the past of Woolf’s book, of her own nation). She consumes the pages like an Eve who accesses a forbidden knowledge of the world’s and man’s secrets. Her infantilization here and throughout the novel (“like a child who will be told”) diminishes her agency and authority as a character but also points to the gendered construction of her desires as well as the knowing made possible only from her “sidelong” view. As a woman, she is able to connect Bart’s England to “Pre-historic man[’s],” with its shared manifestation—exposed by Lucy’s sidelong view—of a primordial, violent affect that is figured here as innate to the British imperialism of which he is representative. The scene closes with Lucy’s exit mirroring Bart’s own. She also “rose” and went “out of the room.”<sup>347</sup> Instead of “glar[ing]” and “stalk[ing],” however, she, having finished the “chapter” on primitive man in England, “smiled, and tiptoed silently.” This difference accentuates her subtler, knowing

inhabitation of the space of England's domestic present. It points also to the contented pleasure that we presume these transposable images produced through the vantage point of a wider historical, quasi-geologic even, temporality. Bart, on the other hand, is very much of his time and, with pregnant irony, is considered also a vestige of that primeval era.

The "sidelong" view that Lucy manifests is affiliated here with a natural historical temporality as expressed by the base matters through which she reconstructs Pointz Hall and the English countryside in which it is enmeshed. As reader, Lucy uses *Outline of History* to re-read her present. And as modern readers, Woolf's audiences are invited to do the same. Ironically, the reader possesses knowledge that Lucy does not: we too, read "guiltily," seeing through the images and metaphors of primaeval English landscapes that a critique of modern England between the wars is implicit in Woolf's rendering of the palimpsestic nature of its base materiality. Orienting *herself* within the book ("she had lost her place" / "Then she found the page where she had stopped"), Lucy catalyzes a "view"—important as a motif throughout the novel where it becomes tantamount to the reading of a landscape, of a totalizing, consuming view. "[H]er place" seems to suggest more than the page of the book to which she has read (her narrative progress). She does not hold that imperial perspective which Bart evinces towards the beginning of the narrative and that the text produces elsewhere with its repeated evocation of aerial orientations. This is further emphasized in the pictorial and not just textual nature of that which Lucy peruses. The book itself then invites a "view."

Once oriented in the text of natural history—the view of landscape—Lucy envisions a climatic and material transformation of the present space, exposing certain

elements of the present's view of itself, as Miss La Trobe attempted to do with her play. In the room in which she sits in Pointz Hall's mid-twentieth century England, "[t]he darkness increased" and a "breeze swept round." The story on the book's pages appears to come to life before her—an aesthetics of mysteriously agential environmental forces extending to Pointz Hall and not just describing primeval Piccadilly. Just as the "divided" look on her face had manifested her split temporality in the beginning of the novel, here too, the surfaces of Lucy's body become a canvas for the material manifestation of these two times' affective coevalness. Lucy's body lets loose a "little shiver" and she pulls her "shawl about her shoulders."

Imaginatively resettled in his native primeval English environs, Lucy's brother Bart is marked by his imperialist associations, depicted as both native and anachronistic from the view of a natural historiography of England. In the opening pages, Bart is named as a member of the "Indian Civil Service, retired."<sup>348</sup> Though he has retired from his position in England's colonial rule over India and now inhabits the domestic space of the living room arm-chair, his imperialism comes home to that space as well. Later, in the gardens on the grounds, Bart is also depicted as a surveyor of England—land assessor and acquirer. He is reading the newspaper and suddenly "the breeze blew the great sheet out; and over the edge he surveyed the landscape—flowing fields, heath and woods. Framed, they became a picture. Had he been a painter, he would have fixed his easel here, where the country, barred by trees, looked like a picture. Then the breeze fell."<sup>349</sup> The landscape interrupts his surveying of world events in the paper with the material presence of the now in England. In response, the colonial gaze is applied to the English countryside as if it were a colonial landscape. Earlier, the family speaks of

the “site they had chosen for the cesspool” and Bart notes that it is “on the Roman road.”<sup>350</sup> The text associates the cesspool not only with a colonial past of England’s rule from without by Rome but also—through Bart’s personal history—with England’s colonial rule over India. In doing so, Woolf draws our attention to the layering of histories present in this “view,” a multiplicity of presences that, I suggest, disrupts the totalizing historiographies of imperialism. The very materiality of the landscape speaks to the multiple mutations of presents that have been visited upon that place. Bart continues his commentary, noting that “[f]rom an aeroplane . . . you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars.”<sup>351</sup> In viewing a national history in his local landscape as a blotting out of the smaller details of place, Bart’s view mirrors a totalizing view of history made possible by the ignoring of historical specificity in favor of a national mythology aligned with patriotic colonialism. Khan writes, “[t]he novel depicts the nation as pock-marked by continental invasions that have left their imprint on the landscape . . . and citizens’ psyches, reciprocally impelling conquests overseas” authored this time by England.<sup>352</sup> This seeing of a universal national history in a local place being is made possible by the perspective of the “aeroplane.” Because the airplanes in this play-novel are elsewhere exclusively affiliated with war’s violence, the view affiliates this nationalist apprehension of history in place with the impetus for war. Not seeing England as the apex of progress and whose imperial superiority the interwar imaginary typically constructs, Woolf layers England’s present with multiple historical moments. These moments are read as still present as “scars” upon the land, allowing Woolf’s text to achieve what La Trobe’s play may not have—holding

a mirror to the Englishness of the towns people. Furthermore, it evokes an environmental-materialist historiography, one which, like Foucault's "baking process of history,"<sup>353</sup> sees the environment as something that contains within it the material scars of a nation's history. This countryside landscape can be read much like Lucy reads *Outline of History*. From the plane of the village around Pointz Hall, the war view of land constructs a national history of accumulated development through conquest and war, exposing war's national significance as well as enacting war's violence.

Back in the Pointz Hall sitting room, there is a continued emphasis on views as attention is called again to the window. The change in the room could simply be from the "great square of the open window" that Lucy was "was too deep in the story to ask for" someone to "shut." Yet, the temporality of such shifts suggests a too-quick change from light to darkness, from still air to cold sweeping winds. This calls attention to the time of the novel and the narration itself, as if more time has passed than was diegetically narrated. Using the narrative speed to call attention to both the narrative frame itself and to the possibility for this climatic change's unnaturalness further suggests the performative powers of narrative, of text in general. We appear to have moved back in time, then, based on the scene's aesthetics, into a place of historical darkness for England.

Caught in this feedback loop, Woolf's language invites no resolution, allowing us to possess a "view" similar to Lucy's as well as exposing the power dynamics of Bart's. The "too deep[ness]" of Lucy's immersion being something that silences and disconnects her from her present is a depth into which we are also invited to descend. Through Lucy, our view as readers shifts further to the space, now seemingly transformed via the frame of the "great square of the open window." It "showed only sky now." The sky is "drained

of light, severe, stone cold,” making it indistinguishable from ground matter and more like the “darkness” Lucy sees. In addition to wind and darkness, this window allows “Shadows” to permeate the room. Repeated twice, shadows land most significantly upon “Bartholomew’s high forehead; over his great nose.” His markers of stature are cloaked in a darkness that re-writes them. He looks now “leafless, spectral,” and “monumental.”

This set of images evokes a dead tree, a ghost, and a memorial stone, three objects whose matters are aligned with death, with residues of a past now gone. In persisting, they suggest the need to dispense with an outdated British imperialist policy as represented by Bart. Once “great” and “high” this superiority is muted as stone. Like the “severe, stone cold” of the “sky[‘s]” primitive darkness, Bart is cast into similarly stony matters, becoming more monument than man. Like the “prehistoric” creatures of earlier passages, Bart is here animalized as “Prehistoric man.” He is more like the dog than the child (Lucy’s avatar): “[a]s a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered. He rose, shook himself, glared at nothing, and stalked from the room.” The narrative moves directly from this animalized treatment of Bart to Lucy’s reading of the following lines from her book: “‘Prehistoric man,’ she read, ‘half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones.’” Bart is compared to and seems to be a modern manifestation of this primitive, animalized man. This third use of stone diction solidifies our association of this geologic lexicon with the inert, inorganic matter of human civilization, Such matters persists and remains there, marking the passage of time. The “rais[ing]” of these “stones” alludes to Neolithic sites such as Stonehenge and the like, mirroring the primitive sky that invades and exposes Pointz Hall at Lucy’s invitation as well as indicating Bart’s “monumental” nature. “Prehistoric,” as a temporal marker,



indeed, means before written history. Yet, Woolf's foregrounding of the atavistic as prehistoric as well as "primeval" calls attention to the always already textual, and therefore aesthetic, nature of history. However materially grounded its views may seem, it is narrative can be endlessly re-interpreted as Woolf here uses natural historical images to do. At the same time, her novel uncouples this imagery from its traditional use as natural historiography in England in order to naturalize nationalist sentiments and generate patriotic feelings for the nation's wars and imperialist ventures. In ironizing that stable materiality of British landscape history, Woolf reveals that to found a national narrative on environmental aesthetics is to find that, rather than firmer ground, all that is solid melts into air. Taken playfully out of context, as I feel Woolf would have us do, the interdiction, "time to read now" addresses the reader directly alongside Lucy in the narrative. Time to read now our books, our history, the landscape, and our world.

*A "shadow over the entire landscape": Land and Stone in Three Guineas*

And Woolf, too, continues to do so elsewhere. Reading how the land articulates English nationhood in her essay, *Three Guineas*, the text suggests that a native fascism, or what she calls an "infantile fixation," is expressed in England's material landscape aesthetics.<sup>354</sup> She responds to England's outward declaration during the interwar years, the public rejection of fascism as something foreign to its native drive towards democracy and freedom, only being cultivated abroad. Christina Alt discusses what I will call Woolf's naturalization of fascism in England, stating that "Woolf places violence against nature and violence between human beings on a continuum with each other . . . She then links this violence against nature with violence against humans."<sup>355</sup> *Three Guineas* is written in an epistolary format as the narrator, presumably Woolf, writes three

letters in response to requests that she donate money to several causes pertaining to the national anti-war effort and to support both women's education and entrance into the professions. The looming, once again, of world war in 1938 on the horizon continually punctuates Woolf's discussion of what these three interconnected issues. In *Three Guineas*, images of ground matter and space construct a relationship between material environment and national subject, demonstrating how the dynamics of power that lead to global war for England are always already an expression of a native form of fascism.

I diagnose the native fascism of *Three Guineas* by reading it in combination with the rhetoric of that essay to which it becomes linked once the war is fully underway: "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940). Here, Woolf notes that public voices call out: "[w]e are a free people, fighting to defend freedom."<sup>356</sup> She does not, however, believe it is "true that we are free," and asks: "What is it that prevents us? 'Hitler' [they] cry with one voice . . . What is he?," she replies, answering, "Aggressiveness, tyranny, the insane love of power made manifest," concluding, "[d]estroy that, and you will be free."<sup>357</sup> Drawing attention to the ideas that Hitler is publicly claimed to stand for, she uses this emphasis on the ideational aspects of Hitler the man to make her case that it is those ideals, and not a singular man, that should be the focus of English efforts at eradicating fascism. Citing Lady Astor, an MP in the house of commons from 1919 to 1945, Woolf notes that the presence of these same ideals in the "hearts of men" here in England, cause "[w]omen of ability . . . [to be] held down" due to a "subconscious Hitlerism."<sup>358</sup> Woolf, therefore, sees England's calling the Second World War "a fight by the English to protect freedom, by the Germans to destroy freedom" to be dubious.<sup>359</sup> She feels the English desire to see a justification for global war in a false domestic national

hermeneutics: “[l]iberty has made her abode in England. England is the home of democratic institutions . . . It is true that in our midst there are many enemies of liberty . . . a castle that will be defended to the last.”<sup>360</sup> Rather than a state of exception responding out of necessity to an imminent national threat, Woolf attempts to point to the way in which “war is a profession” and therefore cannot be an exception to the ideals of the nation materially reified as the stony edifice of a “castle” of liberty and freedom.<sup>361</sup> Her explanation of the native and persistent nature of a fascist instinct now driving England again to war evokes a base material aesthetic that deconstructs the spatialized representation of England as a structure of freedom built from the native quarries of the land. This reveals that what is kept out of the castle is more than foreign “enemies of liberty” and is instead a concretization of an inherent patriarchal fascism within English spaces.

Woolf interpellates a collectivity of selves who she hopes will find the ability to be the parrhesiast that she aims to be in the essay through her creation of a “we” who see differently. This “we” possesses a “sidelong” or “slantwise” view capable of making such native fascisms legible within the national landscape. Like Lucy’s view, this “we” is enabled by a marginal position relative to the gendered power dynamics supporting men’s public education and careers while excluding women from equal participation in public life—exclusion from participation in those institutions that constitute the heart of democratic England. She argues, furthermore, that this has occurred for all of English history, marking it as not foreign but native. Linking England’s freedom castle to the walls of Oxbridge and then to the stones of Parliament and the rest of Westminster, Woolf terms this exclusionary club that is housed within the castle walls from which

women are historically barred, “Arthur’s Education Fund.”<sup>362</sup> Her depiction of the powers of this fictive fund upon the English populace is entirely constituted via a spatial aesthetics, concretized by the ancient stones that constitute it. She explains that this “Fund” has both historically and presently “cast a shadow over the entire landscape. And the result is that though we look at the same things, we see them differently.”<sup>363</sup> This early introduction of the collectivity of “we” here refers to the daughters of educated men, an inclusivity she will later expand through a re-assignment of the inside-outsider status. In this image, the “landscape” of England is conflated with a way of looking at things, of seeing national land and the Englishness founded upon it “differently.”

Furthermore, the metaphor of a “shadow” over “landscape” already echoes the fascist powers of Hitler, often said to be a “shadow over Europe,” echoing also the shadows falling across Bart’s forehead as the sitting room in Pointz Hall is darkened by a primitivist aesthetics. In conflating the external fascism of Hitler with the internal institutionalized gender dynamics of England, Woolf begins to naturalize this native fascism upon the matter of nation—its land and historic structures, through a version of what I term base matters. Native fascism is my combination of Lady Astor’s phrase “native Hitlerism”—cited by Woolf above—with Woolf’s own suggestion of sexism as fascism at home in England: “infantile fixation.” Woolf articulates this native fascism through an aesthetics of base materiality, a national rhetoric of landscape and space. Through the “we” who is “seeing differently,” the reader glimpses the foundation of her as yet unstated “society of outsiders.” From this view one sees the material alteration wrought by such internal fascisms: “[s]o magically does it change the landscape that the noble courts and quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge often appear to educated men’s

daughters like petticoats with holes in them, cold legs of mutton, and the boat train starting for abroad while the guard slams the door in their faces.”<sup>364</sup> Secondhand objects and cold exclusion are all that appear in the place of “courts and quadrangles,” such enduring spaces being transmogrified into objects of decay and abandonment. The transformative position one’s view has on a national landscape is based on the way one is allowed to occupy its sacred public spaces. To prevent fascism by foreign invasion, suggests Woolf, one must first become attentive to fascist histories at home.

Because of the importance of those spaces we occupy politically, Woolf’s spatialized rhetoric structures our understanding of her political claims. She offers a spatial historiography of the public and the domestic, as well as their attendant attributes: the national and the private.<sup>365</sup> Taking downtown London as her public space par excellence, Woolf writes that “[w]ithin quite a small space are crowded together St. Paul’s, the Bank of England, the Mansion House, . . . Law Courts; and on the other side, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament.”<sup>366</sup> This space holds structures representative of all of the major disciplinary powers of England—Religious, Financial, Legal, and Governmental sites of authority are all contained in this small section of London. The public authority of the nation invoked by this space, notably, excludes the domestic. She continues, “[t]here, we say to ourselves, pausing, in this moment of transition on the bridge, our fathers and brothers have spent their lives. . . . It is from this world that the private house (somewhere, roughly speaking, in the West End) has derived its creeds.”<sup>367</sup> The private spaces of the home are excluded from the public space of the nation, though they both lay within England, within London even.

This spatial division reflects a constructed social division as well. Woolf notes early on in the essay that woman is disconnected from landscape in any truly national, and hence patriotic, sense. To men she explains, “[y]our class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically all the capital, *all the land*, all the valuables, and all the patronage in England.”<sup>368</sup> Woman’s distance from any true belonging to the nation due to her having no right to the land itself, to that which is materially England, affects a dispossession of her from the protection offered by the freedom castle that England supposedly manifests. Having realized “how much of ‘England’ in fact belongs to her” (none), woman is not bound by the compulsion to support “fighting to protect England from foreign rule, [and] she will reflect that for her there are no ‘foreigners’, since by law she becomes a foreigner if she marries a foreigner.”<sup>369</sup> Woman is marked, then, as always already foreign and lacking any material claim in the past or present to England. The defense of an interiority from an exteriority towards which she holds no malice is no longer a natural desire. She is herself free from the fascist logic of patriotic war for disembodied ideals of freedom. Woman must then ask herself, Woolf adds, “[w]hat does ‘our country’ mean to me an outsider?”<sup>370</sup> She answers: “the outsider will say . . . as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.”<sup>371</sup> Defining woman as countryless, she depicts this not as a loss of home but as a new claim on global citizenry.<sup>372</sup> From this position, war seems an absurd endeavor. Unlike the stony aesthetics so far associated with the masculinized England of war and empire, such national permeability here affiliates the feminized element within England as more akin to those muddy matters of her novels—flowing in and out of domestic borders, exposing a permeability within and below the nation. The nation is

here constituted by base matters that threaten the fixed position and boundaries of the masculinized England characterized by its native fascism.

This new ethical orientation comes with a new affective stance. Rather than violent, imperialist patriotism:

from this indifference certain actions must follow. She will bind herself to take no share in patriotic demonstrations; to assent to no form of national self-praise; to make no part of any clique or audience that encourages war; to absent herself from military displays . . . and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose 'our' civilization or 'our' dominion upon other people.<sup>373</sup>

Woolf's argument continually plays on the then-familiar trope of the land as foundation of nation.<sup>374</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, this concept naturalizes the nation through spatial and material metaphors. Yet, Woolf's hermeneutics highlights the way empire's explosion of the logic of native land as a concrete metaphor for the foundation of nation makes such national grounding increasingly problematic and difficult to maintain. Woolf deploys her own constructivist rhetoric of land and space to expose the weaknesses in an existing public discourse that seeks to use images of land and stone to justify war, sexism, and imperialism on behalf of a fallaciously depicted free England. Woolf's most explicitly anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist text, *Three Guineas* allows English modernist discourses of base materiality to deconstruct themselves from within, opening up an alternative space for this materially internal, yet socially and ideologically agonistic or exterior, "we" so that she may theorize new forms of connection and belonging. One might even argue it offers a more ecological model—though she does not go as far as, say, H.D. in this regard. By disrupting the elision of inside, native, and natural, remaking

herself as native foreigner and men as native fascists, Woolf's base material tropology also points to the use of environmental aesthetics to mark what is outside and inside. Her text reveals then one sense in which a racialized environmental discourse emerges surrounding imperialism in war-time England.

Recalling Woolf's description of the public "space," we note also that she calls it "quite a small space" for which there is a "[w]ithin" where sites of power are "crowded."<sup>375</sup> The dimensional, prepositional, and adverbial designations attached to these sites' containment in said space indicate an interiority that is in tension with the national and public valences of its contents. That she calls it "there," as in over there and away, and not here where the narrator stands, reinforces the false division between this public space and the "private house," which despite its specific singularity is somehow harder to pinpoint locally than that multiplicity of public edifices downtown. It is tenuously located "somewhere, roughly speaking, in the West End."<sup>376</sup> That public space is equated here with "world," a totality from which the "house" "derive[s]," setting up a parallel between public space and global space that is not echoed in the private space of the home with regard to its relation to the space of the nation. This second equation does not follow because it would disrupt the sovereignty of the nation to model it on a house derived from without. This notion would imply the nation is derived from a global totality, a majority of which is foreign. And so, Woolf positions—spatially—the narrator, not in the private or public space but on a "bridge," a space constituted by its facilitating the "transition" between spaces. By speaking from the boundary of these two spaces, Woolf's very narrative *revisions* national land. One must not speak only from within public or private spaces but from the position of an orientation both within and outside of



them. Even the formal generic structure of *Three Guineas* itself echoes this spatial dynamic. Ashley Foster notes that “[i]n collapsing the boundaries among peace pamphlet, political manifesto, letter, and essay-novel, Woolf subverts the divisions between private and public life, bringing the home and the family into the political arena and indicting the patriarchy in a war-making system.”<sup>377</sup> Having predicated the interiority of Hitlerism to the English subject on the structural resonances between woman’s restricted freedoms in England and the restricted freedoms of other peoples at the hands of fascist dictators on the continent, the spatial-material rhetoric of *Three Guineas* suggests that the ascetic work of living for freedom is afforded to Woolf only as an outsider occupying the inside agonistically.

Therefore, just as the home is both within and without the public space of the nation yet exclusively outside the public spaces of education and professions (of which war is one among many for men), so too are women and other outsiders able to inhabit power without colluding with it. Woolf writes, “we enter . . . and survey the scene in greater detail. The first sensation of colossal size, of majestic masonry is broken up into a myriad points of amazement mixed with interrogation.”<sup>378</sup> The primary “sens[ory]” apprehension of spaces of power within this national landscape is marked by stone—what Woolf calls the “majestic masonry” of “colossal size.” This description mirrors the “raise[d] stones” of primeval man in Lucy’s imagined England of *Between the Acts*, the “monumental” statue of Bart, and the “stone cold” environment of the past that marks England’s present. Woolf points to a continued verbal-visual geologic lexicon that is frequently used in public rhetoric to *root* or *ground* English national meaning—solidifying its power. Angeliki Spiropoulou discusses Woolf’s “entwine[ment]” of nature

and history across her oeuvre, including the invocation of “inorganic, stone-like ‘solid’ objects” that “by virtue of their being inorganic . . . evoke a prehistoric past of stones and minerals . . . attesting to a natural history before humanity,” so that “the logic of ruin seems to defeat modernity’s . . . search for stability and continuity, which is in turn motivated by its acute awareness of its own passing nature.”<sup>379</sup> I would argue the desire for stability and continuity extends to the presence of actual stone and rock remnants in Woolf as well. It is tied to the fresh consciousness of human’s material mortality in the face of World War I and its potential repetition in the Second World War. The nation itself, *Three Guineas* then implies, is the “colossal” and “majestic” matter these buildings manifest and reinforce. Woolf exposes, therefore, the national tendency in the interwar period to use stone as a marker for a hoped-for stability. This is echoed in Nancy Cunard’s reading of the Jamaican landscape, which I discuss in Part Four. Seeing it “broken up into a myriad points,” however, hints at the agonistic view’s ability to deconstruct such rooted native fascisms, demonstrating the colonialism and wars that such solid ideologies support are no “freedom” “castle” after all.

Hence, in *Three Guineas*, there is an implicit historiography of landscape, inscribed within the insider-outsider position that affords a “sidelong” view and has the ability to expose and critique the genetic temporality discussed in Chapter 1. Though Woolf’s pointing to similarities between modes of oppression at home and abroad is compelling enough, the network of contradictory assignments of interior and exterior subverted throughout the text resist the power that this native fascism maintains in its dominant unilateral positionality of space and time. This has implications beyond a straightforward politics of peace or gender, hinting at the way environmental ethics must

be seen as always already entangled in a politics of freedom. Because the maintenance of nationalist discourses of violence is founded upon fictions of interiority and exteriority, fascist notions that naturalize pastness and futurism—even when shrouded in seeming democratic ideologies—are revealed to rely on an aesthetics of the material environment. This materiality is then always already interior to our discussions of history and subjectivity, most crucially so in times of war when national matter becomes the base matter for grounding discourses of power and its resistance in an ethical paradigm (the defense of body and land). Hence, the materiality of the “society of outsiders” that is located in *Three Guineas*’ example of public space is also bound, according to the narrator, to a sharing of something with this voice’s position in the past and present. It is bound to an ethical orientation in the present towards the future, towards a latent community of “we.”<sup>380</sup> It is not just the narrator who stands between the public and private spaces but a “we” that includes any excluded from the public space where “our [white, heterosexual, middle and upper class] fathers and brothers have spent their lives.”<sup>381</sup> It has the potential to be inclusive of all who are disenfranchised in the name of imperial England. This includes the increasingly marginalized environment itself and those communities disenfranchised by England’s blind consumption and destabilization of it on a global scale through colonialism.

### *Conclusion*

As a part of the generation-wide response to the early twentieth-century decades marked by global conflict—the centerpiece of which is World War I—the works of Virginia Woolf show that modernist aesthetics rely increasingly on a tropology of base matters in order to articulate and engage with narratives of English nationhood. This

national aesthetics variously attempts to stabilize and reconceive itself in the face of such seismic upheavals. Though, as discussed in Chapter 1, environmental aesthetics are an important part of modernist literary history more generally, I argue that images of mud, land, soil, and stone become especially prominent in the English national imaginary when viewed at the intersection of ideologies of empire and experiences of war. This chapter has claimed that, Woolf's war-time writing suggests *base matters* consistently signify the following within the modernist English imaginary.

*Mud* variously represents the residue or stain upon the land of an obscured national history of endless war and an internally corrupting imperialism. Yet, it also depicts the fertile material of the organic national self, positioned agonistically. Vacillating between associations of the hidden and the potential, these decidedly unmanifest and immaterial qualities are materialized and vivified by Woolf's muddied metaphors. There is a tension between the mud that represents the historical silencing of women, veterans, and colonial others and that which is imagined as a woman's creative substance itself. Yet, each of Woolf's images of mud expresses an unarticulated narrative to be revealed or formed by and in words, language, or literature—be it a play, novel, or historical narrative.

Images of the *land* are similarly bifurcated. The land is both shaped (scarred) by history and shaping of the present. Land variously represents the overlain histories of English cultivation of the countryside in the name of colonial violence and the landscape that excludes women from spaces of power and therefore disenfranchises them. In both cases, images of land consistently represent an accrual of national history recorded in the present matters that comprise spaces of national importance. Examples include the

country house, London park, or Westminster from the bridge. Each points to the image and thing of land as the material crucible that turns national abstraction into reality.

Though images of *soil*, which will surface more directly in Part 4, appear infrequently in these works of Woolf's, its sense of arability and fertility is subtly present in her images of land and mud. This can be seen, for example, in the marks that remain near Pointz Hall from the tilling of the land to raise wheat for the Napoleonic wars as well as the productive mud of Miss La Trobe's insides as she brews her next play in the pub while the oxen-like villagers' talk are tilling her muddled mind. The slippage between such base matters should remain at the forefront of our minds as we continue to trace this subset of environmental aesthetics within English modernism.

Finally, *stone* images, fittingly, have more of a solid, unified connotation in Woolf. They stand in opposition, as one might expect, to mud and soil, aligning themselves often with the terra firma of land. Whereas mud keeps a history alive and represents creativity, its mutability opposes stone's changelessness and obduracy. Stone is depicted variously in Woolf as primeval remainders and ironic markers of the failed or fallacious civilizing arc of time. Stone's manifestation of this persistent repressiveness is materialized in the present of her essays and novels: in Bart's monumental, in the stone cold presence at Pointz Hall, in the colossal, majestic stones of Westminster, and in the rock houses of a primeval countryside both emergent and not yet faded at the end of *Between the Acts*. Stone as the force and foundation of England's national power "structure" casts its building blocks and essential elements as markers of a chaotic brutality rather than a civilized strength.

Like the above discussion of Woolf, Parts 2 through 4 trace an ever tighter circle around the way World War I itself, and modernist responses to it, emerge at the intersection of an English nativism and imperialism. This Englishness is founded in part on *base matters*. As such, writing responding to war-time more broadly, as I have taken Woolf's works to be doing here, reveals the role World War I plays in both creating and revealing changing environmental attitudes in the early twentieth century. These base matters form the environmental aesthetics that, I have argued here, constitute an emergent structure of feeling. National and environmental imaginaries become entangled within such modernist affects. They also lay the groundwork for a problematic racialized environmental aesthetics, a representational pattern that continues to shape the climate crisis denialism and violent ethnic nationalist ideologies experienced today in England, across the Anglophone world, and beyond.

## **Part 2: War**

### Chapter 3—Entrenched Subjectivity and the Base Material Aesthetics of War

The environmental destruction wrought by World War I is catastrophic but not singular. As I have argued in the Introduction, a critical investigation of the war's ecological impacts is important in environmental humanities' studies of the twentieth century. Yet, one might still ask: *Why World War I?* Are there not better sites of inquiry to satisfy the desire for greater understanding of changing attitudes and behaviors towards nature in the modernist period as reflected and affected by British literature? I would answer: No. Generally speaking, war is, as Kate McLoughlin has noted, an experience uniquely entangled in the material, environmental realm: "part psycho-physiological, part geographical," war possesses a distinctive "*locative quality*" in "its close association to the territory it is fought on and over."<sup>382</sup> World War I allows for a unique understanding of environmental epistemology through literature, then, because of its production of a particular perception that Samuel Hynes calls the "death of landscape," an emergent way of perceiving the world that assumes a "dead Nature."<sup>383</sup> Here, "the surface of the earth" reflects the "derationalized and defamiliarized" nature of space—an "*anti-landscape*" where "the world [rendered] is beyond landscape."<sup>384</sup> Furthermore, the war is what makes "the anti-naturalistic conventions of Modernism" singularly suited to the task of representing, in a phrase, "*annihilated Nature*."<sup>385</sup> The editors of the preeminent British environmental humanities journal, *Green Letters*, open their introductory statement to the special issue on Modern Warfare and the Environment with the phrase "Since the First World War."<sup>386</sup> This starting point validates further the important role World War I plays in environmental histories of militarized modernity.



Yet, Tait Keller adds that the “First World War continued and intensified trends” of environmental exploitation and degradation “from the nineteenth century, not upsetting or subverting them.”<sup>387</sup> The section below will begin to touch on what we do with the tension created by our understandings of the war as both a product of historical latency as well as a producer of perceptual schisms.<sup>388</sup> Alongside both trends, one finds England playing a central role, both at home and around the globe, in the production of actual environmental transformations. Indeed, Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz go so far as to argue that “from the standpoint of climate, the Anthropocene should rather be called an ‘Anglocene’,” citing that Britain (together with the US) has historically contributed more CO2 emissions than any other nation.<sup>389</sup> This dynamic becomes crystallized through their entrance into World War I. Tracing the impact of environmental aesthetics within English modernist literature responding to World War I, therefore, necessitates my investigation into the literary causes of a perceived death of landscape and, as an extension of this, of Nature itself within the national imaginary.

Given that culturally pervasive environmental representations have the power to impact environmental epistemologies, it seems crucial to explore how the perception of “*annihilated Nature*” influences the English imaginary beyond simply direct representations of the war zone itself. Methodologically, then, I examine a history of the environmental ideas that grow out of the war, rather than presenting a material environmental history of the war proper or a cataloguing, for its own sake, of environment representation in war-time modernist literature. However, insofar as this project is historical in its methodologies, it seeks the temporally-situated emergence of a novel view: the perspective or orientation inherent in modernist environmental

aesthetics.<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, as demonstrated in Chapter 1's discussion of nation and nature, one must understand environmental epistemology as always already entangled in ideologies of English nationhood during both war and peace times. Because the "develop[ment]" in the "later nineteenth century" of the "idea of English literature . . . as [a] fundamental component[t] of nationhood" was "crystallise[d] in the context of the First World War,"<sup>391</sup> manifestations of Englishness arising from responses to World War I continue patterns of this discursive and aesthetic national-environmental entanglement. As a *foreign* war fought under the illusion of *domestic* national defense, the experience of English soldiers is both within and in excess of the imagined bounds of one's native land. In being thusly constructed, the spatio-material imaginary of land on the Western Front calls upon the same base material aesthetics undergirding imperial English national identity at home. Like national lands, then, the base matters of the war zone also invoke an aesthetic-material dialectic between nation and environment and its subsidiary process: the aesthetic-affective feedback loop between landscape and subject or citizenry. Beginning in 1914, England attempts to make sense of a war that seems to have cut the nation off from its own, increasingly idealized, past. In narrating such efforts, this doubled recursivity continues to be catalyzed on all levels by the genetic temporality. As we saw in Woolf's resistance to such historical dynamics in the works analyzed in Chapter 2, this recursive temporality attempts to materialize a stable national identity through the base material aesthetics of land.

Before the war, base matters more easily naturalized English solidity on the land. But, in the crisis of the war's excessive materiality and disrupted senses of belonging, war-time mobilizes base matters to crystalize a reality that had remained illegible until

now. This reality is of the subject's simultaneous dependence on and increasing sense of alienation from the material environs in which it is enmeshed. Woolf saw such destabilizations as an opportunity for progressive and creative refigurations of Englishness. Yet, in many works, the affective and epistemological registers of base matters begin to shift—the weight being placed more on base matters' associations with physical debasement than supportive grounds. Conflict anthropologist Matthew Leonard notes that “[t]here was a feeling among the belligerents that the mud of the Front . . . was eroding humanity. The mudscapes that the men were forced to live in became all-consuming, and the ground was like a living entity—a landscape ‘alive’ with the dead. It was as if the landscape was taking revenge for the destruction wrought upon it by man.”<sup>392</sup> Where, before, base matters made an imagined nation feel real and stable, now, such material aesthetics facilitate its opposite—the making imaginable or legible a disorienting reality, the disassembly of stability itself. I claim, therefore, that the subject's mediation of war-time through the English national imaginary's environmental aesthetics and epistemology makes possible a spatio-temporal reorientation. I suggest this subjective reorientation exacerbates alienation and illegibility within the human-environmental relationship for years to come.

This reorientation is made possible by the frequency with which landscape is used in mediating the English experience of World War I. In addition to the uniquely locative quality of all wars, these attempts to make war-time legible through landscape stem primarily from the foundation of the English war effort on a call to defend of “our” beloved land. Samuel Hynes explains that “[t]hese [soldiers] were men who left England ‘And died . . . in foreign lands’ because they love[d] the English earth.”<sup>393</sup> While people

in the trenches and at home began, in the face of the war's novel destructions, to think "elegiac[ally]" about "the English countryside and the English past," in writing the war through English landscape the reader is also asked to envision a sense of "continuity, linking the soldiers of 1914 with past volunteers and this war with past English wars."<sup>394</sup> Narrations of the disorienting experience of a foreign war, then, suture the wound of the national present through depictions of the land as continuous home space. As a form of historical witness to a national imaginary in transition, such an environmental aesthetics manifest land as what McLoughlin calls a "text of war," "allowing the reader to unearth what has taken (the) place" by "hint[ing] at what is . . . buried."<sup>395</sup> As a result of landscape's multidirectional shaping capabilities, this buried and dis-placed war experience, or what I call *war-time*, reshapes English environmental affect and epistemology for soldiers and civilians alike. War-time environmental aesthetics, therefore, reshape the ecological relationships embedded in English subjectivity—its at-home-ness in its native environs. In the section that follows, I address the three main ways English subjectivity is reshaped by war-time through a base material aesthetics. Firstly, in these war texts, landscapes appear primarily as *distortions* of home spaces or familiar surrounds. This is often paralleled by the individual's feeling that their integrity is threatened. In other words, they experience a fear of psychosomatic disintegration. Echoes of this perceived destruction and collapse can be found beyond the body and subject. Reverberating as a broad rent in spatiotemporal epistemologies, the base matters of war-time depict, secondly, a *reorganization of subjective space* entire and, thirdly, a sense that the event that is war is *temporally boundless and spatially uncontainable*. Perceived distortions of space and time merge within distortions of environmental and

bodily matters, creating the sense for both author and reader that war-time has produced not only a personal change but that it has altered the external world as well—scarring the very fabric of reality.

### *Distorted Home Lands*

As discussed in Chapter 1, landscape exists at the nexus of those matters and aesthetics of nature embodied by land. Distorted landscapes in war-time modernist literature reflect, as elsewhere, an altered way of seeing, revisioning both the world and one's self. This notion of seeing as orientation is intensified by the eroded bodily and subjective integrity expressed in concert with such environmental aesthetics. Given the heightened awareness of the national and material contexts of one's embeddedness in the war landscape, subjective reorientations become increasingly available for reformulations of Englishness as expressed through landscape. Landscape representation of the war zone itself is characterized by an estranging, "defamiliarized landscape, absolutely unlike England, or any other landscape on earth."<sup>396</sup> This "broken" foreign landscape reflects back on a domestic one, where England "exists as a sort of negative sum" of its "losses" and "ruins," including the war dead and the "ruins of the old, pre-war society" in the images of "the physical ruins of destroyed landscapes."<sup>397</sup> This subtractive refiguration of England, I argue, reaches beyond the national imaginary as apprehension of the national subject's relationship to national grounds extends to the environment itself.

The particular power of environmental ruination to facilitate a subject-altering affective impact occurs in part via the liminal status of the body. It contains and gives agency to the intangibility that is subjectivity, yet—as more matter than mind—the body is aligned primarily with the base matters of the earth. In war-time writing, the

boundaries of the material, bodily self are increasingly subject to collapse, especially at their shared borders with the basest of matters—the ground itself. The perception of an unnatural collapse of bodily boundaries occurs most intimately through its seeming permeability to raw and dead matters of other decomposing subjects in the form of the corpse. In discussing World War I literature, Trudi Tate defines dead bodies as “the corpse—inert matter.”<sup>398</sup> For the soldier, the fear of becoming inert matter “is threatened by the mere presence of the corpse,” which Julia Kristeva describes as “a border” that while simultaneously “constitut[ing]” and “guaranteeing our subjectivity” through its “exclu[sion]” is also always “threatening it with dissolution” for it “lingers ‘at the borders of our existence’ as ‘the ultimate ‘abject’,” “encroach[ing] upon everything.”<sup>399</sup> Hence, “the corpse as abject marks the threshold between subject and object and threatens to contaminate or dissolve the subject.”<sup>400</sup> More than a psychic burden, “the dead threaten the living directly” as corpses often end up “piled” on the “wounded”—but living—“and press them down, suffocate them, strangle them’.”<sup>401</sup>

In addition to threatening a collapse of the boundary separating the subject from the inert matter of the corpse, both the subject and the corpse’s too-closeness with the land itself threaten to dissolve all distinguishing boundaries. Bodies, once dead or dying, often merged with the earth of the trenches and no-man’s-land itself, making the distinction between the once-human inert matter and the non-human ground matter increasingly tenuous as “dead men—and parts of [them] . . . became an element of parapets and trench walls.”<sup>402</sup> This excessive and threatening materiality is often marked in trench literature by a sense of “too much[ness].”<sup>403</sup> The living body, too, has a new excessive intimacy with base matters, for “[s]oldiers are inhabitants of the terrain” and “the land . . .

is the surface and substance” of their daily lives.<sup>404</sup> Hence, “bodies and land become very close,” so much so that “[a] strange relationship is established between body and earth” as it houses “literally in and under the ground” both the living and the dead in a muddling reversal of normal environmental habitation.<sup>405</sup> Ironically, the survival of the soldier often depends on this intimacy with the inert matter of the earth. Dorothee Brantz concludes that the “modern warrior[’s] . . . ability to blend in with the landscape and become indistinguishable from the environment” represents a “changing relationship” between subjects of war and the environment.<sup>406</sup> In this new state of the soldiers’ “[i]nseparabl[ility] from the absolutely finite, minimal space of their refuge” (the bunker or trench under fire on the front), the environmental aesthetics of trench literature often evoke “corporeal metaphors to describe the trenches”—“the environment of the war” and elsewhere it inversely “displac[es]” these “images of mutilation and suffering” from “the human body on to the landscape,” further muddling the line between body and land.<sup>407</sup> In seeing the body as increasingly permeable to its surrounds, the body also becomes revisioned as fragmented. “Two sights turn up repeatedly in the soldiers’ narratives of the First World War: corpses and bodies in pieces.”<sup>408</sup> The becoming unwhole of the body is frequently represented as a series of “severed” forms, yet, these shapes never appear to add up to a whole person.<sup>409</sup> Given the number of English war missing, “leaving no identifiable body behind,” the “loss of [the] human shape” is troped as an “absence,” an erasure of the subject-body by the appearance of the body-as-inert matter: “undifferentiated,” “it has no recognisable shape or coherence.”<sup>410</sup>

As an increasingly interstitial figure, the soldier-subject saw the threat to their own lives and that of their fellow soldiers as “closely tied to the death of nature,”

resulting in a “new symbolic unity born out of their mutual annihilation.”<sup>411</sup> This erasure of the mattering, or meaningful presence, of matter—be it human or nonhuman—during war-time is linked to a general trend, reinforced during World War I, of the commodification of lives and landscapes. Beginning with the period surrounding this war, Bonneuil and Fressoz argue discourses of “nature as stock, external to the economy and constituting an inexhaustible storehouse” are translated into the even more insidious apprehension of “the ‘invisibilizing’ of the limits of the Earth” through “a radical internalization” of ecosystems into economic systems so that man hours and natural resources extracted become interchangeable and the seemingly positive push towards understanding humans as part of a connected ecological system results instead in the “den[ial]” of “[nature’s] alterity to humans” and leads to “the ontological dissolution of nature” that makes environments further available for their seemingly consequence-free exploitation.<sup>412</sup>

This affiliation of the collapsing of the boundaries of the material self with the erasure of the mattering of matter leads, then, to the destruction of *a* subjectivity. While the cohesion of the individual subject is itself often threatened by the experience of war, collectively, a certain subjectivity—marked as it is by a specific orientation, or, way of knowing itself in the world—comes under erasure during World War I. This disappearing subjectivity is one that understands its embeddedness in environmental systems as a non-threatening state. Because the embedded materiality of the trenches and no-man’s-land on the Western Front suggest to the subject of war-time that both self and world are in the process of being shattered, Margot Norris asserts that they feel as if they are “witness[ing] the destruction not just of their material world but also of their conceptual



universe.”<sup>413</sup> Consumed by a world reconstituted through “military logic and artistic representation,” “the subjectivity that modern warfare’s death event destroys” becomes lost through “the paradoxes and conundrums posed by the destruction or maiming of language by trauma.”<sup>414</sup> For this deracinated subject, “the past was dead, England was finished, [and] there would have to be a new . . . earth.”<sup>415</sup> This reoriented subject links the perceived break in time between pre- and post-war with the death of England and earth—of a native landscape. Homeless and seemingly hopeless, the post-war subject feels that the persistence of nature on the front-line is “abortive,” marked as it is by “*disfigurement*,” by formlessness; the “unnatural” presence of life among death manifests as “felled trees [that] bloom” and the “forget-me-nots [that] spring up among the ruins.”<sup>416</sup> World, subject, and word all being marked by loss and their strange surviving of the death of those things on which they thought themselves founded, the post-World War I subject is haunted by a “fear of omnicide,” of the death of everything known.<sup>417</sup> As a remainder, after the war the modernist subject sees itself as an “apocalyptic subject,” as one living in a dead world where all has already been lost.<sup>418</sup> It is no surprise then that the war-time subject understands the dissociative experience of war to have brought about not their own conceptual divorce from nature but rather the death of nature itself, the death, that is, of a functional human-environmental relationship.

The eroded integrity of subjects and bodies standing in new relation to the environments in which they find themselves embedded (often quite literally, in the trench) inaugurates, as I hinted above, a distinct environmental aesthetics—one that Samuel Hynes calls an “*anti-landscape in words*.”<sup>419</sup> The distortions of the mind become here a distorted material world. Hynes terms the environmental aesthetics of war-time an

anti-landscape because landscape representation during this period is part of a wider pattern of gap aesthetics—that characteristic play with absence and “fragmentation” we find typical of Modernism.<sup>420</sup> The aesthetics that we trace as a result of the war, therefore, are not particular to veteran writers as they persist “not only in writings about the war, but in Modernist works that are not what we would ordinarily call war literature.”<sup>421</sup> Moreover, Modernism was “[n]ot only validated” by the war, “but made necessary; for if war was a nightmare in reality, then only a distorting, defamiliarizing technique could render it truthfully.”<sup>422</sup> After November 1918, this nightmare reality is extended to a wider world pervaded by a feeling of loss, “rendered” as an aesthetic “emptiness” or through the absence of stable forms, structures, and entities.<sup>423</sup> It is populated, instead, by broken things, “all expressing a fracture in time and space that separated the present from the past.”<sup>424</sup> What occurs in the literature is a proliferation of images, rhetorics, and structures of “chasm, or an abyss, or an edge,” “fragmentation and ruin,” and “dissolution, flux, and corruption.”<sup>425</sup> These “monuments of loss” bore witness to the “loss of values, loss of a sense of order, loss of belief in the words and images that the past had transmitted as valid.”<sup>426</sup> As witnesses to excessive loss, “[t]hey testify to a disconnection from the past, as well as to a consequent dislocation.”<sup>427</sup> That this temporal effect generates a sense of *dislocation* explains why this war-time “sense of crisis” is synonymous in English literature with “the defaced countryside,” wherein “a movement away from the country house . . . to the frozen, empty space” where it no longer orders the world is a “movement towards dissolution,” both spatially and temporally.<sup>428</sup>

Gap aesthetics pointing to perceived absences in the present represent a real feeling of temporal loss. Yet, the perception of “a gap in history,” of some seismic shift

in historical trajectory, is not a factual one.<sup>429</sup> Widespread societal upheaval in England preexisted the advent of World War I. The experience of war-time alters the perception not just of the present and future but retroactively reshapes apprehensions of the past. This “myth of the War,” which “[English modernists] accepted . . . as truth,” is maintained by nostalgia: looking back “nostalgically,” the Edwardian years appeared “serene,” but at the time “they would surely have been aware that stability was threatened” by the labor strikes, suffragette protests, and political campaigning for Irish Home Rule, to name a few prominent elements, all of which expressed themselves in either real or potent rhetorical violence in the years leading up to the war. Ironically, this destabilizing sense of violent disruption can also be seen in pre-war modernist arts.<sup>430</sup> Yet, while the world did not change, the “First World War” still “altered the ways in which men and women thought . . . about the world,” “the years after the war seem discontinuous from the years before, and that that discontinuity became a part of English imaginations,” and in this sense, the war “changed reality”—especially the reality undergirded by the English national imaginary.<sup>431</sup> Amidst that “sad sense that that time is gone,” which Hynes names “*nostalgia*” and links to “its companion feeling, disillusionment,” absence pervades the experience of Englishness.<sup>432</sup> In feeling as though the present has broken irrevocably from the past, the English subject imagines that gap of the past becomes reified in the present.<sup>433</sup> The embedding of a reified temporal discontinuity in World War I’s environmental aesthetics elides the distinction between temporal and material distortions, and reinforces the affective-aesthetic relationship between land and history for the English nation. As the tangibility of this present absence teeters on the boundary line between ontological and phenomenological, this reification

goes beyond the affective presence of a ubiquitous feeling, often seeming to take on haptic and ontic resonance in the material world of the subject.

As read through modernist literature, Englishness is, thereafter, inflected with a sense that something is “missing,” “some feeling that one used to have is lost.”<sup>434</sup> Projected, as before the war, onto the land, anti-landscapes depict war-time environments as parodic invocations of pre-war English countrysides wherein “the presence of corpses and shattered trees . . . offers instead an . . . anti-rhetoric . . . appropriate to the reality of the war, with its dead men and its dead nature.”<sup>435</sup> This “new realism” constituted by the “direct experience” of “fighting . . . a war,” conveys “elegi[acally]” that “[o]n the Western Front,” “Nature was dead”—here, “inherited images” of the natural world “are rhetorically tangled and blurred,” and nature seems only a fantasy, no longer real.<sup>436</sup> Based on Hynes’ readings of the historical-aesthetic-environmental dynamics instituted by World War I, I claim that what changes, since it is not time or English society itself, is the subject’s ability to feel at home in the world. Affectively, that world felt comfortable, knowable before the war and now it does not.<sup>437</sup> This represents an internal change in *oikological orientation*,<sup>438</sup> or orientation towards home environment, rather than an external change in environments themselves. Unprocessed as such because of the traumatic nature of the war experience (for soldiers and civilians alike), the internal, affective loss is reified by the English subject as a material, environmental one in anti-landscapes, or, in broadening them beyond literature set in the war zone itself, what I have called base matters. These literary spaces present aesthetic representations of those environments in which the subject feels alienated, no longer at home, or even threatened and fearful of their surrounds. As a literary reflection of a wider socio-cultural shift, this

change to English subjectivity apprehends a “[n]ature” that only “remains as an absence.”<sup>439</sup> For soldiers themselves, the “feeling that home was not in England, but in the trenches” begins also to infect those who never knew the trenches first hand.<sup>440</sup> The base matters that depict an alienation from or fearful orientation towards one’s natural environs are catalyzed “by what happened between 1914 and 1918,” as these years “determined what England after the war was like and what *modern* came to mean” not merely in the minds of soldiers returning home or the fantasies of modernist writers, but for the general public as well, for “the new trench reality began to establish a public presence . . . it was enough to give a collective identity to a new tradition, and to puzzle and disturb” civilians back home.<sup>441</sup> “[B]orne by cultural and ideological devices that are contemporary with it,” the obscuring dynamics of base matters as an environmental aesthetics of absence and fear are then actualized by World War I.<sup>442</sup> The war is therefore responsible for the “production of a modernizing consciousness” that is “still active today,” having contributed to what Bonneuil and Fressoz call the “Agnotocene”: the “production of zones of ignorance” wherein the “damages of ‘progress’” are “made invisible” within the human-environmental relationship that—as the twentieth century progressed—led to climate changes now associated with the environmental precarity of the Anthropocene.<sup>443</sup>

#### *A Reorganization of Subjective Space*

As one can see from the discussions above, new distorting and dissociative trends in environmental aesthetics that solidified during the war act to reorient the subject both spatially and temporally. This initiates a shift in oikological orientation that further illuminates the legacies of World War I as an agent of both environmental and national

histories, as the war affects an imbrication of environmental and national aesthetics. This overlap becomes most visible in examinations of base matters—those images and rhetorics of ground, such as the land, mud, stone, and soil of both the Western Front and the British Isles. As a *reorganization of subjective space*, the subject is reoriented perceptually in space rather than being witness to any actual, external alterations of literal spaces. Becoming wide-spread—as World War I enables them to be—such spatio-perceptual reorientations affect, I argue, an attendant recalibration of the human-environmental relationship itself throughout the British-dominated Anglophone world.<sup>444</sup> This spatial reorganization is primarily characterized by an *inversion* of inherited perspectives and orientations towards land. Because of the importance of land to both war zones and English national identity, the ecological inversion of English subjects can be understood as an *entrenchment*. In addition to the dissociative properties of entrenched subjectivity with regard to the ecosystems in which they find themselves embedded, war-time *erodes their sense of agency* relative to base materiality as well. We look to modernist war-time literature to understand such dynamics further for the perceptual, affective, and agential implications of entrenched subjectivity all begin with the “disorder[ing]” of “traditional conceptions of space” expressed through a concomitant “change” in “[l]anguage and images.”<sup>445</sup>

For the subject of World War I, the perception that space is disordered comes about as a result of a four-fold experience of inversion represented in war-time literature: the inversion of the space-place relationship, the inversion of the place-affect relationship, the replacement of givenness with hyperawareness in the way a subject’s attitude towards a place relates to their attachment to that place, and the inversion of the

role played by proximity or embeddedness within that attachment relationship. Kate McLoughlin notes that in the war zone, although “‘place’, as opposed to space, implies a strong emotional tie . . . between a person and a particular physical location,” the “‘space/place binary’ often becomes ‘porous and provisional’.”<sup>446</sup> As the affective attachments to a physical location begin to fluctuate in the deracinated spaces of World War I, the correlation between place and affect also becomes inverted. Like the attachment to home places that accrues over the early years of life, the shorter but more condensed experience of war “involves a particularly intense attachment to location . . . in terms of a relationship with the land,” yet, while “standard models of ‘place’ . . . involve ‘positive, satisfactory experience(s),’” for landscapes of war, “intimacy [is] required for survival by those within it,” yet “the attachment is most often negative” as “the terrain is viewed as hostile.”<sup>447</sup> War writing, therefore, makes use of what McLoughlin calls an “inverted pastoral,” for “it requires *proactive entry instead of withdrawal* but still *demands and produces special consciousness*.”<sup>448</sup> Here, the “the war zone *is itself a version of pastoral*,” fostering “(pastoral) consciousnesses” wherein subjects are “*at home in their surroundings yet never off guard; alertly interactive with their environments*.”<sup>449</sup> This inverted at-home-ness, a dissociated interactiveness with one’s material surrounds, upends the typical correlation between awareness of one’s environment and attachment to it where the former usually indicates a decrease in the latter. This is because “etymologically and psychologically,” “‘place’ is related to ‘complacency’ . . . in the sense that, most of the time, people lapse into inattention with regard to their surroundings” due to their quotidian familiarity.<sup>450</sup> While the landscape of war is essentially unfamiliar and estranging, “the soldier’s relationship with his or her

surroundings must,” however, “be ‘active’ and ‘reciprocal’” causing “the individual in war [to be] hyper-aware (both optically and haptically) of his environs; constantly alert to ‘sign-stimuli indicative of environmental conditions favourable to survival’.”<sup>451</sup>

Demanding an ultra-conscious intra-active embeddedness exponentially in excess of that experienced in English homelands, the subject of war recodes highly reciprocal relationships to one’s surrounds as a marker for danger. Furthermore, the literature of World War I frequently depicts the “shr[i]nk[age]” of the “range” and “scale” of environmental apprehension “to the actual scale of fighting—a few soldiers in a trench, with a few yards of emptiness beyond.”<sup>452</sup> The landscape of affective importance to the subject of World War I is then censored or limited, deracinated from the ecosystem from which it is, in reality, inseparable. This deracinated affect correlates, moreover, to a national one. It erases not only a wider perspective on the environment inhabited but also the national grounds on which his or her presence there is mandated: while the “range is concentrated on the few yards about the trench in which he stands. He seems to have no national view of the purpose of the war.”<sup>453</sup> National attachment seems to correlate positively, then, to one’s apprehension of the base matters of war. The eroded apprehension of the latter causes a dissociative relation to the former, and the landscapes of home, therefore, become available for a similar dissociative affective attachment.

These affective inversions in the subject-land relationship are spatio-perceptive reorganizations because they turn on the way in which subjects typically orient themselves as bodies in space, a spatiality, in particular, that is constituted by the land as axial zero point. Evoking Immanuel Kant, McLoughlin explains “[t]he ‘ultimate ground’ on which we form our concept of directions in space derives from the relation of three



intersecting planes to our bodies”; these “intersect physical space at right angles, giv[ing] rise to our sense of ‘above’ and ‘below’, ‘right’ and ‘left’ and ‘in front’ and ‘behind’.”<sup>454</sup> Most importantly, “[o]ur most ordinary knowledge of the position of places would be of no use to us, Kant writes, ‘unless we could also orientate the things thus ordered . . . by referring them to the sides of our body’.”<sup>455</sup> As such, space in which apprehension is both physically contracted and perceptually hyperaware is derationalized, disorienting the subject who now stands in a paradoxically inverted relationship with the land to which it is typically acclimated at home in England. In the trench, the “surface of the earth” forces the soldier to be “cut off from the landscape.”<sup>456</sup> Yet, in war writing, perspectives are rendered variously as if “the earth is seen from a great height, or from a position ground level or below, or from an improbable position in mid-air; and the background is left empty, or disappears, so that distance doesn’t run out to a horizontal line, but simply disintegrates,” demonstrating further how in the contracted space of the trench “[s]pace is” not only “derationalized and defamiliarized” but also dissociates the subject from a stable perspective on its surrounds.<sup>457</sup> This newly disorienting orientation towards the land constructs a sense of place under erasure as what Marc Augé calls a “non-place” wherein one is “relieved of his usual determinants” for the space occupied exists only to be “passed through.”<sup>458</sup> And yet, in World War I, it is long inhabited, causing a more lasting alteration. Disconnected from the environment conceptualized as a livable nature—from a sense of ecological embeddedness as source of survival rather than obstacle to it, such inversions promote an ironic orientation towards one’s environs. This irony is highlighted especially by the underground positionality most often inhabited by the trench soldier. As a non-place, the environment of World War I is termed by Paul

Fussell as an anti-pastoral<sup>459</sup> because it represents nature under erasure, present only ironically in its ability to point to an absence. As elements of the anti-pastoral, positionality and perspective are altered through three aspects of the war zone: space's limitation to embeddedness in the ground, the ironic proximity of war zone to home land (which should be much more distant given the disjuncture of experience and appearance between the two places), and the closeness to but also blindness to unseen threats from the enemy in/across no-man's-land.

The literature of this war is then particularly fixed on grounds, a concept that yokes together what I have identified as patterns of base material aesthetics. "The literature of the Great War frequently makes use of words such as creep, burrow, and crawl," hence, these texts orient their subjects not just towards the ground, but towards undergrounds.<sup>460</sup> While the entrenched soldier cannot safely see aboveground themselves, war planes offered a "panoramic view of the battlefield from above," this displacement of sight translates the "lost" "overview of ground" into a further embeddedness in it, as "the use of airplanes also force[d] soldiers farther below ground so that their positions would be less visible."<sup>461</sup> This "troglodyte world,"<sup>462</sup> writes Fussell, was one of simultaneous "concentration, "constraint," and "enclosure," marked by an "unreal" feeling of "being unoriented and lost," while also being paradoxically close to home, so much so that the lights and sounds of weaponry across the channel could be heard from parts of England.<sup>463</sup> On the front, the war-time subject finds space reorganized. They reorient themselves via both the experience of being embedded in a precarious and unmarked underground while also abutting the edge of the world beyond which is the inaccessible and dangerous no-man's-land and enemy territory. This

foregrounds a blindness to the above ground and across the line—the unseen and unknowable.<sup>464</sup> These affects and orientations are part of Fussell’s ironic use of the pastoral; he defines this anti-pastoral as the “invoking [of] a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable” to represent war in natural, outdoor settings during World War I as well as an “imaginative[e]” attempt to “protec[t] oneself against” the indescribable horrors and dangers of the war zone through images of home that, though ironic, are still “a comfort in” themselves, adding also that a sense of elegy often bleeds into the ironic use of the pastoral, in depictions of ruined, uninhabitable landscapes.<sup>465</sup> The alteration wrought by an ironic pastoral produces, therefore, a prepositional confusion for subjects of war who are unable to orient “I” via inherited standards of “in/on” and “to/from.” As a result, this begins to erode the “I” or subject itself as a locus of both real and grammatical agency.

This prepositional disorientation of the subject-environment relationship via a series of ironic inversions to the environmental imaginary is inherited by the English national subject. And moreover, this dislocation of the entrenched subject’s agency is reinforced by another spatial dispersal of agency, as the (lethal) agency of war becomes newly “dispersed,” untargeted, unpredictable, and en masse.<sup>466</sup> This “moment of rupture” for agency is then inaugurated by World War I though it will be amplified exponentially throughout the twentieth century.<sup>467</sup> Margot Norris explains that it is “modern weapons technology,” such as the machine gun, aerial bombing, and chemical weapons (gas), that “has fundamentally altered the locus of agency.”<sup>468</sup> This “altered [the] ethical terrain on which modern wars are waged”<sup>469</sup> for the soldier-at-arms facilitating these machines. Furthermore, for the soldier-as-victim and civilian target the unlocatable characteristic of

violent agency during the war also effects a violence to one's perception of their own agency. Their agency is eroded by their inability defend themselves against an attack whose source is unseen. While individual human agency wanes, like emergent machine agency, undifferentiated elemental agency, also non-human, seems to thrive as, for example, lethal gas "usurps the human element, the air" in order to kill<sup>470</sup> and mud and earth seem to work against one's survival. This dispersal of agency combined with the spatial reorganization of the war zone affects a sense of immobility and stuckness, a reduction of agency for the individual subject, and a violent shift mirrored in depictions of soldiers' relationship to their base material surrounds. Eric Leed attributes the endemic of war neuroses to this relative immobility and passiveness of the victim, that, he argues, is caused by the "the dominance of material over the possibilities of human movement."<sup>471</sup> Prominent sociologist Georg Simmel considered the "symptom[s]" experienced by many war neurotics "as the symbol of [the] event," whereby a "dragging foot" becomes a "mimetic fragment" for the experience of stuckness that is doubled in this war zone—literally in that the trench soldier often found himself terrifyingly "caught in the mud" while danger falls from above and psychically as he finds himself paralyzed by conflicting needs of personal and national survival.<sup>472</sup> This war in particular incurred excessive neurosis because, according to Leed, its trench warfare takes form *in the ground* itself as a "stable, siege war" rather than *on the ground* of a battlefield, resulting in a reification of the experience of entrenched "immobilization."<sup>473</sup> This links a dispersal of the locus of agency with the disorientation and displacement it helps to affect within the human-environmental relationship during the war. The dislocation of agencies of environmental destruction for decades to come. This can be seen, as will be discussed in

later chapters, in modernist texts set in England throughout the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Such agential dispersal is, then, also evident in its structural affinity to the “dominant narrative of the Anthropocene” that “presents an abstract humanity uniformly involved—and, it implies, uniformly to blame.”<sup>474</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz explain that “[t]his manner of envisaging casualties by placing humanity in the narrative as a universal agent, indifferently responsible” depicts an “undifferentiated humanity” despite the wealthier populations, corporations, and nations contributing vastly more carbon to the atmosphere than the rest of humanity.<sup>475</sup> As disoriented and unagential subjects immobilized in and by the earth from which they simultaneously feel dislocated and in which they feel involuntarily imbricated, it is the affective-material atmosphere of entrenchment that characterizes the war-time subject. As a result, this entrenchment is inherited by the post-war subject, impacting their relationship to the environment writ large.

The entrenched material environment in which the subject is immobilized and lacks agency is marked by a sense of boundlessness and undifferentiation, intensifying these affects for the subject ensconced within. Rather than aiding soldiers in claiming no-man's-land for England, “Entrenchment . . . signified the reversed spatiality of the combat zone, where the living had to stay hidden below ground while corpses gradually claimed the space above ground.”<sup>476</sup> Living this underground orientation for long durations, war-time subjects inhabit, as noted above, “a new spatiality,”<sup>477</sup> where the biological realities of the subject’s relationship to material occupation are reversed. This leaves the subject with a sense of displacement and dissociation from habitable land. Dorothee Brantz argues, therefore, that we must understand World War I primarily as a landscape of “*Entrenchment*.”<sup>478</sup> On the Western Front, “soldiers” “eat, sleep, and fight in

a trench that was only a few feet wide,” “liv[ing] literally in the dirt,” where the only form of protection from frequent “artillery attacks” was “to dig deeper.”<sup>479</sup> The permanence of this entrenched spatiality in the minds of war-time subjects is mirrored, fittingly, in the ground itself, as trenches were so materially invasive in the earth that they become almost geologic. Large enough to be seen from the sky miles above, one can look down from a plane at 400 miles of trenches spanning two countries to this day.<sup>480</sup> The trench forms a lasting earthen work, remaining though through no act of direct preservation. In excess of the individual human’s material temporality, the environments of war are mostly anthropogenic, even when presumed otherwise by their occupants. Bonneuil and Fressoz note how entrenchment’s voluminous stuckness is created by the war itself: “mud, for example, all-pervasive in the European wars of the twentieth century, is more an effect of the destruction of soil by the passage of military vehicles than a pre-existing characteristic of the terrain.”<sup>481</sup> Even more illustratively, “[t]he volume of earth churned up by artillery (up to 2,000 cubic metres per hectare) was equivalent to 40,000 years’ natural erosion.”<sup>482</sup> Moreover, the environments of no-man’s-land and its flanking trenches are just that—no man’s. They belong to no nation and are occupied only by inert matters—be they human dead or unnatural geologic features. While the space is objectively limited, the soldier’s ability to see beyond such base matters is not. His world is a sameness of mud on all sides.

Surrounded by ground matters—landlocked, as it were—the entrenched orientation erodes the inherited, insular orientation of the English national subject, previously enculturated via its orientation towards a bounded, discrete island geography. Though not discussing World War I, John Brannigan’s *Archipelagic Modernism*

addresses the crucial nature of sea borders in forming political identity in the twentieth-century Irish and British Isles as depicted in the literature of the period. The insular national identity being pervasive, it is no surprise that, as David Lowenthal states, modern British officials sometimes bragged that while other countries long had to fight over their borders on the Continent—and were as a result, hardly stable—the strength of the English national identity comes from its insular, island status for its natural geologic features conditioned a continuous and guaranteed national boundary.<sup>483</sup> Bounded by the sea, then, islandness constitutes Englishness as an insular national identity.<sup>484</sup> While this is far from the island nation's first war, it was certainly its most pervasive in terms of enlistment and casualties. Furthermore, France, Germany and others have always had shared modern land borders with other nations. This makes the Continental powers more recently familiar with trench battle, though not entrenchment during siege warfare. The English traditionally had their boundaries made by the geologic power of the sea itself. Hence, they were in many ways environmentally unevolved, or certainly unprepared, for wide-spread, long-term trench warfare.<sup>485</sup> This contributes, I suggest, to the impact their long entrenchment has on orientations towards the land even once returned home. For them the earth had been primarily riven with agricultural burrows for growth. Perhaps now they could never look at the ground the same way again now that they had seen the land's potential to be planted with and house the seeds of death. The insular model for national identity, therefore, has its vulnerabilities. To this point, Brannigan notes that “[t]he myth that islands could be ‘places apart’ proves unsustainable, and instead a new understanding of archipelagic community begins to emerge in the wake of a dissolving Empire and a weakening Union,” and so “[t]he limits of this emergent archipelagic

literature of the interwar period are obvious when we think about how its bonds and borders are constituted,”<sup>486</sup> a reality newly legible after the war. Brannigan only loosely references imperial and domestic instabilities. I would like to argue that when looking at World War I with an eye for ecological orientation, English island insularity is gradually replaced not by an archipelagic consciousness but an entrenched one. English entrenchment substitutes insularity with enclosure and a suffocating sense of confinement and absorption for a sense of safety.

War ground is both unfettered by inherited understandings of material belonging (such as nationalism) and undifferentiated to the point of being unable to locate where one matter ends and another begins (such as one’s body and the earthen trench walls). The environmental materiality of war-time is marked then as the *base* matter that I have been developing throughout this dissertation. Base, here, denotes both its basic, or foundational, as well as its universal, or unlocatable, qualities—it is both the ultimate abject—not me—and also that which seems to resist the idea of difference wholesale. Difference, importantly, is that on which we found all meaning making in the west. The protective borders of its island identity are thus eroded. The subject of war-time then experiences both a newly threatening sense of permeability and a transformation of old senses of rootedness into negative orientations. The constant contact with a seemingly elemental geomaterial surround destabilizes English national identity as previously built on the material aesthetics of land. Furthermore, it calls into question the desirability of any affiliation via grounds themselves. Grounds then become increasingly associated with debasement and threat rather than stability and strength. Traditionally, landscape is “limited in space,” has “boundaries.”<sup>487</sup> Yet this is the opposite of the experience that



entrenchment structures. For example, “we cannot speak of the earth’s landscape’ but rather of many landscapes.”<sup>488</sup> As a total reality beyond which nothing else can be seen—no horizon of difference—entrenchment is in excess of bounded, differentiable space. Citing a touchstone English World War I poem, “The Soldier” by Rupert Brooke, Homi Bhabha’s treatise on nationhood reminds us that under the conditions of this war, England had now to see itself as both “the ‘deep’ nation crafted in chalk and limestone” with its “quilted downs,” “moors menaced by the wind,” and “the quiet cathedral towns,” and also “that corner of a foreign field that is forever England.”<sup>489</sup> By “sen[ding] young men . . . abroad to their deaths in World War I,” the island’s boundedness is then inherently broken for the national subject by deadly foreign entrenchment.<sup>490</sup> Domestic national ground at home can now be distributed abroad to meet the need to integrate collective losses into a healed whole. This unbinds England from the stable grounds maintained by its islandness. Base matters become an inherently translocating, and therefore destabilizing, aesthetic during World War I. More than elsewhere, during war “[l]andscape is thus both a material reality . . . and a socially and culturally mediated space.”<sup>491</sup> This more-than-metaphorical presence of matter gives base material aesthetics a special relevance during World War I. In the literature of this war, base matters, or the aesthetics that point to the “brute reality of the material world,” are characterized by “matter [that] *actually* exists” and that generates a “squashed earth,” making legible the “outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is.”<sup>492</sup> Being both a universally expansive and immanently finite enclosure, these paradoxes of a boundless entrenchment underwrite, therefore, the

disorientation resulting from the sum of those spatial reorganizations discussed thus far through a base material aesthetic.

Entrenched, the soldier's experience of war can be further located in national ideologies of the land for their very reason for being entrenched on the Continent is rooted in land—although not that of the Western Front. Because nation and nature are always already entangled, it is no surprise that English land became the primary tool and imaginary for the recruitment of soldiers to defend the realm—that matter for which they sought to entrench themselves. Conflict always has a “special affinity with land. Land is what is fought for: conquered, defended, loved,” and in England, especially so, where propaganda everywhere “appeal[ed] to individuals’ sense of attachment towards the land . . . to induce them to defend the nation.”<sup>493</sup> Furthermore, “references to the land underscore war’s *emplaced* quality . . . this sense pervades the specially grounded consciousness of those fighting.”<sup>494</sup> Emplacement in this war becomes coextensive with entrenchment as embedded attachment to home spaces is translated into a citizen’s transposition into the trench and transformation into a soldier. This is made possible, according to Simon Schama, as a “quintessentially English scene” of landscaped countryside “supplied a prototypical image that was reproduced in . . . war posters, which merely has to be executed in order to summon up loyalty to the temperate, blessed isle.”<sup>495</sup> Hence, when the industrialization wrought by the war produced changes at home as well, the “ordinary [man]” who “left behind” “his green and pleasant land . . . in 1914,” often felt betrayed as a returning soldier who “now . . . returns to a town of wires and roads and mess” manifesting “war and its aftermath” at home as echoes of the devastation of *nomansland*.<sup>496</sup> This longer history of war-time environmental

epistemology suggests that World War I possesses a certain temporal and spatial excess. War-time spills over into the past and future, domestic and global spaces, that the war proper did not inhabit.

*World War I as Temporally Boundless and Spatially Uncontainable*

The discussions above have touched on the subject's experience of World War I as causing temporal distortions and spatial reorganizations, moving beyond the war's impact on individual and collective perception. There are, however, ways in which one can see that World War I is in actuality neither bounded by the years between 1914 and 1918 nor containable to the Western Front or other arenas of direct combat. I distinguish, in this way, war time and war zones from *war-time*, which will here stand in for the spatio-temporal experience of World War I in excess of its literal spatio-temporal delimitations. War-time accounts for the ways in which domestic England and its civilians may also be included in living in and through a war zone and time. Furthermore, it denotes the way in which, for World War I, war-time brackets a much larger historical period than the years of active combat. Instead, I claim it spans at least those years upon which this dissertation focuses—1890 to 1939. More diffusely, however, it could be argued that it reaches across the entirety of the long twentieth century, a period that we still in many ways inhabit today. Finally, it allows us to account for the way the effects of the English experience of World War I may be seen to have global impacts. These impacts are felt particularly in those current and former British colonies, but in many ways also in the more dispersed Anglophone cultures, the Western world, and the global community of which we are all a part.

Hinted at in my discussions in the Introduction of the legacy of environmental perception and natural resource use catalyzed by the war, I add here that such patterns did not truly begin with the war proper but were rather actualized by that event through many of the aesthetic-affective phenomena just addressed. The war zone can be read, then, as both temporally boundless and spatially uncontainable. This is made possible first and foremost because it exists as a *state of exception*. As a state it evokes both the notion of territory and situation, creating as an extension of this both an excepted space and an excepted time. The environments affected by and situation constituted through war-time exceeds, therefore, the bounds of the war proper while also, as excepted, paradoxically creating an apartness from the rest of space and time.

As an excepted time, war-time begins with the historical antecedents that gave rise to it—the nineteenth century and Edwardian years—and extends into the interwar years between 1918 and World War II. It also, in many ways, reaches into our own present as we are still inheritors to many of the dynamics, discourses, and concepts inaugurated and catalyzed by the war. As a product of its historical progenitors, World War I is, according to Daniel Pick, a result of the temporal latency of increasing antagonism and fear of cultural and racialized Others that grows in the decades leading up to the war and also the steady development of military technology used in colonial wars and English wars with France.<sup>497</sup> Paul Fussell famously historicizes World War I via the newness of all elements of the war experience, from weaponry to strategy, and its following of a long period of domestic peace, claiming the war represents an irrevocable break in English history so that all is now divided between before and after 1914 as evinced by the prevalence of images of division, disjunct, and dissociation in war-time

writing.<sup>498</sup> Pick disagrees, arguing instead that the “[w]ar . . . offers a retrospective knowledge of the latent forces shaping, but repressed from, the consciousness of pre-war culture.”<sup>499</sup> War-time is, therefore, an outgrowth of historical latency. Instead of an actual historical discontinuity, “[w]hat the war offers is a new vantage point on the world that preceded it, the schism between one history and another” is “a certain crisis of realisation” rather than of reality itself; “1914-1918,” then “reshap[es] the memory and the historical reality of the pre-war world,” not, as Fussell suggests, the lived reality of the post-war world itself.<sup>500</sup> Historical and political trends are continuous. Yet, affectively, war-time subjects experience the war as creating a schism that distorts this continuity, hiding the elements of the past in which the post-war subject can now recognize its present. As part of this delusion of breakage, the orientations inculcated by the anti-landscapes of World War I make the war-time subject blind to the reality that shifts in the human-environmental relationship began accruing long before the war. Hence, as the war continues to echo long after the last shots were fired, the divorce of present from past becomes reified as a divorce of subject from environment—as the death of Nature itself and the birth of a modernist subject as deracinated subject. By *actualizing*, or making-conscious and solidifying affectively and epistemologically, a growing dissociative relationship to the environment, war-time activates a latent schism in modernist environmental consciousness that had begun in actuality long before the war and was buoyed, throughout, by the distinct patterns of entanglement between nation and nature in England.

If modernist aesthetics are a vehicle for the *temporal* unboundedness of war-time, then the environmental aesthetics of the novels and poems found in the chapters that

follow do not diverge from this pattern when it comes to the *spaces* of war-time. As an excepted space, the war zone belongs nowhere; it is beyond all national boundaries, especially as a world war, hence its ground zero is termed nomansland. Kate McLoughlin terms “the war zone” as a “state of exception” for “peacetime laws and norms are suspended” and because “[i]t is both vividly known and constantly strange.”<sup>501</sup> Existing outside of the political bonds that undergird nationhood, this uncanny space constitutes an exceptional war-time that spreads the destruction of the war zone into civilian spaces. World War I’s inauguratory combination of the strategies of total war and attrition—the undifferentiation between civilian and combat spaces and populations alongside the strategic objective of resource exhaustion (including man-power) and economic collapse (supply lines and factories etc.)—creates the conditions for founding what Edith Wyschogrod calls “death-worlds.”<sup>502</sup> Margot Norris explains that in response to “the confusion over whether and how to count victims of genocide as war casualties . . . Wyschogrod provides a solution for this categorical conundrum by refiguring the phenomenon of modern ‘man-made mass death’ as an ‘event’ that encompasses killing and atrocity beyond the range of combat.”<sup>503</sup> Though the “mass death event” of World War I—despite, it must be noted, its containing its own genocide against the Armenians—bears no structural, and little ethico-political, resemblance, to the Jewish holocaust that is Wyschogrod’s primary referent, her definition of “death-worlds” as the aftermath of mass death events—delimited as large-scale conflict in general—sheds light on some of the altered ways of seeing and being in the world made possible by World War I.<sup>504</sup> She “define[s] . . . the creation of death-worlds” as “a new and unique form of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life simulating

imagined conditions of death, conferring upon their inhabitants the status of living dead.”<sup>505</sup> While I don’t suggest that the conditions of life in the present of those living after World War I simulate the imagined conditions of death, there is a link to be found between the literal condition of entrenchment for the soldiers of World War I simulating the conditions of death and the entrenched consciousness that infects the English, and dare I say Western, consciousness during war-time writ large in an environmental sense. In this way, war-time creates a death-world, because, rather than being genocidal, the modernist period accrues a decidedly ecocidal consciousness. Individuals and nations see themselves as increasingly deracinated from nature and dissociated from an ecological perspective of the material world that would support long-term human survival within it, an affect that, as I have argued thus far, is actualized by World War I’s experience of entrenchment.

Moreover, war-time’s excepted spaces are created not just in the war zone itself, but also on the home front where literal violence was at times during World War I perpetrated on English soil. These incidents were more limited than they became during World War II and for the most part did not stray far from London proper. Yet, the nation as a whole came to feel as if there was something different about the boundaries of this war and its penetration into domestic spaces. Modernist literature often echoed this growing feeling with such sentiments as Ford Maddox Ford’s that: “1914 brings a war which, ‘unlike all the wars that Mary could remember, did not stay decently outside England and in the newspapers.”<sup>506</sup> This sense that in the war’s penetration of England, it also violated England’s established relationship as insulated from war zones cuts to the core of war-time’s creation of excepted spaces. War-time exists as an exception to the

existing rules of space and time. Though the bombings caused “damage to London [that] was minor compared with the devastation of the battlefields, it had a profound effect on those who lived through the aerial bombardments, the first of their kind in Britain.”<sup>507</sup> Wherever one lived in the country, reading about attacks on London in the papers did violence to the integral sense of insular safety one felt at home as a citizen anywhere in England. Airplanes were used for bombardment, but, more ominously and more aesthetically impressionable were Zeppelins, those large, balloon-like war ships of this early period of modern mass warfare. Tate writes that because of the looming presence of Zeppelins, “war transforms the city of London, both physically and imaginatively. Zeppelins” make it so “the city they inhabit has become unsettled and is threatening violence. The war will transform London into a place of dread and emptiness.”<sup>508</sup> As a place so important to the imperial imaginary of modernist England, the metropolis of London being newly marked by “dread and emptiness” contributes to the creation of “death-worlds” as excepted spaces where the human-environmental relationship was revised at home and not just on the front lines. As a result of the nation-wide discursive interpenetration of home and war, as well as their literal overlap in greater London, there is an aesthetic slippage between home and war spaces in the eye of the perceiver of home landscapes that furthers the shifting environmental epistemology of the English public. “[A]rmy generals,” notes Tait Keller, “saw similarities between the barren lands on the Western Front and the worst cutover areas back home.”<sup>509</sup> The effect of distorted apprehensions of nature on the Western Front begins, then, to distort visions of environs at home, so that the two seem contiguous. Because environments depicted at home show echoes of the war zone, “the nature they encounter” at home “bears reminders of the war”



across modernist literature in England.<sup>510</sup> For example, “[i]n Woolf’s formative years, the blasted terrain of World War I encouraged new perspectives on pastoral traditions,”<sup>511</sup> in which the landscapes of England often either resemble the inverted, ironic, or anti-pastoral ones discussed above, or use nature only parodically as a comment on England’s increasingly militarized nationalism as seen in Chapter 2.

One of the most important impacts of war-time’s unboundedness and uncontainability, then, is its effect on civilians beyond the violence and destruction of the front lines; the “physical or psychic shock” of “war neuroses,” writes Tate, “can [be] cause[d]” by “violent events” “*even [in] people who are not present.*”<sup>512</sup> This impact is evidenced by the fact that more than seventy-five percent of World War I literature is written by noncombatants.<sup>513</sup> For example, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)’s recording that her “baby was stillborn—killed, HD believed by the Great War” for “[s]hortly before the birth, HD had been shocked by the news that the passenger ship *Lusitania* had been sunk with 1,200 civilian casualties,” was “by no means an unusual response.”<sup>514</sup> Trudi Tate claims that this, therefore, “suggests a direct relationship between violent public events and the private lives of civilians during war-time” wherein “the violence of war has permeated even the most private of spaces.”<sup>515</sup> Because war-time impacts its victims even “at a distance,” we must expand the space of war-time to be inclusive of such distances. Significantly for this study, the primary process in the diffusion of the impacts of World War I is literary: “being exposed to [the events of war] indirectly, discursively, through stories, can cause war neuroses.”<sup>516</sup> Public circulation of war narratives—in journalism, oral narratives of returning soldiers, or literature—then allows war-time to permeate

affective-aesthetically into the domestic space of England. And hence, “collective trauma of war spreads far beyond its immediate time and place.”<sup>517</sup>

Once unbound from first-person experience, the discursive legacy of World War I can be traced in the rhetorical and aesthetic—and also therefore, ideological—entanglement of military and environmental affects and epistemologies at home in England. Bonneuil and Fressoz note that “war, by creating a state of exception, has justified and encourages a ‘brutalizing’ of relations between society and environment.”<sup>518</sup> Moreover, “[this] concept of brutalization was introduced by George L. Mosse to describe the banalization of violence brought about by the First World War.”<sup>519</sup> Like Bonneuil and Fressoz, I argue that there is a link between the banal nature of violence in World War I and the normalization of environmental destruction afterward. The continuation of brutal war-like violence in the banal of everyday life can be attributed to what Margot Norris calls the “secondary violence of martial logic” that increases with each war of the twentieth century, beginning with World War I. Seeing modernist literature as complicit in this secondary violence, Norris’s theory points to language as a discursive medium for distributing the military state of exception beyond the war proper. Though Modernism precedes and extends beyond the war itself, nothing, when understood in this context, in the modernist period is outside of war-time, least of all its environmental aesthetics.

Though often modernists and war writers seemed, based on the host of antagonistic critical receptions, to be at odds,<sup>520</sup> these two subsets of early twentieth century English writers were deeply engaged in each other’s work. “[M]odernists and war writers reviewed one another’s books,” and so it makes sense that “[r]eading them

together, the distinction between ‘modernism’ and ‘war writing’ starts to dissolve.”<sup>521</sup> Indeed, modernist aesthetics, “the violence and the mechanism,” seemed to presage those needed to depict the unreality of war, in turn “validat[ing]” modernist “perceptions of reality.”<sup>522</sup> Hence, it comes as no surprise that “modernism after 1914 begins to look like a peculiar but significant form of war writing.”<sup>523</sup> And finally, just as images of war itself often occasion modernist aesthetic innovation and validation, so too does war rhetoric at home in the political arena become a fertile ground for a dissociative, disjunctive aesthetics, pointing to the absurdity and unreality of war-time.

Vincent Sherry reveals that the “public dialect of . . . new reason . . . marked by paradox, contradiction, and worse” being espoused by the British Liberal party governing during the nation’s 1914 entrance into war became a source of inspiration for English modernist desires to liberate language from the shackles of fixed meaning and structure.<sup>524</sup> Increasingly, the “logic of Liberal war devolved its burden of proof thus from the substance of its case to the prosody of its argument,” as a party that had up until now been staunchly anti-militaristic began to blast the public with pro-war rhetoric.<sup>525</sup> Language became, then, pure rhetoric and, in argumentation, was detached from the need for actual evidentiary logic. The ability to *say* something compellingly and with grammatical correctness and affective resonance became the only criteria for language to speak the truth—to be considered believable and rational.<sup>526</sup> It is this linguistic deracination of word from reality that created the cultural environment for the aesthetic innovations we most associate with English modernism. Under these conditions, authors “develop a register to echo and inflect the prodigal logic of Liberal war policy” by engaging in various forms of “mimicry” through parody and satire.<sup>527</sup> Sherry notes that,

like Liberals' pro-war speeches, after 1914, modernist novels demonstrate a "rhetorical curve [that] appears to conform to the prosody of argumentation, replicating the process of expostulation, reply, and conclusive synthesis" but where "[i]t is impossible, however, to understand what proposition is at stake, what debate is underway."<sup>528</sup> Additionally, in poetry "the rhythm of linear thinking will disintegrate" as clauses and phrases "interrupt the movement" they have established "frustrat[ing] the expectation" present in the reader, "follow[ing] the code only to break it,"<sup>529</sup> performing "an art of linguistic defamiliarization."<sup>530</sup> Sherry notes how, in Woolf especially, this takes the form of "a savouring of words themselves, as denser drops of solid matter," a "linguistic thingness," as we have seen with her use of base matters in Chapter 2—such as Septimus's time-split word-seed.<sup>531</sup> World War I, then, had a profound effect not only on combatants but also on civilians' experience of the relationship between language and reality. Likewise, modernist aesthetics in England are, according to Sherry and others, founded at their most basic level in the event of the war. War-time transforms English subjects' understanding of the way the world is constituted through language so that language ceases to mean in any logical or predictable way<sup>532</sup> because of the "collapse of a rationalistic apparatus in language" resulting from British war-time public rhetoric.<sup>533</sup>

#### *Contemporary Echoes of War-time*

The war having infiltrated civilian life, Samuel Hynes writes that "[t]he arts in England, and the imaginations that conceived them . . . would carry the war with them—its images, its absences, and its survivors. In the world-after-the-war, the war would continue to be a part of consciousness."<sup>534</sup> In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, at the very least within British culture but in many ways in global and certainly

global Anglophone cultures, a contemporary inheritance of versions of the English experience of World War I occurs. As Hynes states, “[o]ur world begins with that war.”<sup>535</sup> The “myth[s]” of World War I “continu[e] to be accepted in our own time . . . We live with the consequences of the First World War in . . . [t]he sense of a gap in history that the war engendered became a commonplace . . . The gap in history had entered post-war consciousness as a truth about the modern world.”<sup>536</sup> This is borne out in Fussell’s analysis of the war’s legacy as well. While Fussell sees no continuity between the post war world and its past he sees one between the war and its future. His analysis sees the World War I experience as constituting a new modern consciousness that is primarily ironic as opposed to realist, or directly referential—thwarting expectations, underscoring what something is by painting it ironically as, or with, what it is not.<sup>537</sup> The modern consciousness inaugurated by the war is, then, permanently modernist. Though the war literally ends, its afterlife in the imagination of proceeding generations through the continuation of this ironic mode transforms the post-war world into an endless war where orientations towards the environment were now primarily ironic as well.<sup>538</sup> In this sense, the rooting of contemporary consciousness in this “troglodyte” past is evidence of “our own buried life,” the modern subject’s continued orientation towards the environment through the mind of the entrenched subaltern—besieged and belittled by their material surrounds.<sup>539</sup>

The chapter that follows will analyze the way in which such distortions to environmental perception of home spaces result from war-time’s spatio-temporal states of exception in the works of English World War I veterans Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund

Blunden. In his three-volume epic, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (1937), Sassoon's semi-autobiographical avatar, Sherston, performs the entrenchment of English subjectivity as we follow him through his pre-war, war, and post-war years and the slippery temporalities and spatialities they depict via images of mud and land, echoing, in many ways, the transgressive nature of base matters represented throughout Woolf's oeuvre in Chapter 2 and showing similar repercussions for the national imaginary. Blunden's more direct war memoir, *Undertones of War* (1928), depicts the reverse of the warzone's entanglement in the base matters of England. *Undertones* reads the fertile matter of English soil onto the sterile wastelands of France's Western Front. This transnational mattering depicts a similar reversal of national time and its vitality, affecting a degradation of ecological sensibility once tied to pastoral visions of England, now destroyed.

## Chapter 4—Debasing English Matter on the Western Front: The Memoirs of Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund Blunden

In Siegfried Sassoon's trilogy of World War I memoirs—*The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (1937), the environmental affects and aesthetics of the second and third books—during and after the war—invite the reader to retroactively ironize the national subject's intimate connection—depicted in the first book—to the idyllic landscape of England, replacing it, as the narrative progresses, with a sense of environmental detachment that now appears immanent to English national landscapes. The base matters that constitute both English national land in books one and three and the war zone in book two are made available for such reformulations of national identity, I argue, by virtue of the very foundation of Englishness upon the land discussed in Chapter 1. Reified as a universal national subject, the protagonist's experience of the collapsed distinction between landscapes of war and home suggests a deformation of Englishness. Where before, rootedness in and intimacy with one's native environs evoked senses of safety and stability, after the war the identification of one's self with an England that is tied to the land becomes tantamount to accepting a threatening and disorienting entrenchment in (de)base(d) matters.

Similarly, *Undertones of War* (1928)—Edmund Blunden's memoir of this same war, depicts a new nature that inverts the agency of human and nonhuman actors through his depictions of base matters that align themselves not with the stability of nation, but, rather, with the destructive forces of the war itself. Blunden's erosion of the English subject's sense of stability and safety upon the land is figured primarily through images of a decaying of agricultural lands into a regressive primordial landscape where human

agency is displaced by the agency of nonhuman matters of war, such as mud and metal. The environments of the French Western Front, which before resembled those familiar and habitable fields of rural England, are transformed into an earthen prison that threatens to consume the entrenched English soldier—body and subject.

*“I had no right to feel homeless but I did”*: *Entrenchment and Detachment in Sassoon*

The writing of the trench experience does not emerge en masse from the immediate war years of 1914-1918, or even shortly thereafter. English writing most representative of World War I comes into being only after a significant delay, making war writing a product of the same dynamic of latency that characterizes the war itself.<sup>540</sup> Eric Leed fittingly, then, calls this delay the “latency” period in publishing following the war.<sup>541</sup> The late 1920s show a peak in war writing—especially the year 1928. Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs*, however, are the product of an additional decade of thought on his experience, beginning in that year (1928) with the publication of his first volume, *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man*, and culminating with the publication of the trilogy as a single text in 1937 that includes the 1928 memoir of his life before the war, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, and *Sherston’s Progress* narrating his post war years. This digressive decade, I argue, allows Sassoon’s representations of the landscape of both England and the Western Front to demonstrate what becomes legible about the war across this temporal distance.

Sassoon’s text is, therefore, hyper-conscious of the temporality of its own narrative—the chronology inherent in the genre of memoir. This self-consciously genetic temporality recalls the nation’s self-constitution as Sassoon represents the remaking of



the eponymous Englishman retrospectively by the war. Below, I demonstrate the way in which Sassoon performs the remaking of the post-war English subject using the chronology of the memoir's events, depicting George Sherston's transformation through a development of his apprehension of the land—through the text's environmental aesthetics. Like the solidification of English national identity in the concrete, genetic imagery of the land upon which it rests and in which it is embodied, the *Memoirs* re-write Sherston's own beginnings with the implicit knowledge that the meaning produced by the Kentish landscapes of *Fox Hunting Man* (book one) will be undercut by the environmental reorientations emerging in those subsequent volumes addressing his experience during and after the war.

The idyllic, rural vision of England in book one is, therefore, an ironic one wherein a naturalized version of England exists only as parody, as a reality that has already been erased. Furthermore, the articulation of the national subject's intimate connection to such idyllic landscapes of England throughout book one are retroactively ironized, allowing the detachment that occurs diegetically during and after the war to appear immanent to home landscapes upon rereading. The *Memoirs*, therefore, perform what Frank Kermode has termed the transition from a pre-modern eschatological teleology towards a modern one in which: “[n]o longer imminent, the end is immanent,” the end is embedded throughout the text rather than being driven by the narrative's movement towards it.<sup>542</sup> In other words, writing after the war Sassoon infuses the whole of his *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston*, from the beginning, with a base material aesthetics and oikological affect that are borne out of experiences not diegetically represented until the text's middle and end. This chapter claims that, in so

doing, Sassoon articulates how the legibility of the land as object to which identity-forming meaning can be attached has been shattered by the experience of World War I. This is made all the more salient by the fact that, as Christopher Lane has noted, “[b]y framing the war as a literary event, Britain defines its meaning in terms of a national poetics.”<sup>543</sup> In particular, the legibility of a continuous English national identity upon the land breaks down. Hence, the countryside landscapes of the home-before interval are infused with an elegiac tone, one that, as Raymond Williams notes in Chapter 1, is often always already present in representations of rural England. This despite the fact that the narrative itself, in the present of *Fox Hunting Man*, has technically not yet experienced the detachment from landscape wrought by war and depicted between *Infantry Man* and *Sherston’s Progress*. In doing so, I claim Sassoon reifies the war-time subject’s detachment from the land, reconfiguring individual detachment as a perceived end of pre-war England on a national scale.

In setting *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man* in Sherston’s childhood home of Kent, Sassoon suggests that to narrate World War I properly, one must begin in England. Sassoon’s first book depicts what home should be through his representation of its environs and Sherston’s relations to it. Building on this foundation, the second book, then, uses the base material aesthetics of the war environment to demonstrate what home is not. As the title suggests, Sherston’s main preoccupation before the war is hunting foxes and avoiding—like a “good” middle-class English youth with an annual income of £450 and a wayward spirit—any true occupation that might situate him in a job in London or in studies at University. If the first book sets up what home *should* look and feel like—as both a material and affective landscape—the second book spends most of its

descriptive energies showing the reader what it is not. The base matters of the war zone ironize and amplify this contrast between the wasted scenes of his bellicose present and the rural environs of his peaceful past. In utilizing a base material tropology of mud and land to point, by its ironic comparison to Kent, to the absence of habitable natural environs on the Front, Sassoon's environmental aesthetics can be read as dramatizing what is felt to be the war's destruction of a connection to the past associated with the English countryside of home. The erosion of such pasts, as we move from the war zone in *Infantry Man* back to post-war Kent and Edinburgh in *Sherston's Progress*, suggest the base matters of home have been transformed by the crucible of war, marking green lands with dirty mud and suggesting, not just that the English past feels inaccessible now to Sherston, but that a habitable environment is itself under erasure at home in England—impossible now to disentangle from those deadly base matters of war.

In *Fox Hunting Man*, then, Sassoon describes the experience of the Kentish landscape as an idyllic rural land in which the young Englishman felt deeply at home. Before the war, the land is figured as a part of Sherston, a connection that, at the time of its writing, is cast as inarticulable. Sassoon declares:

The air was Elysian with early summer and the shadows of steep white clouds were chasing over orchards and meadows; sunlight sparkled on green hedgerows that had been drenched in early morning showers. As I carried past it all I was lazily aware through my dreaming and unobservant eyes that this was the sort of world I wanted. For it was my own countryside, and I loved it with an intimate feeling, though all its associations were crude and incoherent. I cannot think of it

now without a sense of heartache, as if it contained something which I have never been quite able to discover.<sup>544</sup>

Conjuring air, clouds, orchards, meadows, shrubbery, and dew, Sassoon describes the landscape as “Elysian” evoking the classical allusion to the fields inhabited after death. Marking his Kent as an unearthly space, the text hints at the impossibility of one’s inhabiting this landscape again after the war, despite Sherston’s literal return to Kent. Sassoon continues the ironic perspective of Sherston writing his pre-war world through the voice of a man who has passed through it, describing a nascent awareness of his desire for *this* world, calling it “the sort of world I wanted.” His reason is his identification with it, as a part of himself: “it was my own countryside, and I love it with an intimate feeling.” Foreboding his later detachment from that which was once his own, Sherston states that he “cannot think of it” without a “sense of heartache.” Coeval with his intimate attachment to the landscape, then, is a kernel of nostalgia for something lost or missed, in the sense of having been encountered but not possessed. The heartache describes an intensity of feeling, but also evokes a sense of mourning. He elaborates by writing that it “contained something which I have never quite been able to discover,” denoting a sense of mournful inaccessibility at the core of his intimacy with the Kentish Weald. The present of the plot is set years before Sherston enlists and finds himself at the front, an experience that alters his relationship to the English environs as is suggested here. As the narrator writes from within a self permanently marked by that time, then, England before the war appears to reflect already that something is or has been foreclosed in his relationship to the landscape and intimacy with its elements and contours. The ironic tone of this passage, and similar moments throughout *Fox Hunting Man*, suggest

that attachment to and intimacy with English lands are things increasingly relegated to the past, marking rural landscapes themselves with a sense of extinction.

In foreboding the presence of war-time base matters and the attendant detachment they foster in book one and then bringing these matters home to England in book three, I argue that Sassoon entangles the base matters of home and war, suggesting that the latter have replaced the former. This reading runs in contradistinction to the dominant reading of World War I poets in interwar England, wherein, Land explains, “the reading of the war poets” as expressing a “grief and disorientation” that “mirror the collapse of Britain’s imperial power,” “signals a commemorative appeal for what was shattered by the war: the pastoral beauty and metropolitan elegance of Edwardian England,” creating a “fantasy of national stability.”<sup>545</sup> England, therefore, as habitable land, is no more, and only the deathscapes of war stand in its place while an environmental alienation replaces an attachment to home-lands. Base matters, as an environmental or landscape aesthetics, are only available for such reformulations of identity for the English subject because of their inherited role—discussed in Chapter 1—in forming the foundation, as land, of the English nation. The genetic temporality of base matters authorizes the nation’s permanence on the land, concretizing English land as the ground of national stability in the national imaginary for people of Sherston’s generation, and many before his, up until the war. I claim that the experience of war-time’s inversions and distortions of familiar matters represented here by Sassoon demonstrates how such base matters are transformed in the very ways thought to make them forever resistant to change. The temporally boundless and spatially uncontainable nature of war here described affects, then, the

reorganization of subjective space that replaces an oikological orientation with a sense of permanent entrenchment after the war.

Hence, on the eve of war, Sassoon depicts further detachment from home landscapes through their association with a static historicity wherein the place becomes instead a time. Unable to travel freely in time as one can in space, past-England cannot be returned to, codifying a detachment from environment as home. All of his idyllic descriptions of life in rural Kent come to a head just before the start of the war in the narrative. He describes the moment and feeling of the last summer before the war as charged with a historical significance that alters the memory of this summer season in the countryside. “The cloudless weather of that August and September need not be dwelt on; it is a hard fact in history; the spell-bound serenity of its hot blue skies will be in the minds of men as long as they remember the catastrophic events which were under way that autumn.”<sup>546</sup> All of the pleasantness of the countryside depicted up to this point becomes infused with this feeling of telos and loss. Describing the environment, with its “cloudless weather of that August and September” and “serenity” of “hot blue skies,” as a “hard fact of history” materializes both history and feeling in Sherston’s 1914 Kentish landscape. The land as a site of “spell-bound serenity” is over, frozen in time, history, and mind by what came after: the Great War’s “catastrophic events which were underway that autumn.” Finding the main character primarily in France on the Western Front for most of the second part of the *Memoirs*, the aesthetics of *The Memoirs of an Infantry Man* situate themselves against these idyllic rural tropes of the first book. Sherston ends up severed from his home landscape, then, in much the same way the time of landscape is halted in the above image. The static temporality of the English countryside after 1914

suggested here, then, implies also a severing of access to any feeling of connection to it, rewriting those past experiences with the home landscape discussed in the paragraph above. In addition to adding a tragic sense of irony to our understanding of such space as personal place of home that many felt they were fighting to protect in the war, such detachments, I argue, also put under erasure the apprehension of English lands as natural and as locus of identity for Englishness. In characterizing it thusly, the landscape of the English countryside and the affective environmental orientations it engenders are, I argue, relegated to an inaccessible past. Calling it a “hard fact of history” makes it seem as if this was the last moment many could sense English environs as real, as possessing the impact of reality, in the same way the bombarded trenches would be. Finally, in attributing this historical matter not just to Sherston’s personal memory, but to “the minds of men,” I argue, Sassoon (despite the gendered character of his “men”), suggests the story of the *Complete Memoirs* is not a personal autobiography only, but that of a generation of English subjects. Sherston is reified as a universal national subject through the nation’s mutual possession of this lost moment.

The disconnect alluded to in Sherston’s apprehension of English landscapes in book one manifests itself directly in the home-after interval—*Sherston’s Progress*. Rather than presenting the changes as an affective one, it is rendered materially in the environmental aesthetics of post-war England and Sherston’s ability to perceive them as real. Revealing, as it does, the first book’s ironic relation to English environments, the third book’s distorted landscape aesthetics invite the reader to return to the beginning of the *Memoirs* and recognize the elegiac tone of Sherston’s reveries. The English readers of Sassoon’s day would then have been invited to mirror the protagonist’s own journey of

detachment from English soil as a result of their now “mud-stained mind.”<sup>547</sup>

Furthermore, in linking the legibility of both post- and pre-war worlds to the decryption key of the war itself, Sassoon performs the explosion of the space of war out from within its chronological bounds in the middle of the text—in the space of France that should contain it. As Charles Andrews notes, many have noted the “simple narrative arc of the trilogy,” and “focus[ed] on Sassoon’s failure to achieve unity, plausibility, a coherent plot, and a consistent tone” as a mark of its artistic failure.<sup>548</sup> Yet, Andrews terms Sassoon’s narrative arc, “deceptively simple,” and suggested that “the self-conscious constructedness of the narrative versus mimetic realism” cultivate an intentional dialectic between the irreconcilable parts of Sassoon’s own self and his attitudes towards war.<sup>549</sup> While Andrews’ reads with an eye for Sassoon’s pacificism, I argue the assessment that “the first Sherston volume showed how the prewar idyll was shot through with proleptic war violence”<sup>550</sup> demonstrates not just a complex position on the relationship between England and military ideologies, but also the way the characterization of Englishness as founded upon the idyllic grounds of the countryside cultivates a sense of alienation from such natural environs and the hypocrisy they newly represent. Hence, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*’s “pointed juxtaposition between idyllic prewar England and the destructiveness of wartime,” underscores “the intrusion of barbed wire on the world of the hunt,” allowing Sassoon to demonstrate to “readers in 1928” that “the tools of war were already present in the ‘green and pleasant lands’,” wherein “the supposedly idyllic world before the war unfolds in dialectical struggle with violent, imperialist, and militaristic ideologies that will open the way for the coming global conflict.”<sup>551</sup>



The close readings that follow reveal that in doing so, Sassoon depicts the war as bleeding over into the whole of England's history upon the land. Rather than representing it only in the future of the plot as a haunting memory, the war also moving backwards, infecting even the past of English spaces—of home—retroactively. This is achieved, as Nils Clausson notes, through “the larger contrast between the comforting, pastoral innocence of his earlier life as a fox-hunting man and the fallen . . . landscape of the war.”<sup>552</sup> Reifying the affective experience of detachment depicted in book two as a material reality of English land and homespace, I argue that book three demonstrates the way war explodes spatio-temporal boundaries, constituting a space of exception that distorts the experience of space and time for the post-war national subject. These disorientations of war then inculcate a further sense of detachment from an identity rooted in the land for while the literal matters of war remain in France, the affective materiality of war-time follows England home.

As the narrative moves from Kent to France, the idyllic past gives way for this young soldier to an endless present of destruction, to a futureless waste land. Sassoon writes, “[e]verything I had known before the War seemed to be withering away and falling to pieces . . . I wanted the past to survive and to begin again; the idea was like daylight on the other side of this bad weather in which life and death had come so close to one another.”<sup>553</sup> Here, “[e]verything [he] had known *before* the War”—his memory of life before the war—is equated to a homeplace that is only knowable in the past tense and associated with “daylight.” The relationship between tense or time (“known,” “before”) and matter (“everything,” “pieces”) suggests *Infantry Man*'s setting in the war zone actualizes a transformation of base matters from land as a basis and foundation for the

self, to the debasement and deracination through mud. Hence, Sassoon writes “*against*” the Romantic traditions of English prose and lyric, “transforming” them so that the literary landscaping of England can no longer “en[d] with the hope of rebirth,” for, as Clauson explains, the war has revealed that such visions “offe[r] no such hope” and, moreover, that, after the war, it is now obvious that English “Nature provides no consolation,” in a world where, as on the Front, “spring . . . brings not rebirth and renewal, only a spring offensive in which thousands will die.”<sup>554</sup> The “[e]verything” that “wither[s] away and fall[s] to pieces” further conflates homeplace with an organic object—something of a flower wilting and losing its petals. Yet, in phrasing his desire to “weather” the storm or war—itsself enmeshing this set of images in an environmental tropology—as wanting “the past to survive and begin again,” Sherston suggests already the impossibility of a future. Here, only the endless present of war or an impossible return to the past are entertained. The notion of a “surviv[ing]” past, furthermore, embodies that time, and makes it more easily elided with the place, rather than the point in time. Through the metaphor of the wilting flower, Sassoon suggests that just as the war is seen to “conver[t] the green thickets of Mametz Wood to a desolation of skeleton trees and blackening bodies,”<sup>555</sup> so too is the matter of England itself as represented by the bucolic aesthetics of *Fox Hunting Man* threatened by such transformations.

As always already founded upon the unstable imaginary trope of land, and not secured by any lasting, tangible territorial magic, England’s genetic constitution by base matters becomes also its undoing. Rather than directly destabilizing the national imaginary, the war instead actualizes the instability inherent to England’s unacknowledged reliance on base matters as an aesthetic trope that places real matters

under erasure in its naturalization of the imagined national community of England. Hence, the war reveals rather than creates the always already separation between subject and land inherent to the process of perceiving one's sense of self through landscape as nation—for the distance needed to aestheticize matter refigures embedded subject-environmental relations as transcendent. Entrenchment then is the condition of remaining materially embedded while having lost the cognitive-affective apparatus for comprehending one's situation. The real, material re-entrenchment of the English subject is then perceived as excessive, threatening, and provoking of epistemic anxieties.

Sherston reflects that while at the front, “in that wilderness I had no right to feel homeless but I did.”<sup>556</sup> His designation of war zone as “wilderness” directly opposes it to home as a civilized space where nature enhances survival rather than threatening it. Wilderness, however, as Roderick Nash notes, refers etymologically not to a specific type of environment, but instead to a sense lost-ness felt by those who inhabit it, or to an absence of human habitation altogether.<sup>557</sup> Lost, Sherston experiences a subjective reorientation in response to the alteration of his surrounds from a familiar forested landscape to a wilderness of burnt shards human and non-human alike. There is a slippage embedded in his phrasing, between the change in environs and the change in himself. Though he admits “he had no right to feel homeless,” for he did *have* a home—it existed, across the channel, back in England—his being “in that wilderness” creates the feeling of “homeless[ness],” that lost-ness which is synonymous with inhabiting “wilderness.” To feel lost or home-sick, then, would be within his rights, as he states, but, feeling “homeless” suggests that the wilderness of World War I achieves more than a sense of missing or wanting to find your home, but a more permanent deracination of

subject from homeplace, affectively. This disconnect occurs, as future chapters will continue to demonstrate, not just in Sassoon, but throughout the English imaginary in response to the war. Having “fe[lt]” “homeless,” Sherston, affectively, no longer possessed oikological orientation and, as a result, participates in the epistemological erasure of a feeling of at-home-ness on English grounds.

Underscoring this, we see that in Sherston’s narration of his time on the Western Front in *Memoirs of an Infantry Man*, the disorientating wilderness of war is therefore always depicted as an inversion of home environs. While Sherston is in the trenches or over the top during offensive maneuvers in no-man’s-land, Sassoon depicts an extreme unraveling of distinctions between the land’s characterization of environmental matters as the foundation for life and mud-stained martial landscapes of death. Sassoon writes, “I remarked on a sickly sweet smell which I attributed to the yellow weeds which were abundant there, but Durley explained that it was the lingering aroma of gas-shells.”<sup>558</sup> There is here a confusion between the familiar sensations of flora and the weaponized effects of warfare. Out on patrol, Sherston thinks he smells plants native to the land but his affective experience of his environment is defamiliarized as he becomes aware it is the “lingering aroma of gas-shells.” Not only does he apprehend synthetic substance as organic, the slippage between the two is reinforced by the negative associations of a “weed,” not associated with desirable growth of arable lands but a destructive excess, similar, therefore to the gas-shells. In book two, therefore, the environment apprehended through the senses by the war-time subject is reconfigured as deadly threat rather than source of refuge and survival.

While on the Western Front, the enemy is less the Germans, Sherston notes, and more the “mud” itself—that base matter which becomes the ultimate manifestation of the materiality of inhabited land in World War I.<sup>559</sup> This trope develops firmly throughout the *Infantry Man*. Describing a representative moment in no-man’s-land, Sassoon writes,

I can remember a pair of hands (nationality unknown) which protruded from the soaked ashen soil like the roots of a tree turned upside down; one hand seemed to be pointing at sky with an accusing gesture. Each time I passed that place the protest of those fingers became more expressive of an appeal to God in defiance of those who made the War. Who made the War? I laughed hysterically as the thought passed through my mud-stained mind. But I only laughed mentally, for my box of Stokes gun ammunition left me no breath to spare for an angry guffaw.<sup>560</sup>

Just as the dead “pair of hands” are figured as an unnatural inversion, “like the roots of a tree turned upside down,” Sassoon mirrors this transmogrification in the mind of Sherston who “laughed hysterically” at the grim accusation those skyward-pointing fingers signify. This laughter is itself the opposite of an emotionally appropriate response. Being expressed “only . . . mentally,” the laughter inverts the natural directionality of such an utterance: the image of laughter’s expulsion is one of what is outward becoming inward. Furthermore, this reversal of social behavior is represented in the telling image of what he calls his “mud-stained mind,” a mind whose indelible marking echoes still further the “soaked ashen soil” all around him. Such muddy images link the unnatural-seeming war landscape to the alterations that his dwelling within and upon it has made on his internal spaces: an uncomfortable breakdown of boundaries between the self and

nonhuman matters as discussed in Chapter 3. Hence, the base matters of the front penetrate the mind and not only stain the skin in the form of mud, but rather manifest the controlling base material trope as having catalyzed the English subject's conversion from native to alien upon habitable lands. This, I argue, mobilizes the environmental aesthetics of war as a method for representing the seepage of war onto the landscapes of England—occluding its idyllic past of intimacy with the land and staining its future so that national lands no more evoke an affect of habitability than do the trenches themselves.

In the third book, *Sherston's Progress*, which focuses on Sherston's being invalidated on leave to Edinburgh and eventually permanently returned home to Kent, Sassoon continues to describe the persistent occupation of the afterwards of war while set in English spaces that only acknowledge the before of war. Hence, the spaces of war break through their temporal bounds and intrude themselves into the landscape of home. Sassoon notes that for the veteran, "by night each man was back in his doomed sector of a horror-stricken Front Line."<sup>561</sup> Haunted by dreams of the front, each night occupying the space of home is broken by the caesura of the trench that divides each day from the next: home, front, home, front, home, front—until home-front takes on new meaning. Hence, after the war, in spaces where Sherston formerly felt access to a "peace found in nature," "the war's violence intrudes" "[e]ven in his most peaceful space," in the form of a debasement of English matters through their new coterminousness with those of war, "effectively making no place peaceful."<sup>562</sup> Throughout *Sherston's Progress*, Sherston's dreams in England that there was "no way back" and our "only enemy was mud": here "[t]he War is still going on and . . . Sometimes I actually find myself 'out there' (though the background is always England—the Germans have usually invaded Kent)."<sup>563</sup> This

description implies that all the world is now the war—having also engulfed the domestic spaces of England. There is “no way back” because there is no home to return to, the landscape of England itself has become the “out there” of the war zone, merged with Kent itself.

Book three, I claim, further exposes the way the collapsing of war and English landscapes suggests that the war experience has made a sense of at-home-ness or safe attachment to the land inaccessible within post-war England. What Sassoon’s text demonstrates, I argue, then, is that in the actualization of England’s perception of its own historical reduction of land to nation during World War I, the anxiety and disorientation produced by the entrenched national subject which emerged allows the imagined detachment from land to seep into feelings to a detachment from real environmental senses of belonging and knowing.

Though the war is ended and Sherston is once again on the safe side of the channel at home in England, Sassoon makes it clear that the war, though *past* in time, has not been *passed through* for the soldier. His spaces still seem to be populated by visions of war. More than that, the landscapes of home and war are both depicted as if materially and figuratively collapsing into each other. On leave from the front, Sherston feels that: “[t]o be there, on a fine Sunday evening in June . . . was an experience which now seemed as queer as the unnatural conditions I had returned from . . . all seemed kind and permanent and unrelated to the present time and its troubles. I felt detached from my surroundings. . . I was only an intruder from the Western Front.”<sup>564</sup> Here, both home and front are described as “queer” and “unnatural” despite home being characterized in a positive way as “kind and permanent.” Yet, the completion of this sentence gives

explanation for the strangeness of the scene: the temporal landscape of home radiates permanence and kindness, or the familiarity reserved for kin. This stability and connection are described as “unrelated to the present time.” By being dislocated from the present by very virtue of its permanence and intergenerational bonds, homeplace becomes a manifestation of the past. No longer possessing an authentic or accessible materiality of its own, England as homeplace is constituted only by memory and therefore more evocative of a metaphorical than a material presentness. This leaves the returned Englishman with a feeling of being “detached from [his] surroundings,” an “intruder” from the “front.” Leed notes, “[i]n combat the soldier had often idealized the home . . . an important defense against the dissonances and humiliations of war” and so homecoming frequently brought the shock of a “strangeness of what was once familiar,” shattering not just an idea of home but also an “image of a secure self and a solid identity.”<sup>565</sup> Occupying the space of home, then, becomes synonymous with being dislocated from space, alienated from place, and belonging only to a world (the war zone) that no longer exists in material reality.

Just as the boundary between inside and outside matters, human and nonhuman natures, breaks down via the base material trope of mud, so too does Sassoon describes Sherston’s visions of the landscape of home as melting into that of war in waking nightmares that echo his dreams discussed above: “[a]t one end of the garden three poplars tapered against the stars; they seemed like sentries guarding a prisoner.”<sup>566</sup> In being unable to distinguish war bodies from the trees at home in England, the appearance of home, even when not infiltrated by images of war, instills a “sense of the unreality of [one’s] surroundings” adding that, one started to feel like “[r]eality was on the other side



of the Channel, surely.”<sup>567</sup> In displacing reality to the Western Front from England, Sassoon here reinforces the erasure of England as site of authentic habitation.

The permeability of base matters is then performed by the very materiality of mud, and its refusal to respect the boundaries between outsides of bodies and insides of minds as well as the desolate landscapes of war and the peaceful fields of home in England. Like its mark on Sherston’s mind, mud travels home to England and infects its domestic spaces, infiltrating the base matters of the national inside as well as the limited spaces of war. The result, then, of an inability to separate English countrysides from the trenches and desolation of the French combat zone is a sense of alienation from the landscape of home, demonstrated in its being marked now by a sense of its unreality greater than the surreal scenes of war. The temporal divide between pre-war and war time (for there does not seem to be a post war for the soldier of the Great War) extends, then, in the text to a geo-emotional spatial divorce—a subjective reorientation away from real environs as habitable spaces manifested in the uncontainable presence of base matters such as mud. Hence, towards the end of *Sherston’s Progress*, Sassoon reflects that “the War has *re-made* me.”<sup>568</sup> As Andrews notes, “Sherston’s participation in war’s economy of injury is permanent,” “manifest[ing]” a “stagnation that derives from the inescapable condition of war.”<sup>569</sup> Hence, the sense of being at home in a landscape is displaced from conscious apprehension and the homescape becomes an elusive imaginary past to which the soldier no longer has direct access. England no longer appears affectively or epistemologically real and the veteran remains alienated from any temporal and spatial experience except that of the excepted spaces and times of war itself. The English

landscape they once knew is no more real to them now, therefore, than the pages of the Thomas Hardy or William Morris novels many of them carry with them to France.

“*[S]olid ground was ethereal*”: Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War*

While Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War* (1928) lacks the narrative scope (being only a single volume) that allows Sassoon’s *Memoirs* to perform the level of spatio-temporal distortions to English national stability discussed above, aesthetically, Blunden’s text still enacts an erosion of the stability of national ground. Both hailing from the pastoral landscapes of Kent,<sup>570</sup> where Sassoon brought the war home to England, Blunden brings England onto the Western Front. Rather than focusing primarily on the placement of such matters, therefore, my analysis of the base matters within Blunden’s environmental aesthetics focuses on their primary characterization of war landscapes as an inversion of earth’s natural state as solid ground and agricultural surface. The naturalness assumed to be absent in Blunden’s apprehension of unstable matters and their regressive fertility, belies the accepted inheritance of England’s concretization and continuity upon solid, arable lands—lands resembling those depicted in Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man* before the war. As with the tropes of land and mud in Sassoon then, I argue, Blunden’s base material aesthetics produces spatio-temporal disorientations for the English subject of World War I.

In *Undertones of War*, the instability of the ground is not depicted through its own deconstitution so much as the breakdown of its extant boundaries. In figuring it thusly, Blunden suggests that grounds’ porousness with human matters threaten the integrity of the soldier-subject caught in the paralyzingly excessive materiality of entrenchment. Though, on his return from the war to England he wrote poetry of a “sophisticated

pastoralism,” it was not until he left England for a spell in Japan between 1924 and 1927 that Blunden was able to write his experience of that first displacement from his native land—onto the Western Front.<sup>571</sup> Taking a closer look at the pastoralism of those early poems, however, we can see that *Undertones*’ concern with the seemingly unnatural environs inculcated by the war has already infected his experience of English greens. As Fussell notes, “his pastoralism is war-haunted, strained by remembered horror,” and while other war poets troped the finding of surprising beauty in the horror-scapes of war, Blunden consistently lured his readers into such pastoral lands only to “shake us out of the complacency [in]to which they seem to invite us.”<sup>572</sup> The fixity of the land on which English national stability rests, then, haunts the subject of World War I in its extreme instantiations as the nightmare of stuckness and an attendant erosion of human agency. The English nation and the war itself, then, possess a terrifying material agency that exceeds that of the individual, becoming reified as the transformed base material environments of the Front. In depicting this, I claim that Blunden’s *Undertones* articulates the sense in which war-time English subjects perceived not the Germans, but the war itself as a threat to the survival of England. This in turn produces a sense of anxiety and distrust surrounding the habitability of one’s material environs that exceeds the war and becomes a part of a new version of Englishness emerging thereafter.

This erosion of environmental habitability begins, in Blunden’s text, with the undermining of agricultural spaces, in the “paradoxical world of natural beauty and traumatic violence that Blunden invites us to join.”<sup>573</sup> Throughout *Undertones*, Blunden tropes the decay of agricultural lands to express the war-time experience of a material environment that threatens to intern or displace the soldier-subject, rather than to provide

a habitable foundation for safety and stability. Arriving at a new encampment, Blunden describes the “derelict trenches prepared for the concentration of unhappy infantry during the offensive a year beforehand.”<sup>574</sup> They are “terribly punished and shapeless, grassless, full of warnings, sown with jagged iron.”<sup>575</sup> Transforming the trenches into farmer’s furrows in his use of the word “sown,” their “grassless[ness]” immediately revises the impression of an arable and habitable land to reveal instead a field planted with dangerous metal or “jagged iron,” constructing agricultural landscapes as an environmental arrangement destroyed by the war. Replacing the organic matters of grass and crops with a “shapeless,” metallic materiality, Blunden depicts war-time France as an inversion of his native English environs. The conversion of the land is marked as a deformation, being “derelict,” “punished,” and “shapeless,” that explains its “grassless” absence of life. Furthermore, the use of the word “concentration” implies human habitation in such spaces is less a living on the land and more an internment or imprisonment within such death-worlds. This anti-agricultural rhetoric continues as Blunden characterizes the “mine craters” of “Vimy Ridge” as “its ‘ploughed fields’.”<sup>576</sup> The text also illustrates the “dirty brown smoke of” “German gunners[’]” “parting presents” as “sprouting on the parapets.”<sup>577</sup> This “sow[ing],” “plough[ing],” and “sprouting” performs a transmogrification of the land from the familiar agricultural grounds of home into a seemingly post-natural base materiality, cultivated by the mechanized weaponry of war rather than the civilized agency of farmers.

Elsewhere, Blunden inverts other food production metaphors, going beyond allusions to distant English fields and enfolding the literal body of the English soldier into the reversed life cycle of the battlefield. The close alliance of human and non-human

matters constricts and threatens the English subject's sense of agency in the face of such excessive materiality, what Paul Fussell terms the "adversary environment" of Blunden's war experience.<sup>578</sup> Blunden recounts a scene wherein a:

shell had burst all wrong. Its butting impression was black and stinking in the parados where three minutes ago the lance-corporal's mess-tin was bubbling over a little flame. For him, how could the gobbets of blackening flesh, earth-wall sotted with blood, with flesh, the eye under the duckboard, the pulpy bone be the only answer? . . . we looked with dreadful fixity at so isolated a horror<sup>579</sup>

The merging of "blood" and "flesh" with "earth-wall" as well as the dismemberment of the human corpse implied by the "eye under the duckboard" invert the scene of human culinary agency ("lance-corporal's mess-tin was bubbling over a little flame") into one where the soldier becomes culinary object. The body itself becomes meat-like as the trench is transformed into a slaughterhouse. Repeating the word "flesh" to emphasize the inert mattering of the once-live body, Blunden's description of "gobbets of blackening flesh" and "pulpy bone" imply that in this place bodies are reduced to pure matter: cooked and consumed by the inhuman giantess of the war. Unable to digest the sudden transformation of fellow soldier into inert matter, the affective state of "drea[d]" and "horror" possessing the onlookers instills them with a sense of "fixity" and "isolation." Wedged into the trenches, the deceased soldier's vulnerability becomes synonymous with his living-internment there in that "isolated" spot, for "[n]ot only air but the earth beneath also menaced the tenant of Givenchy."<sup>580</sup> As they gaze upon the results of the soldier's cornered existence, the conditions of his habitation are mirrored in their own bodies—"fix[ed]" to the spot, eyes locked on where his body once sat. Though the watchful

soldiers were not themselves exploded, the material realities of war bind to an “earth” that “menace[s]” rather than preserves.

Just as the entrenchment of the English subject makes his body more matter than individuated subject, Blunden makes the threatening permeability of body-matter boundaries in the trench increasingly explicit through the base matter of their habitation: mud. Describing his experience of long internments in the trenches, Blunden declares resignedly: “[d]ays passed, weeks passed and it began to appear that we were growing like hermit crabs into the sector.”<sup>581</sup> The “sector” that houses them, is made not of the calcified materials of sea shells, however, but of that mud that becomes similarly inseparable from its soldier-host as the crab from its casement. “[T]he quality of the Somme mud,” writes Blunden, “began to assert itself”: “My heavy machine went slower and slower, and stopped dead; I was thrown off. The brake was clogged with most tenacious mud, typifying future miseries.”<sup>582</sup> As with the entrapment of the soldier in the trench, the invasion of trench-matter in the form of mud evokes an anxiety-producing stasis. One is forced to “stop dead”—a telling metaphor regarding the association between stasis and survival. Hence, unable to move out of the land-locked space of the trench, Blunden and others become like hermit crabs, at one with their inanimate abode until body and habitat are indistinguishable. Elsewhere trenches are referred to also as a “cocoon,” where the condition born out of that earth is one in which “mud, and death, and life were much the same thing.”<sup>583</sup> The “deep[er]” the trench is set into the earth, the more they become “cancerous with torn bodies,” as if the earth is itself a body and the soldiers’ rotting corpses are a disease upon the land.<sup>584</sup> This inert matter of once-live human bodies becomes an intimate part of inhabiting the trench world: “in one place a

corpse had apparently been thrust in to stop a doorway's dangerous displacement, and an arm swung stupidly."<sup>585</sup>

The permeability of bodies ensconced in mud materializes and spatializes the affective atmosphere of instability felt by soldiers on the Western Front. Throughout *Undertones*, Blunden represents his emotional state through images of grounds (or its absence) and the ground as insubstantial matter. The infrequency and unreliability of compacted earth finding its way under the English soldier's feet makes it so that, to Blunden, "solid ground was ethereal."<sup>586</sup> The aesthetic conversion of land into air creates a psychological experience of being amidst a nothingness, where no stability can be found. Hence, elsewhere, Blunden writes: "I felt myself in the void."<sup>587</sup> Even when feelings of hope find a way into the soldier's emotional ecosystem and momentary self-possession occurs, it seems to be inevitably consumed by the slimy matter from which one had momentarily freed one's self. Thus, Blunden exclaims: "[n]ow, too, we were half certain that the attack had failed further on, and one more brilliant hope, expressed a few hours before in shouts of joy, sank into the mud."<sup>588</sup> The loss of any imminent hope of escaping the war zone is here expressed via the soldier's affective orientation toward the land itself: positive feelings "s[i]nk," like Blunden's being "dead" stuck on his immobilized bike, "into the mud," absorbed like so many of his once-friend, fellow-soldiers' bodies—into the muddy earth.

Like the mirroring of the English soldier's internal sense of destabilization in the base matters of the Front's muddy grounds, non-human matters appear here to register the subject's distorted sense of the passage of time. Though Blunden's narrator speaks primarily from his isolated position in the middle of the war—1915 to 1917, these two

short years become both elongated and foreshortened by Blunden's temporally slippery diction. It seems that time passes unnaturally quickly. And yet, the distance of each minute, month, year, seems to produce radical changes psychologically and upon the land. Time also then seems bloated, containing more than it naturally should. For example, in 1916, trenches from 1914 are termed "the *Old British Line*" and possess "the appearance of *great age and perpetuity*."<sup>589</sup> Though the trenches should only be a temporary habitation during the expected time of war, the distance of two years makes the trench-scape appear as a "perpetu[al]" home for the British: "as for the future, one of the first hints that came home to me was implied in a machinegun emplacement stubbornly built in brick and cement, as one might build a house."<sup>590</sup> Blunden's use of the phrase "came home to me" hints at the concern over where "home" will be in a "future" that is built from matters that seem to show the marks of a time that moves more rapidly than is perceived or recorded. Furthermore, Blunden juxtaposes the accelerated decay of the wood and earth matters of the "great[ly] age[d]" "Old British Line" to the solid and permanent materials of "brick and cement"<sup>591</sup> with which weaponry is "emplace[d]"—"stubbornly" or immovably "built in[to]" the space as if it were a house or home for extended habitation.<sup>592</sup>

The weapons that inhabit the war zone appear more acclimatized to their environs than the men entrenched there. Metal is "sown" and noxious fumes "sprout[t]" in this land, but soldiers only "s[i]nk" and merge with it. While the Western Front is experienced as materially unstable for the mud drenched soldier, the persistence of certain matters disorient the subject not through their transience, but instead through their endurance—such as the brick, mortar, and metal that seem primordially suited to the



environment of war. The disorientation comes from the contradiction manifest in a simultaneous experience of material instability and material persistence—Blunden suggests they can rely on nothing but the accelerated ruination of their surrounds. Blunden’s language everywhere evinces markers of this hastened temporality, crying out, for example: “What an age since 1914!”<sup>593</sup> Here, years become quasi-geologic eras rather than moments in human historical temporality.<sup>594</sup>

Having noted how the war enables an excessive accrual of time upon matter, Blunden further suggests that within the environments of war-time, time is also impacted by the mattering of war—amounting to a spatialization of temporality that further disorients the English subject. Describing the move from one sector to another, Blunden muses, “[i]t will be a new world again. The past few months have been a new world.”<sup>595</sup> Terming a period of time (“months”) as a space traversed (“world”), Blunden collapses the distinction between spatiality and temporality. To travel from one place to another is here to time-travel. Just as Sassoon’s England is a time—relegated exclusively to the past rather than being a site allowing for spatial returns, the passage of time in *Undertones* also replaces one place with another. As a result, the temporal distance from the narrator’s leave-taking of England constitutes an ever-expanding geographic expanse between him and his home. Despite being only across the short channel, a habitable and accessible England is now worlds away.

In addition to an unnatural speeding up of the individual perception of the passage of time and space, Blunden’s war zone evinces a transformation of natural history and geology in themselves. The environmental aesthetics of such moments depict human history as becoming part of the seemingly catastrophic rush towards an apocalyptic telos

wherein the geologic now coincides increasingly with humanity's primitive origins. Here, base matters are conceived as a past become present, a primordial residue made legible in otherwise civilized lands by the alterations of war. What he calls his "infant war-mind" perceives "History and nature" "beginning to harmonize."<sup>596</sup> Moving back from the Front line through old battle fields now obsolete, the land "immediately" becomes an "orchard" wherein "wagons had been dragged together once with casks and farm gear to form barricades; I felt that they should never be disturbed again, and the memorial raised near them to the dead of 1915 implied a closed chapter. The empty farmhouses behind were not yet effigies of agony or mounds of punished, atomized materials."<sup>597</sup> His mind is itself characterized as regressive ("infant") while embedded in the space of war, pointing to the new historical paradigm in which it finds itself. This infant war-mind, or new war-time subjectivity, then, inhabits a land marked by the "harmoniz[ation]" of "History and nature," or a forced subsumption of human temporality into a geologic one. Agricultural objects ("wagons," "casks," "farm gear") become naturalized as a land structured more by war than by the natural forces of water or tectonic plates. The geology of this place appears different. War seems to have transmogrified the base matters of earth itself. Its material arrangement conveys a sense of disproportionate permanence, more like the stones of a mountain or "memorial," "never [to] be disturbed again" than the randomly scattered detritus of recent conflict. For Blunden, the site memorializes the "dead of 1915," translating the historical events of two years ago into ancient matters. Though "not yet" transformed, the "farmhouses" nearby appear only to be waiting to become "effigies of agony or mounds of punished, atomized materials." The war's impact on the land does not simply create "ruins," which would still suggest what once was, but

“atomize[s]” the “materials” of human habitation. “[S]helter” on the land is reduced not only to rubble but deconstructed at the atomic level, rending their base materiality, devolving them so that they appear out of sync with the temporality of the present. Furthermore, “[a]cres of self-sown wheat” that “sighed” are interspersed with “rough scattered parts” that “recorded a hurried firing-line of long ago.”<sup>598</sup> Nature and the wastage of war—both botanical and metallic matters—merge here into a new ecological configuration. The space is marked by an agency that needs no human intervention to reproduce itself, once farmed by human hands, the land is now autonomous as it was before widespread human colonization. Reduced to base matters, the landscape articulates the result of two years’ passage as though one looks back across a geologic, evolutionary distance of ages. “[S]elf-sown” and personified as “sighing,” the land has both locomotive agency and voice. The objects of human agency being characterized as “rough” and “scattered”—more randomly arranged than naturally “sown” matters, Blunden depicts the agency of war as having replaced that of the soldiers fighting within it, on the “firing-line.”

War, then, becomes the new nature, inverting the agency of human and nonhuman actors as base matters align themselves not with the stability of nation, but with the destructive forces of the war itself.<sup>599</sup> Though its vitality is inhuman, the land still evinces hopeful signs of “life,” that “abundant sang here” through “lizard[s]” that “ran warless in the warm dust” and “ditches,” that “were trembling quick with odd tiny fish.”<sup>600</sup> The emphasis on reptilian and amphibious creatures makes the scene seem a primordial one, dominated by nonhuman life—moreover, thriving in humanity’s absence. Devoid of human presence, the land appears as a space at the end of history, after the fall of man,

echoing equally, however, a return to a previous geologic epoch. In a place where the line of time is both hastened and reversed, the creatures native here do not represent the same French nature that once seemed familiar to the English subject's entrenched there. The fields and valleys of France's Western Front were, before the war, almost geographically indistinguishable from Kent's own, where Blunden's childhood had "laid a lifetime's images of hopgardens, oasthouses, and benign brooks and streams."<sup>601</sup> As both native and strange, the creatures' out-of-timeness is expressed as their seeming "odd." As a response, Blunden underscores the unnatural state of the land, characterizing it as manifesting a "world as remote as Saturn."<sup>602</sup> Despite the explicit emphasis on time preceding this phrase, this otherworldly characterization affects a collapsing of distinctions between time and space. No longer resembling the rural ideal of Old England, here, primordial futures on earth become coterminous with the natural presents of a planet across the galaxy. The world in which his England is at home has then itself been "atomized" by the war and replaced by this new unnatural nature. The marking of the land as a primordial space continues throughout *Undertones*. Blunden notes trees that "lie prone on black channels as primeval saurian."<sup>603</sup> Lizard-like, these "primordial" plants mirror the arrangement of a "trolley-line" that also "crosses" the river "Ancre" there.<sup>604</sup> They do so perpendicularly, however, as they cross "disjointedly" and "disjointedness now dominates the picture."<sup>605</sup> The dead trees depict a strong, ancient-looking and zig-zagging line that cuts across the purposefulness and permanence that should belong to the human engineering of the train tracks' wooden slats and steel rails. Hence, the overall effect is of a land out of joint, allowing "disjointedness" to represent new form of natural history upon the land where a geologic past overtakes the civilized

present. In Blunden's rendering of the land, then, the speed of natural history appears both to advance at excessive speeds and to invert the progress of evolution, regressing the land to a primordial state where human agency is either decentered or erased.

Caught in the regressive forces of war-time's new geologic agency, time is consumed by space and history seems to reduce the civilization of those English soldiers trapped there to ruins. Blunden bemoans that "[o]ut of the line was out of the line in 1916, but we are older now," reinforcing the dramatic alterations made possible by only a year's passage as well as the soldier's inability to escape the war even once the Front is behind them.<sup>606</sup> Later he elaborates, "[a]lready it seemed ages since I had last seen poor Tice, and looked at this very patch of ground with him . . . but the gulf between this and three days before was indeed a black and lethal abyss, which has swallowed up the hopes of the Allies for this summer."<sup>607</sup> Once again, Blunden employs the passage of an unnaturally accelerated time in his expression of his friend's absence, gone from him for "ages," though it has only been "three days." Moreover, accelerated time becomes grammatically interchangeable with space, with the land itself. "This very patch of ground" holds within it "the gulf," materializing the "black and lethal abyss" that is capable of "swallow[ing]" a "summer['s]" worth of "hope." The consumption of time by space adds to the sense of temporal collapse into and concentrated accrual upon the base matters of the Western Front. Directly addressing the pervasiveness of this disjointed mattering of war-time, Blunden explains that "[t]ime-values have changed for a moment from furious haste to geologic calm when one enters that earthy cave with its bunk beds, squatting figures . . . You can rely on a barrage here pretty well the whole time," bombarding "the present inmates of Gordon House."<sup>608</sup> The radical shifting back and

forth between “furious haste” and “geologic calm” vacillates between both inhuman speed and slowness, disorienting and destabilizing the subject who apprehends the land as a material shrine to this changed natural-historical paradigm. Again, it is the constancy of war’s pervasive non-human matters, its “barrage” “pretty well the whole time,” that causes “[t]ime-values” to “change,” once again marking war’s agency as geologic, as the new yet regressive evolutionary force. The land, this “earthy cave,” is then no sanctuary at all, but a jail, as the men inside become its “inmates,” imprisoned and paralyzed by their lack of agency against the remaking of the world by the newly agential base matters of the war.

Blunden figures, I argue, the English soldier as the ultimate casualty of those spatial reorganization of a war-time that is both spatially uncontainable and temporally unbound. As Blunden leaves France “on the way to England” in the final pages of his memoir, he sees the land “from the train”—that notorious blurrer of differentiable space. Dominated now by spatio-material ways of seeing, the “battlefields” appear from this speed of passage to be refigured as “already become historic,” demonstrating the war’s wider colonization of space in their echoing of the primordial wastelands of earlier pages.<sup>609</sup> As a post-historical primordial space, this land too is marked by the nonhuman agency of “waving” “weeds,” the absence of humanity as “houseless regions,” the “lengths of trenches twisting in and out” like those ancient lizard-like trees, and “woods” rendered into useless timber “like confused ship-masts,” representing the ruins of civilization that allows “soldiers” to be repaid for their service to queen and country with “death” rather than “wages.”<sup>610</sup>

This Chapter agrees, then, with Thomas G. Bowie, Jr.'s assertion that "Blunden suggests . . . we're all haunted in some way by war's agony," that he was as "concerned with war's aftertones" as he was with its "undertones," its "imprisoning power."<sup>611</sup> In an earlier encounter with a Colonel whose company had relieved his own and then been annihilated, Blunden articulates the fear that epitomizes the English subject's response to the terrifying base material transformations witnessed on the Western Front: a fear of omnicide or total annihilation. Appearing to be the sole survivor of his company, the Colonel's once cavalier inhabitation of the ruins of the trenches is gone.<sup>612</sup> Blunden finds him changed. He mutters cryptically to Blunden: "'We no longer exist'."<sup>613</sup> When Blunden "asked how; he explained that their casualties had been over 400," saying again: "We no longer exist."<sup>614</sup> In its repetition, the phrase "We no longer exist" carries a force of meaning that is otherwise elided by the Colonel's frank and affectless tone. Based on the slippage throughout the text between English spaces evoked ironically and war zones disfigured, I argue we can read the loss of life in this sector and to the Colonel's company as a synecdoche for the English nation itself. As Bowie also concludes, "the undertones of Blunden's war transcend his own experience, just as they transcend his own war."<sup>615</sup> After the war, England is still a territory and many people survive the war in body. However, as will be demonstrated by later chapters on texts set in inter-war England and by noncombatant authors, the national imaginary—now utterly deracinated from those base matters that threaten it—is forever altered by the experience of World War I. We might conclude, then, that because of England's foundational alterations, it "no longer exist[s]."

### *Conclusion*

My analysis of the base material tropology of Blunden and Sassoon's landscape aesthetics demonstrates the way in which responses to World War I, as a foreign war thought to be fought to defend domestic sovereignty, relied on discourses and aesthetics of English nationalism whereby the nation is concretized and naturalized through the genetic temporality articulated by cultural apprehensions of the land. In using the foundation of the national imaginary upon base matters constituted by mediated experiences of home environments as a starting point for their rearticulations of post-war English subjectivity, Blunden and Sassoon necessarily perform a spatial and temporal distortion and reorganization of the entrenched subject's oikological orientation—their affective and epistemological apprehension of home environs. This shift in English subjectivity, furthermore, actualizes the inherent instabilities present in an English national discourse founded on imaginary grounds—exposing disjunctures in the human-environmental relationship within England that accumulated over decades, rather than the four years of the war.



## **Part 3: Empire**

## Chapter 5—The Naturalization of Imperial Logic: Extractivism, Primitivism, and Negative Matter

Part 3 examines the aesthetic affinities between the troping of base matter in responses to World War I and those dealing with England's imperial identity. I claim that modernist attempts to gird Englishness against the growing spectre of empire (and later its contraction) share affective resonances with works seeking to resituate Englishness after the perceived rupture of the war. While Parts 1 and 2 together explicate the way England's founding of its national stability on tropes of solid ground left subjects open to subjective destabilization as a result of the war's destabilizing base materiality, Part 3 explains that the resultant transition from an overidentification with imaginary national grounds to an overidentification with the experience of entrenchment is enabled by the imagining of those grounds as simultaneously imperial and national, global and local, boundless and bounded.

Examining the foundations of Englishness through the lens of empire exposes a deracination of English subjects from actual grounds that *pre-exists* the war itself. This is why Part 2 suggests the war *actualizes* rather than *initiates* such subjective reorientations, exposing what was always already there, but which was hidden by the fiction of a bounded, stable national ground that excluded the base matters of empire. Moreover, this chapter claims that the invisibility of England's grounding in empire is actually an erasure of England's real material dependence on global, colonial lands for its own national survival as such, pointing to a subjective detachment from habitable and sustainable home environs that was already under way in 1914 and continued long after 1918. In the minds of war-time subjects, however, they did not think of themselves as

what they actually were: imperial subjects fighting Germany for the right to maintain dominance across the globe over the peoples and lands they had colonized. Instead, the war-time subject at home and in the trench frequently transmuted this position into one of a subject defending their peaceful, insular, green homeland—a protecting of little England itself. Hence, the base material aesthetics of World War I and empire are similar not by coincidence, but, I argue, because the war mobilized existing doubts surrounding the reliability of stable English grounds, causing the English subject to encounter, suddenly, the imbrication of its own national grounds in empire—the constitution of the imperial English subject by colonial matters.

This chapter, then, theorizes the nature of English base matters as imperial matters, finding that base matters are in fact negative matters—those ghost acres of invisible colonial environments that appear as shadow matters within the false insular stability of English national grounds. Reading imperial base matters thusly, I argue that the entrenched subjectivity of World War I is in fact coterminous with the extractive subjectivity of empire. Furthermore, the anxiety of too-close, alienating matters I analyze in the World War I's trenches of Sassoon and Blunden throughout Chapter 4 are inseparable from the anxieties produced by England's dependence on the matters it must extract from colonial environs to substantiate its own national solidity—anxieties I find embedded in the base material aesthetics of works examined in Chapter 6, 8, and 9. As a result of the imagined abjection of colonial matters, racially exclusive nationalisms are endemic imperialist visions of England and increasingly prominent in modernist England, especially after the adversarial experience of the war. Finally, then, I suggest, that in understanding the entrenched national and extractive imperial subject as one and the

same grounded English national subject, the entanglement of racialized discourses of ethnic nationalism and environmental discourse of base matters is made legible. One of the ways this becomes most obvious is in the proliferation of primitivist discourses surrounding both environmental and colonial others in modernist works. I conclude, therefore, that the use of base matters to express English national identity then reinforces both racial and environmental othering through the same aesthetic-affective process.

In addition to the inclusion of war-time and national spaces as correlative environments of empire, this othering of racial and environmental matters exceeds even the territories that England maintains lawful control over—those places officially part of the empire. Bonneuil and Fressoz state that “Great Britain possessed an immense ‘informal empire’,” extending colonialist discourse and imperial power to landscapes beyond “those territories directly under Westminster’s control,” as “Britain was,” adds Bonnie Kime Scott, “moving increasingly into the business of commercial influence, rather than outright colonial control” throughout the modernist period.<sup>616</sup> In Chapter 5, I argue then that this entanglement of empire and environment in the English imaginary results from the epistemological achievement of imperialist immanence via the *naturalization* of imperial logic on a global scale. The section below concerns itself with how empire comes to be naturalized in this way, revealing in the process how nature-under-erasure becomes the object par excellence of Britain’s imperial dominance and hegemony. Furthermore, the paragraphs that immediately follow situate this dynamic in the cultural and aesthetic history of modernism’s emergence as a national literature for England—providing the formal and cognitive apparati for the environmental reorientations that will take place during war-time regarding the solidification of the

English subject's entrenchment as discussed in Part 2. It is evident that the environmental aesthetics characterizing English Modernism do not, then, emerge out of thin air in 1914. Nor are the formal innovations that we associate with Modernism spontaneous responses solely to the novel and isolated situation of World War I. Empire, we shall see below, both precedes and is immanent to the English subject's aesthetic mediation of both the experience of war and Modernism in all its forms.

*English Soil and British Territory*

In order to fully grasp the relationship between the British imperial imaginary's logic of naturalization and the English and colonial reality of environmental imbrication, it will help to first define in more detail the various territorial and imaginary instantiations of Britain circulating at the time. Though England has been and continues to be, as a signifier for insular, native ideations of Britishness, the Britishness that both includes and emerges from Englishness must be dealt with in any examination of England's relationship to (its) British Empire. Specifically, let us take a moment to outline the paradoxical co-existence of such simultaneously discrete and overlapping terms and concepts as England, Britain, Great Britain, the United Kingdom, and the British Isles. In examining how these terms are variously enlivened by experience and geography, we shall see that their performative interchangeability breaks down, revealing such illusions to be enabled by a paradoxical understanding of matter that I will call negative matter.

Territory, geology, geography—land and grounds. England's reliance on these earthen grammars create competing and convergent instantiations of Englishness and/as Britishness throughout its modern history. In attempting so-called objective definitions of

the “small group of islands off the north-west coast of Europe,” one must keep in mind that “all existing terms have been bound to the legacies of imperialism, nationalism, and unionism.”<sup>617</sup> Hence, our understanding of “‘three kingdoms’ or ‘four nations’ approach[es] to the historiography of the ‘British Isles’,”<sup>618</sup> still barely begins to account for the role those colonial territories included in the term British Empire play in further complicating and transforming our understanding of England or the British Isles. In brief, the geographic history of England as nation is also that of England’s merging with Scotland and Wales as Great Britain in 1707,<sup>619</sup> with Ireland in 1801,<sup>620</sup> with globally distributed colonial lands throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century. It is also a history of the contraction of the British empire in the mid-twentieth century. Though various regional and global lands are yoked into such terms as Britain, United Kingdom, and Empire, England itself often comes to represent the whole of the landmass(es) that it dominate(s).<sup>621</sup> In all these mergings, expansions, and contractions, the territorial foundations of England—its base matters—now appear stretched and overdetermined to the point of rupture, ceasing to refer to a discrete matter in any positive, physical sense of the word.

More imaginary than even the union of those archipelagic nations under the English-dominated moniker of Britain, is the image of England itself as an island nation. This image that makes evident the extent of the national imaginary’s incorporation of territories beyond its own physical boundaries, for England—geographically and geologically speaking—is not an island at all.<sup>622</sup> Without the appropriation of Welsh and Scottish coastlines, England is more realistically a nation landlocked on two sides—one nation of three on the island called Britain. As a nation *on* an island and not an island

nation, England is foundationally at odds with its own geography. Perhaps this geographic porousness at the regional level makes possible the global paradox of Britishness wherein, as a result of imperial expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Britishness emerges as being simultaneously synonymous with Englishness and in excess of it. Hence, as Ian Baucom states, “allowing England at once to claim and disclaim the spaces and subjects of its empire,” “Englishness, consequently, emerges as at once an embrace and a repudiation of the imperial beyond.”<sup>623</sup> When differentiated, “Britishness . . . coincided with the territory of the nation *and* the empire [and] ‘British’ space was thus read as homogeneous, interchangeable, everywhere alike, while ‘English’ space remained unique, local, differentiated: a formula which permitted the empire to be that which was simultaneously *within* the boundaries of Britishness and *outside* the territory of Englishness.”<sup>624</sup> Arjun Appadurai explains these distinctions based on the differentiation of “territory” and “soil,” stating that “the tendency of nations to wander beyond their discernable borders, by distributing their populations, laws, civil authority, markets, and images across the globe, produces disjunctions between ideologies of the soil ‘as the ground of loyalty and national affect’ and discourses of territory ‘as the site of sovereignty and state control of civil society’.”<sup>625</sup> By detaching the idea of territory from the material reality of soil, Britain’s rootedness in global territories becomes more an abstraction than a geographic actuality. Furthermore, by arbitrarily privileging some soils over others, England’s grounds also become legible only through imaginative, illusory epistemologies. Hence, “Englishness has been identified *with* Britishness . . . and Englishness has also defined itself *against* the British Empire, first by retaining a spatial theory of collective identity but privileging the *English* soil of the ‘sceptered isle,’ as

containing not just England's but Britain's "authentic identity-determining locations."<sup>626</sup> Rather than undermining English rootedness in the idea of land, imperial slippage between Britain and England mobilizes "[t]he rhetorics of spatiality and the subrhetorics of locatedness" to make a deracinated soil, a material nature-under-erasure, that is increasingly "central . . . to ideologies of English nationalism."<sup>627</sup>

*Negative Matter: England's Ghost Acres*

I call these magical, deracinated matters *negative matter*. Negative matters imagine English land through a material aesthetics of solid, seemingly present, base matters in lieu those absent matters on which the English nation is in fact ecologically, economically, and politically dependent. This places English matters in tension with bounded notions of spatiality. As such, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, England and Britain are frequently articulated as unproblematically coterminous.<sup>628</sup> Despite this "increasing Anglocentrism of the archipelago" and the world,<sup>629</sup> wherein "England, it seems, remains securely wedded to a British and imperial identity which steadily ceased to exist in the course of the twentieth century," "it does so," Brannigan argues, "because the alternative is to think itself as one small peripheral nation among others, or perhaps not even a nation at all."<sup>630</sup> Brannigan's notion that English nationhood is itself in question results from the fact that "'constitutionally, England does not exist'," "[t]here is no constitution founding the English state, and the people of England are represented only through the parliamentary institutions of Britain."<sup>631</sup> As a nation, therefore, England can only ever be constituted by a negative matter, delimiting what it is inversely by what it is not. What goes undiscussed, however, in questions of Britishness from the English perspective is those forms of subjectivity that are always already excluded by their



inability to identify with a specifically English soil, despite being subjects of British territory. I demonstrate that, in such cases, the negative matter of England results not in an English land manifested by magical thinking, but rather, in an erasure of the apprehension of colonial and neocolonial lands. This erasure is made possible by the subtractive function also present in negative matters, a hidden subtraction of that which is from that which is imagined to be, of colonial matters from England's material foundations.

As imperial logic is naturalized, then, the base material aesthetics of English modernism too become an extension of this negative materiality of empire.<sup>632</sup> This domestic use of an imperial aesthetics constitutes a *fictitious* representational schema, a fiction created, however, by the material *realities* of imperialism's praxis in the actual world. In the mind of the English subject, this aesthetics is naturalized, becoming coterminous with the materiality of the world itself. In other words, imperial fictions are increasingly taken as actual environmental truths. Abstracting the world thusly obscures empire's agency in (re)imagining the world, converting it into an invisible—and therefore more insidious—power. Furthermore, this naturalization takes the form, as elsewhere, of a recursive feedback loop. Here, imperialist practices create effects that both ratify past actions as well as encourage their continued iteration. As noted in the Introduction, beginning in the mid-nineteenth and continuing into the twentieth century, the needs of England's population<sup>633</sup> and the consumption that fuels its economic desires materially out-strip the ability of those lands to produce enough natural resources solely from within the geographic bounds of Great Britain. This increased reliance on *ghost acreage*, or

lands abroad that feed and fuel people living on English soil, becomes a tacit rationale for imperialism, mobilizing its subtractive imaginary.

The slippage between England and Britain—and between nation and empire—made possible by the ideology of negative matter is crystallized within modernist environmental aesthetics into the image of the “ghost acre.” The ghost acre refers to without making visible those colonial shadow lands that in England’s material consumption of the lands of British colonies forms an ecological, social, economic, and political imbrication of Englishness and Britishness. I.A. Simmons explains that,

the British Empire acted as a source of raw materials which were brought to the mother country. . . The repercussions on the environment of Great Britain were usually at a remove . . . with impact upon agriculture being an important theme. Cheap wheat and cheap meat from abroad obviously undermined the profitability of British agriculture . . . The term used for all the imports of organic materials, like cotton, cereals and fish might be ‘*ghost acreage*’: control of lands overseas and over the oceans added to the effective land surface of the kingdom, just as the use of underground fuel resources released land at home, the environmental relations of the British population have to be seen therefore outside a strictly local ‘people-land’ framework.<sup>634</sup>

In being materially founded on ghost acres, the imperial logic of naturalization allows Englishness to imagine itself as therefore transcendent of environmental materiality—the visible marks of their material dependence having merely been displaced to the colonies whose matters haunt modernist aesthetics as the ghost acres of British empire. Hence,

Bonneuil and Fressoz write that “[n]o other industrial country” besides “Great Britain” “has had a development model so dependent on biomass from the rest of the world.”<sup>635</sup>

I claim, therefore, that such consumption patterns and their attendant ideologies perform a reduction of matter to abstraction within the English imaginary, revisioning matter as an abstract consumable and not a real, material entity. In economic terms, Jason Moore identifies the abstracted nature of matter as an “ecological surplus,” defining this fallacious surplus as those “real abstractions” produced by capitalism’s—and therefore colonialism’s—extraction and consumption of “non-capitalized natures,” those raw matters of the earth.<sup>636</sup> Caitlin Vandertop explains Moore’s “real abstractions” as being created by “the material and symbolic appropriation of cheap natures at the commodity frontier” of the British empire wherein the “material objectives of resource extraction depended on the symbolic ascription of subjective and arbitrary values to designate and quantify cheap natures,” values that usually amounted to zero or an “ecological surplus” in Moore’s words.<sup>637</sup> Devalued and derealized, matter is apprehended as pure abstraction under the regime of imperialism. This perspective codes the environment as pure “‘externality,’ . . . the ‘side-effect or consequence (of an industrial or commercial activity) which affects other parties without this being reflected in the cost of the goods or services involved’.”<sup>638</sup> Circulating through imperialism as an illegible cypher, the ghost acres on which imperial England founds itself as stable national entity project, therefore, a discourse of environmental matters wherein “the earth itself becomes unearthly” during the modernist period.<sup>639</sup> The illegibility of England’s environmental imbrication in colonial ecosystems resists comprehension, in part, precisely because of the boundedness of England’s imagined historiography, unwilling to see England through

the lens of a world-ecological history, the substitution of ghost acres for negative matters remains occluded. This is because, as Dipesh Chakrabarty's notes, "the crisis of climate change" is only legible within the epistemology of "*collective* human pasts and futures," displacing environmental apprehension beyond "the limits of historical understanding," so that one may "experience specific effects of the crisis but not the whole phenomenon,"<sup>640</sup> making it resistant to integration in national ways of seeing and knowing one's environs.

As a constitutive part of the dynamics of British imperialism and the English national imaginary, the abstracting of matter also becomes a central trope of modernist aesthetics. Simon Gikandi, therefore, states that the English subject is "rescued from its materiality" through its encounter with a colonial frontier and transformed, via modernist aesthetics, "into an aesthetic object."<sup>641</sup> The English subject is refigured in such texts as "transcend[ing] its sordid materiality."<sup>642</sup> As an extension of this, I claim, the English subject sees itself also as transcendent of environmental materiality—of nature itself. Such colonial spaces are perceived "not as a particular space 'but a shape, a strangeness, a wanting to know'."<sup>643</sup> Yet, as an expression of English subjectivity under the contraction of a "culture of colonialism," "modernism" senses that "no longer can "social and physical boundaries [be] confirmed," and as a result "attempt[s] to narrate the failure of this hegemonic style" of imperial aesthetics, an aesthetics that had "demand[ed] and establishe[d] a 'realistic' style that depends on the existence of an intelligible world, [and] the capacity of language to represent this world."<sup>644</sup> This anxiety over a failing epistemology frequently represents—taking colonial Africa as an example—"[t]he continent" "not [as] the utopian space in which Europe can be regenerated," but rather, an

“Africa [that] is the locality in which the workings of the mind are challenged and ultimately reduced to the inert will of the world.”<sup>645</sup> Here, matter’s abstraction belies matter as a source of threat, its abstractness delineates not a lack of agency, but an “inert will” that, because of the visual dialectics of empire, remains unseen to the English subject—a subject who, nonetheless, is constituted at the national level by such negative (base) matters.

Anxieties surrounding imperialist devaluations of nature, however, pre-exist the modernist’s colonial encounter in the English national imaginary. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller explains, for example, that Victorian author William Morris’s desire to “defin[e] wealth in terms of surface rather than chthonic resources” presents in his writing as a “tendency toward exteriority and ornamentation,” what Miller calls an “aesthetics of surface” such that “environments in Morris’s work are characterized by a focus on surface beauty.”<sup>646</sup> As a privileging of surface over undergrounds, Morris’s distaste for “the extractive process of mining,” which surfaces dirty earth onto clean lands, inadvertently reveals an abjection of the earth itself.<sup>647</sup> Privileging a matter that is all surface and no depth, all aesthetics and no substance, Morris’s environmentally-minded writing nonetheless contribute to the abstracting of matter. Though Morris writes in the nineteenth century, his direct responses to environmental exploitation presage modernism’s indirect reflections of the abstraction of environmental exploitation itself, as part and parcel, I argue, of their privileging of deracinated language and aesthetics. As I suggested in Part 1, this abstracting of matter effects a sense of separation between culture and environment. Such widening divisions reinforce the now commonplace

concept of environment as an external “out there,”<sup>648</sup> epistemically abjecting the ecological-material foundations of English society.<sup>649</sup>

*Substitution and the Invisibilizing of Matter: An Imperial Bait and Switch*

As a result of the abstracting of matter and externalization of environments, an *invisibilizing* of environment-as-matter occurs—first and foremost in its effect on colonial spaces. I use the term invisibilizing to describe one of the processes, during the modernist colonial period, affected by what Rob Nixon calls *slow violence*. Slow violence is:

a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all . . . a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.<sup>650</sup>

Not only does this destruction and exploitation of peoples—in this case, colonized peoples—and environments “occur” literally “out of sight” of the perpetration of such damage—in this case, the imperial subject and empire writ large, the linked temporal and representational qualities of said violence also reinforce its resistance to imperial apprehension. As noted in the Introduction, English subjects at home in the British Isles, for example, do not see the effects of colonizing and extractive practices on the Indian land as destructive, but rather, effective environmental and imperial management. Furthermore, as a violence whose material effects are “gradua[l],” “delayed,” “incremental[,] and accretive,” the perception of the “calamitous repercussions” of, say, mining in Malaysia, are not fully visible to the English subject from the metropolis

without the ability to view an iterative record of daily change or a comparative view of a before and after in which a period of decades or centuries have lapsed.

Such dynamics resonate in imperial homelands where the concealment of environmental matters abroad exacerbates the blindness of England to domestic material foundations at home. For example, “[w]hole counties of England, and the heavens that hang over them,” says Morris, “have ‘disappeared beneath a crust of unutterable grime’ . . . This unutterable grime came, of course, from beneath the surface of the earth, from the extraction and combustion of coal.”<sup>651</sup> As a whole, then, empire’s destructive capacity is only apprehensible by taking into account effects recorded on the lands and communities “dispersed” spatially across the globe. Combining the spatially distanced and temporally dispersed nature of the slow environmental violence of imperialism with the “accretive” quality of its manifestation—the fragmented nature of its material evidence—slow violence is further invisibilized by its instantiation as “neither spectacular nor instantaneous,” whereas the catastrophic destruction represented in natural disasters like volcanic eruptions or hurricanes are easily legible as such. As a result, “slow violence is often not just attritional but also exponential, operating as a major threat multiplier; it can fuel long-term, proliferating conflicts in situations where the conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded,” for, going unnoted, no one seeks to mitigate such destruction.<sup>652</sup>

The aforementioned feedback loop—between an imperial ideology that is embedded in and maintained by a naturalizing aesthetics and the distant colonial matters subjected to it—becomes entrenched, then, as English blindness ratifies the continued abstracting and consuming of matter at home and abroad. This aesthetic-material process

undergirds an epistemological-material one—creating a foundational slippage between the seen and known with regards to ecological materiality. The recursivity of the aesthetic-material feedback loop enables (and is simultaneously encouraged by) a literal, ecological—but also necessarily cognitive—dynamic of *substitution*. In the environmental sense, this substitution is best elaborated by John Bellamy Foster’s recovery of Karl Marx’s concept of *metabolic rift*. In his “later political economy,” Karl Marx “emphasiz[es] the metabolic rift between human production and its natural conditions,” a rift that names capitalism’s “robbing of the soil,” though Marx “did not restrict,” says Foster, his “discussions of environmental degradation” to soil alone, “also acknowledge[ing] other aspects of this problem, including the depletion of coal reserves, the destruction of forests, and so on.”<sup>653</sup> In this “material estrangement of human beings in a capitalist society from the natural conditions of their existence,”<sup>654</sup> a “‘rift’ in the ‘metabolic interaction between man and the earth,’” occurs “through the removal from the soil of its constituent elements, requiring ‘systematic restoration’” as we see with the “growth simultaneously of large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture under capitalism,” wherein such industries “provid[e] agriculture with the means of the intensive exploitation of the soil.”<sup>655</sup> The removal of constituent elements from the soil of colonies to the imperial lands comes in the form of “long-distance trade in food and clothing” as a result of “‘the blind desire for profit’” that “had ‘exhausted the soil’ of England,” an exhaustion that “could be seen daily in the conditions that ‘forced the manuring of English fields with guano’ imported from Peru.”<sup>656</sup> The removal of these elements as they are “shipped to locations far removed from their point of origin” makes “the reproduction of soil fertility” impossible without industrial intervention, a procedure



that causes its own damages at the site of removal; environmental degradation results additionally in recipient locales, as “the pollution of cities with human and animal wastes was also tied to the depletion of the soil” since such wastes are needed to replenish the soil of the countryside that feeds the city but instead the excess creates a different sort of imbalance in import sites.<sup>657</sup> Most importantly, Foster adds that “[t]he antagonistic division between town and country, and the metabolic rift that it entailed,” “was also evident at a more global level: whole colonies saw their land, resources, *and soil* robbed to support the industrialization of the colonizing countries.”<sup>658</sup> While the main victims of the metabolic rift that results from such imperial substitutions are colonial environments, this abstracted bait and switch impacts English national understandings of their own constitutive ties to the land as well. “Englishness,” writes Baucom, “has consistently been defined through the identity-endowing properties of place,” yet “their history . . . ‘took place’ abroad” causing “the imperial transformations of English identity” that increasingly manifested throughout the modernist period—including shifting oikological orientations, and the attendant changes to environmental ways of knowing they affect as home-places too are abstracted from real environs.<sup>659</sup>

Originating in the lack of differentiation between real lands and “ghost acreage” at home, substitutive logic is central to the grounding of England within modernist literature as well as within wider public imaginaries. In entangling English and colonial lands at both the material and discursive levels, I argue that substitutive logic creates a shadow structure within the British imaginary. While not discussing an environmental epistemology, Fredric Jameson’s diagnosis of modernist literatures’ depiction of colonial spaces as the absent core of the English imperial subjectivity offers a correlative narrative

for understanding the displacement of a domestic ecological sensibility at home in England. Jameson writes that “from 1884 to World War I, the relationship of domination between First and Third World was masked and displaced by an overriding (and perhaps ideological) consciousness of imperialism as being essentially a relationship between First World powers of the holders of Empire, and this consciousness tended to repress the more basic axis of otherness, and to raise issues of colonial reality only incidentally.”<sup>660</sup> Because “in the modernist period . . . [t]he prototypical paradigm of the Other . . . is the other imperial nation-state,” “this masking of [colonial] otherness by a very different [imperial] one,” can be termed a “substitution of rivalry for exploitation,” a substitution, moreover, that occurs as a “strategy of representational containment,” cloaking the “fundamental imperialist structure of colonial appropriation”: “the ‘dépossession du monde’ of the colonial peoples.”<sup>661</sup> As an imaginary substitution, such “representational effects,” place a “systemic block on any adequate consciousness of the structure of the imperial system.”<sup>662</sup> The displacement of colonized lands and peoples from the imperial imaginary is echoed “in the aesthetic realm where the mapping of the new imperial world system becomes impossible, since the colonized other who is its essential other component or opposite member has become invisible.”<sup>663</sup>

Resulting from and reinforcing the invisibilizing of colonial matters, the substitutive logic that ratifies imperialism is crucial to understanding the “meaning loss” that characterizes modernist aesthetics.<sup>664</sup> Jameson argues, therefore, that “[i]t is in this situation that modernist representation emerges.”<sup>665</sup> Because “colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere,” the invisible elements that undergird modernist England are registered as a

loss.<sup>666</sup> “Such spatial disjunction has as its immediate consequence the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole,” yet the inability to represent colonial worlds “beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and life world [are] very different from that of the imperial power” does not repress the sense that something is missing, nor does it reveal the substitutions that enabled its erasure from English consciousness in the first place.<sup>667</sup> This becomes a nationally constitutive problem for “England, the very heartland of imperialism,” as not only does “this radical otherness of colonial life, colonial suffering, and exploitation” occur out of sight, but it is also “the structural connections between that and this, between absent space and daily life in the metropolis” that “remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power.”<sup>668</sup> “[F]aced with this problem of a global space that . . . somehow constitutively escapes you . . . cartography is not the solution, but rather the problem,” and so modernist literature contains resonances of unspeakable knowledge that “are hidden away beneath its surface,” “dependent on space, and inexpressible without it.”<sup>669</sup> “[M]odernist ‘style’,” then, emerges as “a new spatial language,” “the marker and the substitute . . . or place-holding . . . of the unrepresentable totality” of empire and English material imbrication in it.<sup>670</sup> While the modernist English consciousness continues to register as absence the colonial world that constitutes it as imperial nation, so too does this aesthetically present absence on English literary landscapes attempt to make legible both the lands on which England depends and their structural dependence upon them. This absence marks a modernist aesthetics of negative matter as foundation, or base, of Englishness, functioning as a shadow haunting the base matters of nation within a given textual

landscape in which English subjects see their own national identity reflected—at home, in colonial lands, and on the Western Front.

As a *shadow* it is both visible and invisible—seen but not apprehended as materially present, an aesthetics marked by the presence of displacement, that characteristically modernist present-absence. Within English auto-epistemology, the shadow-matter aesthetic mirrors, domestically, the literal and material environmental damage caused abroad by British imperialism without its being acknowledged as such. As Chapter 6’s reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* demonstrates, such shadowy residues of substitution unconsciously mirror the effects of empire on actual colonial environs in the affective and epistemological apprehensions of imagined English spaces. Just as modernism is constituted by imperialism, so too is Modernism’s project of Englishness, for “Englishness was itself a product of the colonial culture that it seemed to have created elsewhere.”<sup>671</sup> Simon Gikandi notes that “the culture of colonialism” is “a culture of mutual imbrication and contamination” wherein “[t]he invention of Britishness [is] superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and in response to the conflict with the Other.”<sup>672</sup> As constituted by its perceived difference from and yet consumption of the colonial other, “the frontier, the boundary, and the field of alterity [are] important signifiers of [an] ambiguous cartographic moment”; these “insignias of difference and identity” are therefore “constant reminders of the ways in which British and colonial identities are staged as radically different and yet inherently similar.”<sup>673</sup> Hence, when in the modernist period “Britain” “seeks to understand its unraveling (in the aftermath of empire),” it employs a natively grounded nationalism, “the cultural grammar (nationalism, tradition, and usable pasts) inherited

from its former colonies,”<sup>674</sup> haunted as England is by the shadow-matters of colonial lands appearing everywhere in its own base material environmental aesthetics, especially those of war-time England.

With this in mind, I would argue that as imperialism consumes colonial lands, it also produces an erasure of *the land* as a meaningful basis for Englishness. Felt senses of domestic displacement mirror colonial disenfranchisement: as empire disenfranchises colonized peoples from their environments, it also effects a deracination of English identity from *real land*. Though environmental conservation emerged as a result of imperial management of colonial lands, “[c]olonial states increasingly found conservationism to their taste and economic advantage, particularly in ensuring sustainable timber and water supplies and in using the structures of forest protection to control their unruly marginal subjects.”<sup>675</sup> Hence, conservation, in the imperial lexicon, is simply another term for appropriation, resulting in the disenfranchisement of colonial peoples from their native environments.<sup>676</sup> As a disguise for systematic disenfranchisement, such conservation strategies and rhetorics led to “local people [being] increasingly identified as being at fault for environmental destruction and incapable of managing their resources effectively.”<sup>677</sup> Whether having as its goal the imperial idea of “effective environmental management to be the production of the maximum amount of useful resources over the long term” for the benefit of the mother country, or in its contemporary expression as the goal of “maintaining nature in its natural state regardless of its utility” (more commonly termed preservation now), “from a colonial perspective, both strategies served to further marginalise the claims of the indigenous people.”<sup>678</sup>

The ideology of right management that underwrites imperial claims to conservation over the needs of colonized peoples is a fundamental characteristic of imperial ideology. Hence, in modernist England, “soil erosion was” cast as “an urgent problem and threat to white imperialism.”<sup>679</sup> For example, in the 1930s, one author writes that soil erosion is “the greatest danger threatening the security of the white man and the well-being of the coloured man in the tropical and sub-tropical lands of Africa and India”; another similarly concludes that “the soil demands a dominant, and if white men will not and black men cannot assume the position, the vegetation will do so, by the process of erosion finally squeezing out the whites.”<sup>680</sup> In India, despite having an “ancient civilization whose monuments everywhere littered the landscape, it had (in the imperial estimation) failed in one essential respect—to overcome the elementary forces of nature. Thus, it was in no small part through a transformation of the environment, by establishing and demonstrating mastery over nature itself, that the British sought to advance and legitimize their rule in India.”<sup>681</sup> As I suggested above, the domination of the soil that disenfranchises colonized populations also “travelled back to the imperial core,” so that for the imperial subject “the origins of conservation and environmentalism,” “gave birth to new ways of thinking about nature and its value—including” scientific principles that would be put into practice for the exploitative management of English environments.<sup>682</sup> Though Gikandi speaks of a more general cultural instantiation of subjectivity, I would argue that it is also true that in the environmental sense: “the death of the European subject [is] by necessity staged in the colonial space.”<sup>683</sup> As the English subject searches for the eroded or absent grounds of their national identity, “the dialectic of imperial expansion and contraction . . . swing a global cosmopolitan gaze inward,” a

process that Kelly Sultzbach argues creates a secondary “turn toward rural perception,” wherein “modernists were looking to the countryside for inspiration” and “modern artists’ representations of country life inform a desire to reclaim a sensitivity to heritage and local place.”<sup>684</sup> Yet, this search for native English grounds must necessarily reproduce a colonial othering. As Robert Young writes, “those who evoke the ‘nativist’ position through a nostalgia for a lost or repressed culture idealize the possibility of that lost origin being recoverable in all its former plenitude without allowing for the fact that the figure of the lost origin, the ‘other’ that the colonizer has repressed, has itself been constructed in the terms of the colonizer’s own self-image” as imperial subject, always already founded on absent lands.<sup>685</sup> Though the turn to rural England may contain the seeds of a more environmentally embodied national structure of belonging, as an outgrowth of “[r]everse ethnocentrism . . . [t]he ‘nativist’ argument thus simply reproduces a Western fantasy about its own society,” an argument that is frequently “projected out onto the lost society of the other and named ‘the Third World’,” perpetuating imperial exploitation in these elsewhere.<sup>686</sup>

*The Tropicalization of England: Entrenchment as Extractivism*

One can see, then, that England’s inherited relationship between nation and nature, which I outlined in Chapter 1, is here mobilized to found a new form of Englishness—one reoriented in relation to its environs. Furthermore, as constitutive of England’s affective detachment from the environments that enable its existence—its base matters, empire sets in motion the distorting dynamics that undergird the entrenched mindset actualized by war-time, making empire and World War I part of a larger, contiguous historical enfoldment. The imperial-environmental recursive feedback loop

here described, then, reveals the *entrenchment* of the war-time subject to be deeply entangled in the *extractive* praxis and mindset mobilizing imperialism at its most basic level. Miller explains that because of the “overhanging threat of climate change” that “dominate[s]” “[h]uman relations to nature in late modernity,” any attempt to understand the modern human-environmental relationship must account for the fact that “climate change itself is largely a result of what is sometimes called ‘extraction capitalism,’ a process by which enormous profits are generated through the extraction of finite resources (coal and oil, for example) from beneath the surface of the earth.”<sup>687</sup>

Furthermore, “extractivism is ‘a habit of thought that goes a long way toward explaining why an economic model based on endless growth ever seemed viable in the first place’.”<sup>688</sup> She cites the oft-present trope of “mining” in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature as “the perfect [English] metonym for the broader economic system in which it functions,”<sup>689</sup> that of global imperialism. This “endless growth” model at the core of imperial practices of environmental extractivism “obscured the market’s . . . environmental remainder—‘waste’—left over from the supposed equilibrium of capitalist exchange.”<sup>690</sup> Home-grown extractivism, therefore, breeds imperialism. As a practice that “bring[s] poisonous material to the surface of the earth,” writes Miller, English extractivism in the form of mining and other praxis, tends towards exhaustion by nature, for “[e]xtraction does not last forever . . . and once a lode has been depleted, a new source of profit must be found elsewhere.”<sup>691</sup> With the inevitability of exhaustion, like with the forces that created ghost acreage, imperialism is needed to open up new frontiers—to locate new negative matters on which to maintain the basis of Englishness.



Furthermore, in their abjection of undergrounds as sites of filth to be displaced to the colonies, mines find aesthetic resonance with other similarly marked chthonic spaces. Miller's reading of a Victorian representation of the "underground railway" that, until 1906 was, in Morris's terms, "the means of travelling which civilization has forced upon us like a habit," describes underground habitation in the cities as much like those of the miners in the industrial enclaves of the countryside: an "underground setting, filled with coal smoke, a virtual hell of discontented humanity" wherein one revels in being afterwards "back on the surface of the earth."<sup>692</sup> What strikes me about Morris's sentiments and Miller's reading of the English environmental orientation embedded within it, is the way it resembles the subaltern's experiences of the trenches of World War I. Extractivism, then, is aesthetically and affectively linked to the experience of entrenchment in the English imaginary—long before the war has a chance to bring home the disjunctive experience of imperial logic to the English national consciousness. The deracinating effects of the debasement of matter then constitute a long arc in the history of the English self-image as projected upon the land: from its own environmentally degraded spaces, to those of World War I, to colonial sites of exploitation, and home again to roost in the imperial homeland.

In my reading of entrenchment as an extractive epistemology, the war's imperial enmeshment makes legible two key characteristics of war-time modernist environmental aesthetics. These are the apprehensions of nature as an endless resource and of "the tropics," in particular, as a site of excess. The tropics' excessiveness presents both in a sense of their prodigious productivity and their being grotesquely uncivilized. Such excessive reproductivity marks the tropics as site for potential extractive enrichment of

the metropolis, while their grotesqueness abjects all that is branded tropical, further validating imperial exploitation of those lands and peoples encompassed therein. The trope of the tropics is oft-cited within imperialist narratives, such as Chapter 6's *Heart of Darkness* (1898). Yet, Chapter 8's reading of Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) reveals how the tropics shadow narratives set in England that respond to World War I as well. Typical depictions of the tropics describe "plants" that "have certain botanical plausibility but are also subtly exaggerated in scale and shape, thereby creating an impression of a world of nature that is different from, or alien to, nature in the temperate world."<sup>693</sup> "Tropical nature . . . also seems strangely melancholy, even somewhat sinister" with "huge, dark palms and tree-ferns," suggestive of "a vegetative existence belonging to an older, more primitive world than the temperate world of the present," a "visual grammar . . . remarkably persistent in Western representations."<sup>694</sup>

More than an innocent encounter between different environmental subjects, tropicity is itself invented by imperialism, forming an environmental corollary to Edward Said's "orientalism."<sup>695</sup> Like the orient, "tropical nature was an imaginative construct as much as it was an empirical description of the natural world."<sup>696</sup> Hence, "'tropical' came to constitute more than a geographical concept; it signified a place of radical otherness to the temperate world, with which it contrasted and which it helped constitute. Descriptions and pictures of the tropics in this way contributed to the formation of European identity, as distinct from that of the tropical zone."<sup>697</sup>

Furthermore, "[e]ventually, many places came to be seen as tropical that in a literal (geographical) sense were not," in this way, any non-European environment became a site "where the superabundance of nature was believed to overwhelm human endeavor

and reduce the place to nature itself.”<sup>698</sup> Like imperial justifications for colonial disenfranchisement from the land mentioned above, tropicality contains explicit notions that “the hot lands ‘will never be developed by the natives themselves’ and that, as a consequence, ‘the right of these races to remain in possession . . . will [in] no” way include “recognition that they shall be allowed to prevent the utilization of the immense natural resources which they have in charge’.”<sup>699</sup> This results from the assumption that “because nature in the tropics was so fecund, the few needs of ‘native’ peoples could be met with little mental and physical labour,” amounting to an intrinsic laziness and ineptitude.<sup>700</sup> In addition to defining itself against tropicality, England is “subjected to a creeping tropicalization” itself, a process that occurs through their attempts to Anglicize colonized peoples.<sup>701</sup> Ian Baucom gives the example of the “Victoria Terminus” in India, a train station meant to represent “England in India, and a space in which the Indian is made to be English,” that instead comes to reveal that “England,” in doing so, “has been tropicalized” for “beasts and foliages of the subcontinent” cover the “English Gothic” architecture of that space, such that its “Englishness has been subtly estranged,” and “it has become what it was built to erase,” alternately manifesting a “celebration of tropicalization and hybridization” rather than English global dominance.<sup>702</sup>

Characterizing the imperial environmental imaginary thusly makes visible modernist revisions to the national trope of the land so that a complementary imperial trope of land as always already displaced and under erasure is shown to increasingly become the ironic center of England-as-empire. This is especially evident, as I shall demonstrate in Part 4, during the period I have delimited as war-time. As imbricated in the imperial-environmental imaginary, the base material aesthetics elaborated throughout

this dissertation, then, instantiates *the land* as that *negative matter* which fuels imperial England's cognizance of itself as a simultaneously domestic and global space—as existing in excess of the laws of matter, and transcendent, therefore, of nature and any ecological enmeshment in it.

As the aesthetic refiguring Englishness, Modernism can itself be said to be constituted by the imperialism that naturalized such material-environmental aesthetics and epistemologies. This is evident in the way that Modernist texts reveal England's unstable foundation of itself upon the ironic functioning of a negative matter—a figure of land that stands in for material earth while also signifying its absence as meaningful way to ground national epistemology. As noted above, “the modernist . . . substitute[ion]” of “a First World set of characters for a Third World presence” is “a strategy of representational containment.”<sup>703</sup> The “systemic block” that, according to Jameson, such containment produces makes “modernist ‘style’—now . . . the marker and the substitute . . . of the unrepresentable totality” of England as constituted by its connection to the colonies.<sup>704</sup> In addition to “modernist representation[‘s] emerge[nce]” in response to the crisis of English national identity caused by empire, as imperial contraction increasingly occurs after World War I, “the aesthetic crisis denoted by modernism,” claims Simon Gikandi, marked the “los[s of] traditional authority” surrounding “a crisis of belief in the efficacy of colonialism, its culture, and its dominant terms—a progressive temporality, a linear cartography, and a unified European subject,” wherein “colonial space, once read as a source of national power and individual engenderment, is now perceived as a spent and corrupting force.”<sup>705</sup> The collapse of national foundations upon the “unshakeable confidence in the imperial enterprise” leads to a “deep anxiety about the imperial

enterprise,” effecting “the radical reconceptualization of narrative forms.”<sup>706</sup> As an aesthetic founded on an absent referent increasingly deracinated from native lands, English modernism represents the rejection of “nineteenth-century theories of representation[’s]” reliance on realist narrative and aesthetics, whose “relatively stable subject-object relationships” no longer reflected the lived experience of a fragmented and uprooted English national identity.<sup>707</sup> When not attempting to represent absent grounds or epistemic fragmentation, English modernists performed what Jed Esty calls the “Anglocentric turn.”<sup>708</sup> This nativist turn is precipitated by the “end of empire,” and “entailed a metaphorical repair of the social divides that had conditioned modernism’s aesthetics of failure and fragmentation”; Esty argues that “we can,” therefore, “identify imperialism’s place in the modernist imaginary as,” in part, a “material predicate of lost cultural wholeness.”<sup>709</sup> This refocusing on native lands results from “certain English intellectuals interpret[ation of] contraction as an opportunity for cultural repair,” for a “cultural revival” wherein “Modernism’s nativist and culturalist turn represents the first part of a decolonizing dialectic in which the tropes and modes of colonial knowledge came home to roost at the end of empire.”<sup>710</sup> This is why, states Helen Southward, “in the face of contracting imperial territories, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, and Woolf sought a means to ‘reenchant’ . . . England, that is to reassert cultural integrity at home.”<sup>711</sup>

### *Primitivism: A Modernist Imperial Aesthetic*

Across English Modernism’s aesthetics of failure and recovery, the trope of the *primitive* appears as a central figure within modernist negotiations of a national culture attempting urgently to detach itself from colonial matters. Yet, “the interest in foreign aesthetics and ‘primitive’ cultures” only succeeds in “replay[ing] Western modernity’s

imperialism.”<sup>712</sup> Though only passing reference is made to the role of environmental discourses and aesthetics in the scholarship on *Primitivism*, I claim primitivist aesthetics repeatedly appear surrounding the use of base material tropes within the environmental aesthetics of English modernist literature. Primitivism is most often employed in an attempt to reinforce and catalyze the doctrine of continued, inevitable European progress and superiority. Primitivisms look, in modernism specifically, to literary representations of both foreign and domestic pasts to aid in the effort to renew a European, in this case English, civilization perceived to be in decline. Though often evoked as a celebration of non-European cultures, many argue “modernism . . . runs on ‘a wholesale appropriation and refiguration of non-western artistic and cultural practices’ in the service of ‘a society utterly committed to the preservation of its traditional prerogatives’” and not any truly progressive or democratic agenda.<sup>713</sup>

In 1973, Michael Bell’s early definition of primitivism, notes two literary responses to the growing modernist “concer[n] with what they felt to be the psychic disintegration and emotional barrenness of their time.”<sup>714</sup> Some authors performed a “Primitive Sensibility” which takes the form of an attempted “recreation of what many anthropologists have believed to be the most essential qualities of pre-civilized feeling and thought,” with “question[able] anthropological validity.”<sup>715</sup> Nonetheless, this “way of feeling” is a “primary mode of response to the external world,” being marked in modernist writing by the “absence . . . of a firm and rational distinction between the inner world of feeling and the external order of existence,” representing instead ““only a single undivided totality” in which there has been no “dissociation.”<sup>716</sup> Bell notes in passing that here the “primitive relationship with the natural environment is” considered to be “felt . .

. as continuous rather than radically transcendent,” an ecological orientation that alternately evokes desire and, as is the case in Chapters 6 and 9 which focus on this underexamined aspect of primitivist aesthetics, fear.<sup>717</sup> Alternately, other writers responded with a “Conscious Primitivism,” more evocative of stereotypical tropes of the primitive Other in its “moral or symbolic use.”<sup>718</sup> The marking out of a primitive other effects, in turn, “a dichotomy in which the basic disparity between the inner and outer emerges only the more clearly and irreconcilably. Rather than a recreation of ancient feeling . . . we are made only more aware of how foreign it is to [Europeans’] habitual assumptions.”<sup>719</sup>

Other theorists and scholars of the primitive, such as Marianna Torgovnick, Elazar Barkan, Ronald Bush, and Sieglinde Lemke, have approached primitivism from its more explicitly ethnocentric and racialized perspectives. Torgovnick traces “the basic grammar and vocabulary of what” she “call[s] the primitivist discourse.”<sup>720</sup> Here, “synonyms” for the primitive, each equally problematic, include “savage, pre-Columbian, tribal, third world, underdeveloped, developing, archaic, traditional, exotic, ‘the anthropological record,’ non-Western, and Other”; such rhetorics participate, she adds, in a “a discourse” that comes to be “fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other.”<sup>721</sup> Not only is primitivism foundational to the relationship between self and other in the West, in Europe—and England in particular, primitivism undergirds the process through which the colonial Other comes to constitute the very identity of the English subject. Hence, Gikandi explains “that colonized peoples and imperial spaces were crucial ingredients in the generation and consolidation of a European identity and its master narratives.”<sup>722</sup> As such, primitivism may “refer[r] both to societies ‘out there’ and to

subordinate groups within the West.”<sup>723</sup> Such primitivism, then, is not limited to descriptions of colonial territories, but is often used to delimit foreign elements at home: [f]requently” “females” and “the working class or other subordinated segments of a population become associated with primitives—the Irish, for example, or Jews, . . . or U.S. blacks.”<sup>724</sup> As a result of such figurations, those labeled as primitive are seen “not as various and complete in themselves but as developing towards Western norms.”<sup>725</sup> Temporally regressive, so-called primitive peoples are considered to manifest our “untamed selves, our id forces—libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous,” “sexual,” “grotesque,” and “cannibalis[ti]c.”<sup>726</sup>

Hence, “[t]hose who study and write about the primitive usually begin by defining it as different from (usually opposite to) the present.”<sup>727</sup> While primitivism can manifest inside or outside of the home country, under English imperialism, “Africa [becomes] the quintessential locus of the primitive”; it is “‘dark’ and dangerous” but also represents “‘childhood’—the ‘immature,’ developing state of human existence.”<sup>728</sup> At the same time England is abjecting primitive elements and projecting them onto Africa, the British were also “appropriating their culture, and a new fad, ‘primitive art,’ swept Europe,” and “[d]uring the teens and twenties . . . African drawings and sculpture, . . . were . . . much in vogue among artists and collectors.”<sup>729</sup> Despite celebratory appropriations and appreciations of non-European “primitive” art, “[i]ncontestably, public racism increased as Europe subjugated a growing number of ‘primitives’ and ‘savages’.”<sup>730</sup> Racist ideologies buoyed by primitivist discourse increase alongside the representation of the primitive figure as “the great black hope, so to speak, who would impede the process of decay—and thereby stop the metropoli ‘from dying from the weight of civilization’.”<sup>731</sup>



This paradox, is, therefore, an inherent characteristic of primitivism, performing a doubleness and recursivity within imperial cultures such as England's.

Furthermore, primitivism is as often marked by reductive and deracinating epistemologies of Nature as it is by the troubling racialization of cultural others and rampant ethnocentrism. Chapter 6, therefore, analyzes British modernism's echoing of a perceived temporal distance between the modern Europeans and so-called primitive (colonized) others in the widening chasm it depicts between imperial English subjectivity and "Nature." Hence, the racist and environmentally unsustainable ideologies embedded within imperialist discourse are frequently aided by the historiography that primitivism's temporal registers project. As I noted above, primitivism often constructs "Nature"—or at least humanity's connection to it—as existing in an elsewhere (either the European past or the present culture and place of non-Europeans, which are themselves elided). This merging of the past of England with the present of colonial lands, the notion that "primitive Africa mirrors Englishness at an earlier historical period," under the sign of primitivism—celebratory or derogatory—"seems to" have increased "dramatically in the period after World War I when, with the consolidation of high modernism as the normative literary style," so that:

Africa suddenly begins to be associated with a certain kinds of *redemptive* primitivism. The idea of Africa as a possible sanctuary for the lost souls of civilization is particularly appealing when the idea of Europe enters into a state of terminal crisis in the years between the two world wars . . . Africa is both the self and the other of Europe, connected to it by a long history of colonial rule and

conquest but separated from it by the persistence of what is considered residual primitivism.<sup>732</sup>

Hence, as I discuss in Part 4, the interwar years substitute the primitivism of such works as *Heart of Darkness* with “a concerted attempt by some European writers . . . to valorize this primitivism.”<sup>733</sup> And so, “Africa is the place where ‘pagan England’—the raw and pure state of cultural being—can be recuperated . . . the decay and decomposition [seen] on the tropical landscape.”<sup>734</sup>

Redemptive primitivism, as well as the more oppressive—directly imperialist—brand, evince what Johannes Fabian calls a *denial of coevalness*. In the nineteenth century, British evolutionists emphasis on “Time as natural history” increasingly saw the functioning of nature to validate the characteristically Victorian “faith in progress and industry.”<sup>735</sup> This natural time “formed” a “temporal discourse” via an “evolutionism” that “rested on a conception of Time [that] was not only . . . naturalized but also thoroughly spatialized,” “visualiz[ing],” as it did, “evolution, not as a *chain* of being, but as a *tree*.”<sup>736</sup> Combined with the Victorian faith in progress, this temporality rejects the neutral conception of time put forth by Darwin, who wrote that “[t]he mere lapse of time by itself does nothing either for or against natural selection.”<sup>737</sup> This results from the “full[ness] of the[ir] conviction that Time ‘accomplished’ or brought about things in the course of evolution.”<sup>738</sup> Such spatializations of time “produc[e] a global result,” as anthropology’s imbrication in discourses of imperialism<sup>739</sup> ratifies “distancing devices” of which the most insidious is a “denial of coevalness,” or, a “persistent and systematic tendency to place referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.”<sup>740</sup> English imperialist discourse, along with most

post-Enlightenment Western discourse, therefore “assigns . . . conquered populations [to] a *different* Time,” labeling them thusly as “‘savage’” or “‘primitive’,” by constructing “[t]he other . . . as a system of coordinates (emanating of course from the real center—the Western metropolis) in which given societies of all times and places may be plotted in terms of relative distance to the present.”<sup>741</sup> As a result, colonized peoples and people subjected to neocolonial powers are classified in the English imaginary as less-than-human by virtue of their spatial distance from the imperial metropolis.

These racist and ethnocentric veins of primitivism, like imperialism more generally, acutely impact modernist discursive negotiations of nature and nation in England. The trope of primitivism depicts variously a figure: childlike, “free,” and “in tune with nature.”<sup>742</sup> Hence, as Bate notes, “the common association of ‘woman’ and ‘black’ with closeness to nature, with instinct and biology” and “of ‘man’ and ‘European’ with rationality and with transcendence of nature.”<sup>743</sup> Just as Said notes that the West creates the idea of orientalism and projects it onto the East in order to secure a sense of themselves as a discrete identity, so too does the primitive other underwrite European identity as founded on its transcendence of nature. Furthermore, “the primitive” is used “as an inexact expressive whole—often with little correspondence to any specific or documented societies.”<sup>744</sup> As a geographic inexactitude, it bleeds into a lack of environmental legibility. Torgovnick cites “[t]he *jungle*, for example, [a]s a term popularly used to describe the locale of the primitive. And yet, in a strict geographical sense,” like the tropics, “it is a term most applicable to parts of Southeast Asia—not African savannahs, plains, deserts, forests, rain forests, not to the Amazon, not to the lands once occupied by Native Americans.”<sup>745</sup> Moreover, “[p]rimitive beliefs and social

relationships are . . . sometimes . . . seen as equivalent to the ‘oceanic’: to a dissolution of boundaries between all conceived and conceivable polarities,” and in this way reinforce the deracination of cultural from environmental specificity.<sup>746</sup>

Anne McClintock takes up the spatio-temporally imagined disjunctures discussed by Fabian and Torgovnick and addresses how, as an inherent part of British imperial ideology, the set of linked dynamics she terms as the production of “anachronistic space” and “panoptical time” emerge. McClintock writes, “[i]n colonial discourse . . . movement through space becomes analogous to movement through time. History becomes shaped around two opposing directions: the progress forward of humanity” and “regression backward to what I will call anachronistic space . . . from white male adulthood to a primordial, black degeneracy usually incarnated in women,” so that for the colonizer travelling to colonial territories, “the movement forward in space is backward in time.”<sup>747</sup> Based on this spatiotemporal distortion, “*anachronistic space*” also necessitates an attendant environmental orientation and erasure, for it relies also on the “[t]he myth of the virgin land” that is necessarily “also the myth of the empty land.”<sup>748</sup> As sites of pure nature, wherein “if the land is virgin, colonized peoples cannot claim aboriginal territorial rights” and so “indigenous peoples are not supposed to be spatially there—for the lands are ‘empty’—they are symbolically displaced onto . . . *anachronistic space*.”<sup>749</sup> Such space is also the site of “a permanently anterior time,”<sup>750</sup> where, I argue, nature itself becomes an anachronism, or, anachronistic space par excellence. This “imperial science of the surface” allowed “Time” to become “a geography of social power, a map from which to read the allegory of ‘natural’ social difference. Most importantly, history took on the character of the spectacle. In the last decades of the nineteenth century,” what she

calls “panoptical time,” also “came into its own.”<sup>751</sup> She defines “panoptical time” as “the image of global history consumed—at a glance—in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility,” wherein “the evolutionary family Tree of Man” consistently depicted “the European as the apogee of progress” and the “differential progress of the races” is “mapped against the tree’s self-evident boughs.”<sup>752</sup> “In images of panoptical time, history appears static, fixed, covered in dust” and “historical time” “disappear[s],” from this image, “anachronistic space” then emerges as “[g]eographic difference across *space* is figured as a historical difference across *time*,” and non-European land is understood as “a land perpetually out of time in modernity,” further reinforcing the anachronistic quality of any space that seems to possess an excessive environmental materiality.<sup>753</sup>

As noted above, Rob Nixon has treated the specific ways that this denial of coevalness inherent to the anachronistic, panoptical time of British imperial ideology is a crucial part of the functioning of what he calls the *slow violence* that impacts our environment and the disenfranchised people most effected by its degradation. Though not all base matters contain evidence of Nixon’s slow violence, each text analyzed herein evinces the invisibilizing effects of its spatio-temporal distortions. I claim that these distortions of space and time are then made possible in the British imaginary through a mode of landscape representation that creates false developmental distances between the civilizations of English and non-European peoples, peoples and lands that are often colonized or otherwise exploited by neo-colonial practices at the hands of English businessmen and government. Furthermore, within such environmental aesthetics, the atavism attributed to non-Europeans is often depicted through their possessing of a

closeness to nature that is considered anachronistically coeval with a distant stage of English historical development. Such spatiotemporal denialism discursively (and sometimes materially) consumes other cultures while simultaneously displacing them to the geospatial fringes of a world mapped by British imperial and nascent neoliberal, postcolonial power.

In constructing contemporary non-Europeans as coeval with English pastness through environmental aesthetics, such writing entangles racialized and ethnocentric ideologies of the British empire in equally backward ideologies of human's ecological relationality—namely a promotion of *postnaturalism* as linked to the supposed British right to empire. Despite the well-intentioned impulse to spur individuals into action by acknowledging the gravity of our impact on the environment, Bill McKibben's now classic environmental text, *The End of Nature* echoes, in 1989, this same postnaturalism that relegates “authentic” nature only to the past, belatedly explicating the result of imperialist discourses of primitivism on environmental epistemology: “[t]hose ‘record highs’ and ‘record lows’ that the weathermen are always talking about—they’re meaningless now . . . [t]hey imply a connection between past and present which *doesn't exist*. The comparison is like hanging Rembrandts next to Warhols; we live in a postnatural world.”<sup>754</sup> In the Chapter that follows, base material tropology's engagement with primitivist aesthetics and themes are shown to constitute and maintain an ideology of human nondependence on the material environment, a transcendence that is the ironic ground of the imperialist English national imaginary. Though I locate it in the early modernist work of Joseph Conrad's fin de siècle text, this ideology persists long beyond the modernist era—as we see with McKibben's comments—continuing to

obscure and paralyze an actionable environmental awareness, rather than, as many contemporary environmentalists had hoped, shocking us unto it.

## **Chapter 6—Dark Matters: Excessive Colonial Environments and Occluded English Foundations in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness***

Chapter 6 takes up those base matters that—like those that undergird English national identity at home and those that reorient the subject at war—are foundational to the imperial English subject.<sup>755</sup> This chapter demonstrates that the base matters of empire depicted across modernist literature are imbricated in those base material aesthetics constitutive of the English nation. What my reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) exposes is that, as discussed in Chapter 5, the domestic matters taken to be solid ground were always already negative matters—shadow versions of the colonial matters extracted from abroad that reveal the ghost acreage comprising English national ground. As an imperialist nation, England had increasingly relied upon natural resources imported from the colonies since at least as far back as the industrial revolution when an exhaustion of domestic environmental resources gradually force the British outward towards global environments to extract fuel and raw materials for the running of their industries and feeding of their populations. The substitution of supposedly solid matters for shadow matters demonstrates what Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy calls “nature’s ubiquity”<sup>756</sup> throughout the empire, rather reinforcing the imperial domination by England of environmental others of which the imperial subject is transcendent. As Fredric Jameson argues, the English populace attempts to contain this disturbing knowledge, writing it onto the landscapes of its own native spaces in an attempt to resolidify national grounds. Rather than repress awareness of national dependence on colonial lands and peoples for the continuation of an English way of life, however, modernist literary landscapes encode this displaced foundation further within the national



imaginary—though its aporetic aesthetics underscore the illegibility with which it presents itself.

Like the English modernist oeuvre of which it is a part, Conrad's short novel performs and illustrates the imperial subject's revelation that the foundation of English national sovereignty—in its economic and environmental senses—indeed, its very survival, rests on a negative materiality and not the stable base materiality of native lands that the English national imaginary had concretized and naturalized at home. Pointing to an absent environmental referent, this negative materiality evokes the substitutive dynamic that is naturalized and therefore made invisible by imperialist aesthetics. I agree that, as Li Weilin argues, Conrad's novel offers readers a didactic tale of western imperialism's negative effects on African ecology, depicting "unrecoverable damage to the natural resources" there.<sup>757</sup> Yet, Caitlin Vandertop's explanation that the novel exposes more global implications of such imperialism "connects forms of ecological disruption to the economic appropriation and exhaustion of human and extra-human natures at the commodity frontier" and exposes "the world-ecological paradigm—with its focus on the historical interrelation of nature and capital" comes closer to my own reading.<sup>758</sup> I take Vandertop's claims one step further, arguing that in representing the abstraction of matter that more easily enables the imperial process of environmental extraction, *Heart of Darkness* registers the destructive effects of imperialism not just on those colonial lands and their native populations (such as those of the African Congo), but also on the English imperial subject as well, in their encountering of the displaced foundation of their national identity on the colonial frontier. Hence, Conrad's protagonist, Marlow, and many of the characters and people he encounters, all experience an

emptying out of their own identity in the face of the matters that constitute them: the materiality of unfamiliar colonial environments.

Given the subjective constitution of the English via, as I argued in Chapter 1, imaginary landscapes, the imperial subject is bound by language—the very thing that fails in the face of Conrad’s fictional Congolese environs. *Heart of Darkness* depicts, then, a darkness that is matter itself. Matter in the novel connotes the limit point of subjective knowledge for it can only be encountered and not known or epistemologically consumed. This epistemological-material reality conflicts with the imperial subject’s familiar charting and measuring of its world possessions through language and other representational arts. The indescribability of environmental matters in the novel is then of a piece with the trope of darkness as the unknowability or illegibility of one’s reality. Language, the text muses, is imaginary; matter is real. Because matter exists in excess of the meaning we attribute to it, the novel is able to consistently exchange the referent for mattering from (linguistic) meaning to (environmental) matter. Conrad’s text suggests then that, no longer able to define itself through its difference from colonial matters, the imperial subject experiences foundational anxiety—a fear of its own dissolution—as language fails to maintain the boundary line between mind and matter, subject and environment, English and African, imperial and colonial.

In response to the embedded Africa narrative’s depiction of an excessive materiality that drains agency from imperial subjects into nonhuman matters, *Heart of Darkness* attempts to circumscribe the revelation of the imperial subject’s foundation upon a negative matter by encasing the dark materiality of colonial spaces in a frame narrative that characterizes Englishness as defined instead by their enlightenment and

civilization. In doing so, the novel employs a primitivism that is constructed both aesthetically and narratologically. The text casts Africa as primitive and England as civilized space based on the environmental aesthetics of dark matters that infect each, but at supposedly different *times*. The denial of colonial coevalness is reinforced by the double river narrative construction. The frame story takes place on the Thames in England and the embedded narrative takes place primarily on the Kasai in the Congo. The text's musings over the historically ancient primitivism of the English race upon the shores of the Thames, then, employ this double river journey to suggest that England's outbound waterway is the temporal reverse of the spatially distant inland flowing Congolese river. Here, tidal currents (or lack thereof) evoke the movement of time itself. While England moves forwards in historical time, then, colonial lands are depicted as stuck in a static anterior time—an anachronistic primitivism.

The narrative suggests that Marlow's journey from historical lands to permanently primitive ones is then a movement *through* time that is coterminous with the motion *across* space—collapsing the two and, in the process, further reinforcing the notion that “wild” spaces marked by the presence of “excessive,” uncontrolled (not yet unexhausted by imperial extraction) environmental matters are also primitive, and therefore anachronistic—the empire is a postnatural place, and the English subject transcendent of ecology. The discussion below, therefore, traces Conrad's literalization of the replacement of knowledge with matter, conjoining the two through the trope of darkness as indescribability, unknowability and as interchangeable with this: material density and agency. As the mud, dirt, and other environmental matters of the Congo invade and consume European bodies, words become like air—empty and weightless. Once the base

material aesthetics of darkness is established, I explain the way in which *Heart of Darkness* attempts to contain that reality within the frame narrative that recasts African environs as anachronistically primitive and denies English lands' historical coevalness with such colonial spaces, indeed, with environmental materiality itself.

The narrative arc of the novel is as follows. *Heart of Darkness* depicts the story of one Englishman's journey into the isolated interior of a tropical, foreign land.<sup>759</sup> Though its location is unnamed, based on echoes between the history of colonial Africa (including Conrad's own time spent there) and the geographic and circumstantial details of the text's setting and plot, *Heart of Darkness* is frequently taken to be set in the Congo Free State in the 1890s under the private ownership of King Leopold II of Belgium.<sup>760</sup> The story begins on a ship floating in the Thames in the present of the novel. Here, the unnamed narrator of the frame narrative relays the story that the embedded narrative's protagonist—Marlow—tells. Marlow relays to his shipmates—an accountant, a lawyer, a director of companies, and the unnamed narrator—the story of a past foray into the Congo on a trade mission for a Belgian company. While they await the turning tide, Marlow discusses the ancient colonial history of the English landscape surrounding them—of the Roman conquest of Britain, its colonization, and the growth of English civilization on the Thames banks. He then transitions to his Africa story and we enter the embedded narrative. The reader only emerges back into the frame in two brief moments at the end of the narrative, first describing Marlow's appearance, and then closing the novel with a description of the river they sit upon while leaving England and entering the sea. The bulk of the narrative takes place within this embedded story, where its language points increasingly towards the inability to describe—everything being

“incomprehensible,” “indescribable,” and so on. Marlow receives a commission to captain a river boat in the Congo. He travels to Belgium to get approval from the company doctor and visit the aunt who helped get him his appointment. From there he travels to Africa by ship, following the eastern coast and being deposited on the Congolese shore at the “seat of government.” Here he boards a steamer captained by “a Swede” and heads up the Congo river to the “Company Station.” He speaks with the chief accountant there who explains it will be several days before he can travel towards his final destination: a trade agent named Kurtz with a remote outpost. Once there, Marlow is meant to make a report on the man and his doings for the company. They are worried about his methods, his health, and eager to know what he has learned that enables him to obtain more ivory than any other commission. After ten days, Marlow travels by land to the “Central Station” located further inland and up the Congo river.

From there he waits long for his broken steamboat to be fixed, then travels up the Kasai river to Kurtz’s “Inner Station” with only one incident along the way involving intense fog and natives with arrows.<sup>761</sup> There Marlow finds only Kurtz’s second in command—“the Russian.” The Russian explains that Kurtz spends most of his time exploring and raiding the distant villages, far from Inner Station on the river’s shore. However, later that day Kurtz is delivered, ill, by some tribesmen to the station. Marlow describes Kurtz as mentally and physically unwell and seemingly grown too close to the land and its native population. After a midnight incident when Kurtz tries to crawl back into the forest where he hears a tribal ritual underway, Marlow carries him to the boat and transports him back down-river. Kurtz dies before they reach Central Station, but Marlow returns to Belgium with Kurtz’s report on subduing the natives, still haunted by his

African experiences. The embedded narrative closes after Marlow's conversation with Kurtz's Intended. He lies to her, concealing that Kurtz's last words were "the horror" and stating instead he had uttered only her name.

Though the plot of *Heart of Darkness* appears readily apprehensible, simplistic even, the indescribability of colonial environs therein depicts Congolese nature as illegible and therefore unknowable. The novel describes undifferentiable colonial spaces that offer no solidity against which to define the imperial self. This, I argue, leaves the English subject with no Other from which it knows itself by comparison. This results in an anxious tone that pervades the text. From the first, Marlow's description of his encounter with Africa presents not only a paucity of qualifiers, but muses on the very indescribability of that place.

His apprehension of colonial geography is rife with ambiguity. Marlow states: "I felt as though, instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre of the earth."<sup>762</sup> In excess of earth's surface—characterized as those flat mappable space of "continents," "the center of the earth" registers uncolonized non-European interiors as essentially unknowable, a dark chthonic underground far from the light of the sun. This quasi-geologic unsignifiability continues as Marlow describes the African coastline:

I watched the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by a ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you—smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering. . . This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark green as to be almost black, fringed with white

surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce and the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam.<sup>763</sup>

Describing the landscape as “coast,” rather than naming the territory, reduces the place to its geologic features. Here, he then atomizes them further as “almost featureless.”

Throughout the text, as Jeffrey Myer notes, this reduction amounts to “the figuring of, not only the human inhabitants, but the ‘wilderness’ itself as undifferentiated, generalized other ‘Other’ against which the anthropocentric self takes its identity.”<sup>764</sup> Yet, this undifferentiated place does not, I would argue, remain stable enough to create a solid oppositional identity against. What appears at first to be a pure mass of rock is further associated with the geologic formation of those base matters. The shore is characterized with the phrase: “as if still in the making.” An unformed place viewed as if in the midst of its geologic evolution into a discrete continent, Conrad’s writing reduces it further to an almost geometric essence, connoting only a “straight . . . ruled line” of endless measurement, continuing “far, far away.” Eluding visual apprehension, the landscape communicates nothing comprehensible, only a “monotonous grimness.”

The land’s incommunicability is, I argue, located in its characterization as matter in excess of language. Such matters, the text suggests, thwart language’s meaning-making function, calling into question the English subject’s typical foundation of its national identity on overdetermined literary landscapes. Though the land here is “always mute,” this silence is also an “enigma,” for the opposite is also true: the coast expresses something, but the substance of its speech is both contradictory and unlinguistic, defying the Englishman’s ability to “think” it. The coast’s “air of whispering,” its atmospheric

language too diffuse to be stabilized as concrete meaning, smiles and invites, but also frowns and is mean, insipid, and savage. The unsignifying “grand[eur]” of its geologic coast is echoed in the organic matter of its “edge” as well, being also a “colossal jungle.” Michael Mayer claims that in Conrad’s Congo tale, “nature [is] mighty and dominating, with massive and looming trees,” suggesting a “kind of nature [that] is devoid of any touch of civilization, reigning supreme over mankind” and “def[y]ing the power of the European colonizer to subdue the land.”<sup>765</sup> As uncivilized space, ordered instead by “nature” itself, Congolese plant life eludes meaning as well, being “so dark green as to be almost black,” marking the base matters of this place with a darkness that has begun to represent an absence of signifyability. While the novel captures a landscape, Marlow is characterized as unable to adequately capture the landscape he encounters, in words. England being a great naval power, the sea holds much national significance for the Englishman telling this tale in the frame narrative to his countrymen on the Thames. That the passage ends by noting that the “blue sea” has its “glitter” “blurred” by the “creeping mist” coming off the coast, obscures the symbolic greatness of the natural element by which England has got its vast imperial dominions.

The land’s ability to alter nature’s ability to symbolize national meaning frames Marlow’s inability to comprehend the landscape as a material agency actively overpowering the linguistic. The darkness of the title, the reader begins to suspect, is an epistemological one—suggesting what knowledge cannot be conveyed by words. Darkness, I argue, can then be read as matter in excess of linguistic signification. As such, Marlow calls the Congo “a God-forsaken wilderness,” where “the uniform somberness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things.”<sup>766</sup> This



contrasts with the sea leading back to England, which was “like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had reason, that had meaning.”<sup>767</sup> “[W]ilderness” is juxtaposed to “nature” and attributes to those wilds a lack of definition (“uniform”) that leads to a refusal of meaning (“keep me away from the truth of things”). The sea, on the other hand, is associated with communion (“brother”) and communication (“speech”) that affords “meaning.” The sea is kindred, for Marlow (like Conrad) is an Englishman and sailor, two positions whose authority seem to be contested by these foreign African lands. The novel itself, therefore, does not just function through the structure of the much discussed frame narrative dynamic—that which J. Hillis Miller famously called the “kernel” and the “shell” of the “nut” of Conrad’s story, containing its meaning,<sup>768</sup> but also through the legibility communicated by its aesthetic landscapes.

The text suggests that this shifting of epistemological agency from English subject to colonial land results from the land’s perceived material excessiveness. In excess of English environmental signification, colonial mattering is marked, then, as unnatural. The closer Marlow’s ship gets to the coast and its final destination, the more language seems to be emptied of its signifying capabilities. Conrad writes,

We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized

impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me.<sup>769</sup>

The text encodes such material surrounds as having no stable, comprehensible meaning; “names” are “farcical,” just as the “coast” is “formless,” linking landscape to language. Despite being “in the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water,”<sup>770</sup> there is a sense of enclosure, as one trapped in a “catacomb.” There is also a sense of vulnerability, for “mangroves” are “invaded.” Both trapped and exposed, the place strips its inhabitants of agency. This lack of agency is symbolized by its ultimate object: “death,” whose appropriate locale is a “catacomb.” This heat (“overheated”) extends the sense of enclosure into a stifling; it suffocates breath, life. Furthermore, the “atmosphere,” which should be thin like air, is instead “earthy.” Even the air and the sky are as if they are but more landmass, hence Marlow describes them as “still.” Like the land, the air too is immoveable. The only thing that delineates (“bordered by”) the land from the sea is a “dangerous surf.” Marlow states that “Nature”—personified in its capitalization—“ward[s] off intruders.”

Ironically, the only thing that is enlivened is “death,” for “rivers” are coded as moving “streams of death in life.” Whereas, in the popular English pastoral imaginary, water typically evokes a sense of life or creation, here, the water becomes yet another iteration of death. Extending the conceit of active decay, the other boundary-marker, the “banks” of the “rivers,” are also “rotting into mud.” “[M]ud,” then, becomes a manifestation of decomposition, degeneration made material. Strangely, the water itself does not appear as something in motion, for it is being “thickened into slime.” Like the air, water represents another element in excess of its own supposedly natural state. The

trees (“mangroves”) are the only living thing described in this landscape. Associated throughout English literature with bodies, trees are often an avatar for the human form. That these trees are “invaded” by the mud or slime of the “river[’s]” creation mirrors as an inverted image the “intru[sion]” that the landscape, as “Nature” made manifest in the “extre[me],” repels (“ward off”), rejecting human life. Though, Jeffrey Myer claims that “ivory” becomes “an emblem for the commodification of the African landscape as well as the self’s attempted mastery over nature,”<sup>771</sup> the base matters of the Conrad’s Africa suggest that such mastery is unattainable. Conrad’s language expresses seemingly unnatural and impossible relations and meanings. *Heart of Darkness* then suggests that in order for Marlow to render the Congolese land into literary landscape, language must be made to deconstruct the very logic of rationality that is supposed to make it a reliable epistemological tool.

The failure of realist language to encompass reality appears to undermine the English subject’s sense of reality’s own stability. The text’s elision of body and tree breaks down the boundary line between the human subject as transcendent of nature and the material body as enmired in it, suggesting that without linguistic agency one is no longer significantly different from the other. The singular modifier for “mangroves” furthers the body-tree connection; these trees are “contorted,” a word typically denoting bodies that are unhealthy, disabled, or unnaturally positioned. Even the type of tree chosen—“mangroves”—merges man and tree within the word itself, as “mangroves” contains the word “man” within it as well as a word associated with tree (“groves”). This tree-body imagery continues in the subordinate clause: “that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair.” “[T]o writhe” is normally used to describe a body in

pain. Furthermore, Marlow points to an “extremity,” but the word it modifies is absent. Taken, then, as a noun, it conjures an image of the body’s extremities, its limbs that would “writhe” when “contorted” in pain. That their writhing expresses an “impotent despair” suggests an excess of feeling that amounts ironically to nothing, an affect that one can make no sense or meaning of. In reducing the human form to the deformed inhuman matter of a tree being painfully permeated by the deadly, unnaturally thick waters, *Heart of Darkness*’s base material aesthetics link the failure of linguistic agency in the face of such peripheral environmental spaces to the threat against the English subject who feels also this “impotent despair” in the face of the colonial frontier. I read aesthetic darkness, then, as representing matter in excess of signification.

Encounters with the Congolese people project similar anxieties for the imperial subject, as the text depicts them as more warnings against the transformations that can be wrought by the dark matter of the colonial frontier. Furthermore, in depicting the dehumanization of native bodies, the text hints that a seemingly geologic or cosmic force empties them of agency, depicting, I claim, the way in which imperialist extractivism is naturalized as a global, almost geologic force—a force of evolution itself. Just past a spot Marlow describes as a “scar in the hillside” full of a “broken” and “wanton smash-up” of “settlement” building materials, he stumbles “under the trees” upon a “grove” full of “mysterious sound.”<sup>772</sup> Instead of “breath,” he hears noise that sounded “as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible,” where,

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat . . . clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair . . . this was the place where some of the [enslaved native miners] had withdrawn to

die. They were dying slowly . . . they were nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confused in the greenish gloom.<sup>773</sup> No longer useful for work, “[t]hese moribund shapes . . . The black bones reclined at full length . . . two more bundles of acute angles sat . . . all about the others were scattered in every pose of collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or pestilence.”<sup>774</sup> Conrad’s language asks the reader to associate these “black shapes” with the “contorted mangroves,” for he echoes diction from that earlier passage, such as “despair” and “contorted,” as well as the elision of man and tree (“*mangrove*” and a “grove” full of “black shapes”). Like the deformed trees, these essentially enslaved Africans are also dehumanized forms.

Similar to the darkness of the land as seen from the coast, the blackness of its exploited native population becomes a marker of their unnatural appearance. They are called “black shapes,” “black shadows,” and “black bones.” Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère notes that:

During Marlow’s slow progress toward the heart of darkness, the African landscape is gradually animated and even humanized, while human beings undergo a reverse process. . . . [the] body is gradually emptied of its substance and made hollow. Thus, a central idea operating in the white mythology of empire, namely that of the civilizing mission as a spiritual and moral cure, is radically undermined through an ironic literalization of the trope; while at the same time the embodiment of the jungle emphasizes the human suffering this ‘civilising mission’ inflicts.”<sup>775</sup>

Each word that is modified by blackness is a word that refers to the structure, form, or outline of a human that lacks its animating substance. This enacts a making-hollow of African bodies as a result of the white mythology of empire that motivates this “civilizing” Congolese trade mission. In actuality, the Belgian presence there intends not to improve the land, but to consume its material substance. Extraction as the endgame of evolution is revealed, here, as the imperial fiction it is—hence Marlow’s unease with the material realities of an imperialism that seems to consume not just colonial resources, but the human agents of its mission as well. As the narrative soon reveals—European and African alike, neither is immune to this hollowing out.

Hence, environmental extractivism is shown to empty not only the land of resources for human benefit but also to empty material bodies of their humanness. This reduces colonial subjects as well to matter in excess of meaning, threatening the meaningful cohesion of the imperial subject as much as the colonial. The figures above are likely byproducts of one of the many railroad construction projects that began to crisscross colonial territories at the turn of the century. Here, the rail-building’s destruction of the land echoes the practice of mining that stands as material emblem of imperial extractivism par excellence. The blasting of the earth on the coast for the making of rail lines to more easily haul out those natural resources that are extracted from Africa’s interior translates the excess of environmental matter being gutted from the earth into an emptying of human matter, leaving those whose forced labor has been expended in the project as shapes without unifying form or content, shadows cast by no actual body, and bones with no flesh to enliven them. Likened to the “wanton smash-up” of

building materials that lay around them, these black bodies are further dehumanized in their kinship to such broken pipes and metal, reduced to shattered tools only.

In their affiliation with mangroves, however, they are also linked to another sort of matter—an environmental one—of the landscape itself. This is reinforced further by their being labeled a “grove” and by their positional echoing of the “scar in the hillside,” as if their black bodies are further collateral damage to the local environs. Hence, in lieu of their breathing—a sound of life—Marlow hears the sound of earth’s geologic or cosmologic force, linking violence against these human forms to the “tearing” through space of “earth[s]” forward motion. Though these are not English bodies, the threat of material violence represented by the “launched” “pace” of such a global endeavor naturalizes imperialism as an inevitable cosmologic force that leaves its victims merely “clinging to the earth,” while also serving as a warning of imperialism’s own violent agency. Atomizing the human further, Conrad’s dark diction is marked by a geometric imagery. The geometric violence evoked in his description of these black bodies as “black shapes,” “moribund shapes,” and “bundles of acute angles” suggests a reduction of the human subject to an essential form, like so many one dimensional dots and lines on a plane. Like the coast before it, such deconstructed forms merge with the darkness they invoke, for all shapes and angles are “black” and difficult to see in the “dim light” of the “grove” by which they are “half effaced.” In *Heart of Darkness*, then, darkness is the form of formlessness, a system of meaning, a language, that points to its own limits as the very precondition of speech—the limits imposed by matter that is not reducible to a more palatable Nature. The “shade” of the “trees” where Marlow came to seek shelter and relief is then no refuge at all.<sup>776</sup> The “greenish gloom” of Nature in Africa is recast as yet

more obscuring and dangerous darkness, an incomprehensible force that turns men into mere “scar[s] in the hillside,” a “wanton smash-up” of once human “shapes.”

The failure of language’s ability to make coherent meaning in the face of African landscapes affects, then, an inverted sublime, subjecting imperialist subjects to African environs rather than allowing a linguistically facilitated imperial transcendence of nature, or what McCarthy calls “European self-delusion of humanity’s place atop the natural order.”<sup>777</sup> This is evident when we recall Marlow’s initial impression of the land: “[n]owhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression.” The grammar of the sentence suggests “we stop[ped]” “Nowhere.” This place is not a place then, it is “Nowhere,” the “blank space” on the “map” that the novel describes Marlow musing over when imagining sites such as Africa in his youth.<sup>778</sup> The absence of place becoming yet another form of the darkness and unknowability met here. The base material images of an essentialized geologic or geometric environment and population make this space seem still to project the “blank space” on a “map” of Marlow’s childhood, despite it being a material something in which he is currently embedded. Such spaces evoke feelings of a “general sense of vague and oppressive wonder” for they violate the speculative-epistemological mastery that “should” be gained from an Englishman’s colonial encounter. The words “general” and “vague” reinforce the inability of language to facilitate epistemological mastery. The text reinforces apprehensions of the land as matter in excess of signification. Therein, something exists that cannot be described, but is not hidden. It is almost too visible, too close. This “[o]ppressive wonder” is figured, then, as the opposite of the awe conjured by a sublime encounter with the natural world.<sup>779</sup> The sublime is a state wherein the beholder encounters a natural entity and its grandness



allows them to obtain within themselves a transcendence. This elevation raises the beholder above the nature they behold. Here, by contrast, “wonder” and “awe” are in many ways synonymous; instead of transcendence, we have its inversion: “oppressi[on].” The English beholder is subjected to the African environs, his agency threatened by their very inability to master the material space with words.

Like the Africans’ depicted as a hollow shell, the imperial subject is also emptied out. Though both become reconstituted as negative matter, for the European, a subjective emptiness is replaced by base matters such as dirt. The imperial subject’s base matters, however, are only shadow matters—manifestations of their blindness to their dependence on such colonial lands. And so the revelation of their material-becoming is also expressed by the text as an excess of language that conveys no agency or substance for the subject. On the last leg of his inland journey, up the Kasai river headed towards Kurtz, Marlow meets “The Russian,” living at Inner Station deep in the African interior. Conrad writes, “this *papier-mache* Mephistopheles . . . it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe . . . He talked precipitately.”<sup>780</sup> All exteriors and no inner core, the structure of this man is figured similarly to the language of the text itself—all representation with no substantial point of reference. The darkness of the novel’s illegibility is here figured as an apparent absence of meaning, imagined through the environmental materiality of “dirt.” The only insides that are—and even then tentatively (“maybe”)—attributed to the transplanted European jungle-dweller’s structure are “a little loose dirt.” This suggests that while the core of the imperial subject naturalized to this colonial landscape may no longer be describable with language, what replaces linguistic signification is the substance of the

land itself, “a little loose dirt.” This aesthetic replacement performs the substitution that makes the imperial subject’s base matters, in actuality, negative matters. An unsignifiable (or “loose”) materiality (or “dirt”) is all that supports imperial identity once it has been emptied of European cultural reference points, displaced as it is in a foreign land. Such negative matters, Conrad’s language suggests, dissolve rather than stabilizes imperial subjectivity—consumed by their role as an agent of environmental extraction.

This linguistic failure and its attendant subjective diminution continue to be oriented towards and affected by the landscape as a source of incomprehensible and uncontrollable agency. Various critics read Conrad’s apophatic use of language as pointing to the ways that what is not said—what cannot be said—often represents something quite present and real.<sup>781</sup> Stephen Skinner claims that manifestations of “the unsayable, or the ineffable” in Conrad’s novel pull readers beyond the “limits of the text” “through its very linguistic inadequacy.”<sup>782</sup> At Kurtz’s Inner Station, then, Marlow performs the matter that substantiates such linguistic limits, stating,

The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver—over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a sombre gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself . . . What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big,

how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well.<sup>783</sup>

The “smell of mud” pervades the surrounding environs. Akin to “dirt” as the base matter of this African landscape, this “mud” is “primaeval,” imagined as coming before civilization. The further the narrative moves into the interior of the Congo and up the Kasai, the more the landscape becomes attached to a sense of temporal backwardness as if the increasing material density triggers an attendant reversal of time’s progress.

As Marlow moves further inland, then, his own body also comes under threat of being filled by the base matters of the Congo just like the “dirt” filled Russian, for it is also invading the narrator’s own body. Michael Mayer notes that “[b]oth, the evocation of smell and of stillness in the air, function to underline the effect of rotting.”<sup>784</sup> This rotting is around Marlow, but also functions as a decay of the boundaries between self and surrounds, modern English man and colonial primeval matters. Hence Conrad writes, the “smell of mud” was “in my nostrils.” This collapses the distance between insides and outsides, connoting a too-permissive boundary-crossing between the “primeval forest” “before [his] eyes” and the “primeval mud” invading his orifices, the word “primeval” connecting the “mud” in his airways to the “forest” outside him. The presence of presumed primeval matters, then, represents a “seamlessness between nature and culture where Europeans had presumed fixed boundaries.”<sup>785</sup>

Furthermore, the land’s “high stillness” also registers another valence of its darkness in the absence of distinguishable motion “before [one’s] eyes.” Marked by an unnatural absence, the “forest,” instead of teeming with life, is devoid of it just like the grove of death. Darkness pervades the water as well, here described as a “black creek.”

Marlow continues, describing the surrounds as “rank grass,” more “mud,” and “matted vegetation.” This vegetable matter, which would in the English literary tradition, typically signify life, is akin instead to the “high stillness” of the “forest[‘s]” absence of life.<sup>786</sup> It is, like the roots in *Mrs. Dalloway*’s primeval Regent’s Park tube station, “matted,” or irreparably tangled, and conjoined so as to let through no air or light, seeming to become as if one mass. “[S]tanding higher than the wall of a temple” underscores these material environs as a construction not of human hands, as a “temple” would be, but rather made by the land itself, of the vegetative matter it fosters—a monument to its suffocating fecundity. The jungle, Vandertop notes, and its “dense vegetation” are “agent[s] of extra-human revolt,” whose “disturbing agency” seem to hint at a desire for “revenge upon man.”<sup>787</sup> The “matted vegetation” is also in excess, then, of such “civilized” objects, standing *higher*. Marlow adds: “[a]ll this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself.” The stationmaster’s words, like his insides, are empty. Reinforcing the extralinguistic force of such environmental matters, the matter of the jungle, called here by a totalizing demonstrative with no referent (“all this”), embodies a silence with the potential to speak as “mute.” It also suggests a consciousness that awaits communication as “expectant.” As environmental interlocutor, this jungle receives no sufficient correspondence from the “man” who “jabbered,” speaking only nonsense. Conrad ironizes language here, depicting a matter with substance but no words and a subject with words but no substance. The final tally leaves a terrifying power in the camp of the “mute” agency of colonial environmental matters.

The figure towards which Marlow travels—Kurtz—is also made of empty, excessive language. The passage ends with Marlow’s musing, “I had heard Mr. Kurtz

was in there. I had heard enough about it, too—God knows! Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it.”<sup>788</sup> Despite an excess of talk about Kurtz (“I had heard . . . I had heard enough . . . God knows!”), nothing of substance is as of yet communicated. Language refers to no “imag[inable]” reality. It is as if the material presence of this “mute” landscape penetrates and silences the interior spaces of those who dwell there in much the same way it dominates external reality. Hence, the environment is described as “that dumb thing,” “confoundedly big,” “that thing that couldn’t talk and perhaps was deaf as well.” *Heart of Darkness* depicts the silencing impact of this colonial-primeval space as an emptying out of the signifying capacity of the language that is foundational to the European subject. Darkness is iterated again but in signaling no more knowable a meaning for they are only words “heard” without “any image with it”—a symbolic blindness that extends the forest’s dumbness and deafness to an inability to illuminate knowledge, any longer/here, through language. Material mattering has replaced mattering as meaning.

Language by its very nature is a system that refers to absent matters. This abstract reality of language is reified in the negative matter of Conrad’s literary landscapes. Marlow’s language attempts (and fails) to apprehend the real material environments of colonial Africa, calling attention to the tension between the English subject’s construction through images of native land and their constitution by the (absent) colonial lands that the English nation actually founds itself increasingly upon. This failed attempt performs the dissolution of difference between the European subject’s linguistic darkness and the dark matters of African environs and black bodies, these matters serve as the ultimate Other *against which* the supposedly enlightened imperial subject defines itself, but which in

reality it founds itself *upon*. By revealing the subject to be founded on an ignorance and not knowledge of its base matters, *Heart of Darkness*'s linguistic mattering dissolves the imagined base matters of English subjectivity, rendering them negative matters. Hence, despite their being marked as wild by European subjectivity, wilderness here denotes nothing differentiable, presaging Sassoon's depiction of the war-time experience of that other wilderness, conveying there as well only of a sense of lostness—an orientation within and not a set of coordinates in space. Englishness is not what it has appeared to be.

The text, then, grounds the subject's very stability in a world constituted only by empty words referring to no material origin as the English national imaginary has led many to believe. Caitlin Vandertop notes that ““the horror”” in *Heart of Darkness* “is externalized as a facet of the environment[,] gestur[ing] toward the paralyzing structural embeddedness of colonial exploitation within the material and architectural forms of the metropolis itself.”<sup>789</sup> As an extension of this, the text reminds the reader that the linguistically constituted English subject's semiotic mastery over their material surrounds is what undergirds the imperial subject's imagined identity. In the erasure of language as evidence of referential realism, Conrad's modernist environmental aesthetics mark this simultaneous tension and permeability between subject and matter as darkness as an unlocatable threat only able to be loosely associated with a wild nature and racialized other.

The primary example of this exists in Kurtz's closeness to Othered matter—the African tribal peoples, the wild landscape. The novel constructs Kurtz's closeness to foreign matters as a detachment from that linguistic constitution that grounds imperial subjectivity. Kurtz's depiction as an embodiment of excessive language, language that

proliferates but contains no verifiable meaning, amounts then to a substitution of mattering as meaning for material mattering as the core of his subjectivity. That his indissociability from colonial, environmental matters is depicted as the root of his madness and reason for his death in the novel underscores the way Conrad's text functions as a container for imperial anxieties about the danger of defining Englishness through its association with empire. Myers reads the character as an emblematic "European self" who's attempted "acts of mastery" over "the ecology of Africa as a whole" result in "Kurtz's madness" and "his atrocities against the human and non-human inhabitants of the Congo."<sup>790</sup> I would like to suggest, alternatively, that while Kurtz does represent the imperialist consumption of natural resources, Marlow's language also opens up the possibility that European anxieties are not simply due to a lack of material mastery over nature, but rather an epistemological-linguistic lack. Tony Brown also argues Kurtz's and Marlow's encounter with darkness as wilderness symbolizes an encounter with the absence of linguistic signifyability, reading wilderness amaterially, as representative of a space outside civilization and absent of its ordering codes, fueled by subjects' distance from the European metropole while on the colonial frontier. This distance divorces them from the "constitutive codes" that form the subject's fantasy frame—the psychic structure that allows linguistically constituted European subjects to orient themselves in the world and as coherent individual selves.<sup>791</sup> This, states Brown, brings about a "cultural psychosis," threatening a dissolution of the subject.<sup>792</sup>

Demonstrating that such imperialist dynamics are imbricated in the environment from which they extract their substance, I argue that at the climax of the novel Marlow's

final encounter with Kurtz articulates these anxieties as bound up in an environmental discourses of base matters, and more specifically, a negative material aesthetics.

I tried to break the spell—the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations. And, don't you see, the terror of the position was not in being knocked on the head—though I had a very lively sense of that danger, too—but in this, that I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him—himself—his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air . . . But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad.<sup>793</sup>

By characterizing Kurtz as “unlawful” and “a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low,” Marlow links the loss of the civilized self to one detached from a grounding in base matters (“earth”) through his the detachment from language itself (“in the name of”) and its attendant cultural mores (“unlawful”). This enacts a double articulation of the imperial subject's relationship to mattering, one that contradicts



itself: it both links “earth” and the linguistic codes of “name” and “law” as well as detaching the speaking-subject from “ground.”

Kurtz is depicted, then, as totally deracinated from the “ground” named and coded as “earth.” Being thusly ungrounded, Kurtz symbolizes the dislodgement (“kicked himself loose”) of the imperial subject from native, knowable land (“earth” as synonymous with “ground”) as they think themselves in Marlow’s England where “earth” is most often synonymous with soil, that generative agricultural matter on which the nation could no longer solely rely, needing colonial ghost acres as well. A deracination that occurs in the confrontation with the excessive materiality of colonial spaces: too much matter detaches one from the land as an English construct for national stability. Kurtz becomes, then, totally, irredeemably alien—unearthly—independent of global, imperial world order, symbolizing instead the grand illusion of imperial material control of the earth that collapses in the colonial wilderness. “[E]arth” stands in opposition to other words that refer to the environment throughout the novel: “Nature,” “wilderness,” and more specific locutions such as “estuary” and “jungle.” Moreover, Kurtz not only leaves earth, but “kicked the very earth to pieces,” hence, his departure is not just a realignment of an imperial self as an adopted colonial one, but rather a destruction of the very foundation of the imperial self. The shattering of the earth, then, represents the fragmentation of the imperial subject, as symbolized by Kurtz, into “pieces” that, language having become impotent in the face of this wilderness, cannot be narrated back together again by Conrad’s tale, and must, instead be contained.

Hence, the environmental aesthetics of darkness within the embedded narrative are linked to the frame narrative’s performative location and containment of a colonial

environmental primitivism. Conrad's narrative attempts to contain this aesthetic instability by distancing the speaking English subject from such destabilizing matters—associating the environmental space that contains Africa's so-called dark matters with a temporal regression into primitive time. Eliding space and time in Africa, the text's primitivist narrative produces a denial of coevalness between English and colonial lands. Yet, in the mirroring of two river journeys (Thames and Kasai)—each associated with a primitive time (past for England and present for Africa), the text also exposes the lie of their temporal distinction. Residues of English primitivism are still contained in English landscapes as a result of Marlow's projection of ancient English historical origins accruing materially on the shores of the Thames river estuary.

Scholars have increasingly sought to situate the novel within a rapidly shifting Victorian scientific paradigm from which its nascent modernism arises. Ian Watt notes that Conrad was concerned with the implications of recent developments in natural science, especially emergent theories of geophysics and evolution, depicting these concerns in *Heart of Darkness* as both endorsement of Victorian ideologies and anxiety over the outcome of their being taken to their logical yet extreme conclusions on the colonial frontier.<sup>794</sup> While theories of evolution were often used to solidify European exceptionalism and progress as inexorable, McCarthy argues that Conrad shows how it can also deconstruct notions of human transcendence.<sup>795</sup>

White and Finston add that, as my discussion of Fabian in Chapter 5 explains, Anthropology also reinforced primitivist discourses that built on geologic theories of evolution and informed the “false primitive stereotypes” that populate the novel's latter, upriver journey.<sup>796</sup> Samir Elbarbary addresses the use of primitivist discourse in Conrad's

era noting that the “fascination with primordial darkness” present “in *Heart of Darkness* . . . was prevalent in the late nineteenth century.”<sup>797</sup> Furthermore, Elbarbary regards the image of the nonhuman as the primary way “to signify the ‘primitive’,” and while he prioritizes the animal quality by which “Marlow stresses his primitive, bestial predisposition,” the notion that figures such as Kurtz constitute a Jungian “primordial experience” that seem “as if it had emerged from the abyss of prehuman ages” suggests the rapacious quality of primitive discourse to evoke the nonhuman from earliest microbial soup to the vegetal to the early hominid in depictions of “neo-primitives” as “evolutionary throwback[s].”<sup>798</sup> My analysis departs from the typical approach to this novel as a *reflection* of its environmental, scientific, and imperialist historical contexts (of which the above arguments are exemplary). Building on those histories, I examine more closely how the reader’s intended anxious affective response to *Heart of Darkness*’s dark material aesthetics reveals an emergent, nascent history of unacknowledged environmental thought. I claim that this epistemology *creates* rather than merely reflects a modernist discursive paradigm whereby the extractive logic of imperialism is naturalized. In contributing constitutively to it, the novel helps to obscure the negative matters on which English national imaginary is founded and the racialized environmental discourse that attempts to solidify the increasingly fractured national self in the face of imperial encroachment on home spaces.

Marlow’s journey from England to Africa, therefore, enacts its denial of coevalness through the aesthetic disjunction that is constructed between the civilizing light of *England* and the primitive darkness of African lands. This reinforcement of aesthetic difference in the separation between frame and embedded narrative spatializes

the motion of time and marks African space as both historically anachronistic and materially other. Though the novel's aesthetics mark darkness as England's historical past, however, I claim the England narrative's textual containment (its literal embeddedness) of the African tale situates darkness-as-colonial-mattering at the very heart of England's linguistic self-constitution—as its base matters. Hence, while, as McCarthy notes, “[f]or most Europeans, temporality was a way of measuring cultural progress,” and Lyellian geology now meant that “no place (or culture) is ever safe from the deep history behind it,”<sup>799</sup> the text's primitivism works to bind such fears through the naturalization of imperial logic—evoking the concretizing effect of landscape within the English national imaginary as a bulwark against the threatening implication of those dark matters that reveal the negative matter of national England when situated as imperial England on the colonial frontier.

The frame narrative's clear linguistic description demonstrates the *enlightenment* of the imperial English subject regarding an accrual of national history on its native grounds surrounding the Thames, marking the subject who can read its national landscape as the civilized product of evolutionary, historical time. In contrast, the embedded narrative performs an encounter between imperial subject and the material excess of colonial landscapes that converts language into a system of words emptied of their referential capacities, performing a slippage between the darkness of language and the incomprehensible matters of the speaker's material surrounds.

Beginning with Marlow's descriptions of the Thames estuary, I read the frame narrative as mobilizing a primitivism that enacts a comparative English environmental historiography. By providing a sort of landscape history of this English river, the notable

flatness of history in Africa highlights and amplifies the ironic distance between English and African histories. The unnamed narrator of Conrad's frame story states of the

Thames:

Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in the august light of abiding memories.<sup>800</sup>

While England is illuminated by detailed description, light imagery, and historical narrative, the Congo this chapter has discussed thus is all aesthetic surface and darkness. Lacking depth of meaning and in excess of density of matter, it evokes a primordial landscape somehow anachronistically present in the nineteenth century. The Thames's sense of permanence, stability, and solidity is linked spatially in the passage to the English lands that surround it, depicting the river as the heart and lifeblood of the historical "race." The estuary is described as an "old river," "spread out" with "broad reach," "a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth," encompassing the globe itself by enabling England's imperial reach. The tension between a temporary view of the landscape ("decline of the day" and "short day") and the long temporality that its history suggests ("ages of good service" and "abiding memories") is contained within the site's signification as a material signifier of the "race that peopled its banks" and not just the late nineteenth-century English subject.

The narrator's racialized perspective of the land as embodied history emphasizes a deeper sense of national identity, projecting a seemingly native identity that has been naturalized by a geologic sense of time throughout the long *durée* of English history as reflected here. Hence, Mayer's suggestion that the novel enacts an "assimilation process" that is "antagonistic to the act of colonization," I argue, takes the agency ascribed to nature in the novel too far, for his comment that "nature in Africa has the power to 're-naturalize' the inorganic 'tools of the colonizer'" is undermined by the primitivist narrative containment of dangerous matters within English historically subdued natural spaces of the frame narrative.<sup>801</sup> While the encounter in the embedded narrative produces foundational anxieties, the frame narrative binds and contains them so that they do not infect Europe once Marlow has returned home. Sitting on the boat in the present of the novel, Marlow has survived (and so have those historicized English lands) to tell the tale as one apart from the history of England.

England can differentiate between past and present in reading its lands. In English lands, therefore, a historical time is legible, and darkness is able to be narrated as contained to the past. This constructs the Africa described above as an ahistorical space whose primitive environments are marked as what Anne McClintock calls anachronistic spaces with which coevalness is supposedly impossible. England's history, "when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago," in which this moment, two millennia ago, is termed "the other day," is hence depicted as legible within the materiality of its contemporary landscape.<sup>802</sup> When Conrad writes, "'And this also . . . has been one of the dark places of the earth,'" he then codifies the dark/light code as marker for the measurement of civilization's progress.<sup>803</sup> The phrase implies England's

landscape was once marked by an uncivilized culture, similar to the African one depicted in the embedded tale. This inaugurates from the start the frame narrative as bound up with primitivist discourse. “In his well-known apprehension of the Congo’s ‘prehistoric man’ clapping and stamping on the riverbank,” McCarthy says, “Marlow pierces the border between European and African humanity, while just as powerfully suggesting that the border between past and present is atrophied.”<sup>804</sup> It is only after we have read to the end and returned to re-read the beginning of the novel, that this ironic inference to darkness in England’s past—like that found in the fictionalized Africa’s present—is illuminated, however. And so to read the text for its meaning, as it invites you to, enacts a return to England’s British beginnings, participating in the decay not between England’s past and present, but between spatiotemporal distinctions in toto.

This decay ratifies the denial of colonial coevalness, rather than bringing Africa closer to England. Later in the text, within the embedded narrative, Marlow describes the Kasai river with a more explicit transliteration of temporal into spatial rhetorics:

Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, and impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances.<sup>805</sup>

This African river scene mirrors the English Thames scene at the book’s opening with the Thames motionless air, “sun” offering no light, and “gloom.”<sup>806</sup> In this sense, the narrative asks us to see them as one and the same. Because of “[t]he text’s insistence on a ‘prehistoric earth’,” “this version of time insists that Africans are themselves savages

with no indigenous culture to respect[,] [for] in Conrad's day, creationist and catastrophist geological thinkers both sketched time as directional, traveling like an arrow from one place to a particular end," an arrow distorted by the primitivism the novel ascribes to Africa in the present.<sup>807</sup> Linear time, then, applies only to English spaces, and the aesthetic similarities between the two spaces are undercut by the narrative arc of the novel in the end.

Hence, because of the historical distance proffered by Marlow's explicit use of primitive "darkness," the reader must see them less as the same and more as mirrored or inverted images of each other wherein England's past matches Africa's present. This equation of African locales in the present with the "beginnings of the world" is opposed to this English place that "*has been* one of the dark places of the earth" only in the past tense. Viewing colonial spaces atavistically allows the imperial subject to use this primitivist logic to justify colonial atrocities committed upon them while maintaining their image as empirical light of civilization. For readers, however, the anxiety produced by the aesthetics of the novel and its collapsing of such distinctions can be bound but not entirely erased. Both the maintenance of ideologies of empire and the exposure of anxieties surrounding English national identity in the face of empire are the legacy of Conrad's work.

In comparing Roman conquest of England with the English colonization of Africa, therefore, I argue that *Heart of Darkness* underscores that the extractive dynamic inherent to imperialism erases the civilized foundations of the Englishman in his consumption of African lands rather than its incorporation of them into a greater imperial body as this Roman British history is implied to have done. The English imaginary



evoked here does not, in other words, imagine African colonies will become the new beacon of civilizing light in the next age, taking up the English mantel. In order to understand more fully the historical narrative English readers may tell themselves as a result of reading this book, we will want to take a closer look at how Marlow describes England in these “dark” days of its history. Below, Marlow draws a comparison between the British and the Roman empires. He notes how those people that, according to this national mythology would one day become the English race, were also once savages in the eyes of Roman civilization. Conrad describes, “[s]and-banks, marshes, forests, savages—precious little to eat fit for a civilized man,” where the Romans had to “[I]and in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him—all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men.”<sup>808</sup> Romans came to England as the Englishman narrating his African journey went to the Congo, as part of a mission of extractive conquest. The narrative continues: “a fine” “commander” from the “Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north.”<sup>809</sup>

Despite the echo of sameness throughout, Marlow implies a small distinction—between colonizing (England’s modern relationship to Africa) and conquering (Rome’s ancient relation to England).<sup>810</sup> Hence, equating English pasts to African presents in one sense contributes to a narrative of primitivism that justifies the colonial project (despite Marlow’s stated discomfort with it), but his location of the origin of this primitivism in England itself also troubles such colonial justifications, for, unlike the Roman, who unleashed a “light” that grew to become Britain, the European presence in Africa manifests a reverse dynamic—it regrows a darkness in the European. The occluded

origins of English destabilization in the face of a seemingly excessive materiality of colonial lands lie, then, in their own past, exposed by an encounter between imperial self and colonial other, revealing the substitutive logic of imperialism that validates its environmental extractivism.

## **Part 4: Environment**

## Chapter 7—An Ecological Engagement with Modernist Matters

Thus far, this dissertation has traced the accrual of modernist aesthetics of base materiality across various sites of the English imaginary: that of the nation at home and of World War I and empire abroad. As explored in Part 1, base matters take the form of solid, concretizing matters aiding in the solidification of an England that envisions itself as always already whole, insular, and ancient through the genetic temporality embedded in images of land. Base matters also, as outlined in Part 2, manifest as the debased materiality of World War I that distorts images of land so that they no longer represent the familiarity of home, instead registering a strange and unbounded experience of time and space that leaves the war-time subject feeling paradoxically unmoored by their entrenchment. Finally, this base material aesthetic is represented in Part 3 as that excess of negative matters that appear through the imperial subject's confrontation with those colonial lands on which England depends. I have argued, then, that the affective-aesthetic paradigm of entrenchment is brought home to England after the war. Furthermore, I analyzed the way in which national subjects discover that they were always already embedded in this estranging and entrapping base materiality. The actualization of the entrenchment of the English subject explicated in Part 2—their realization that they no longer feel at home in the world—is shown, in Part 3, to be one and the same as the extractivist subjectivity undergirding the imperial English identity—its national rootedness in a negative matter, in their consumption of the ghost acres of their colonial territories.

Just as Parts 1 through 3 demonstrate how base, debased, and negative matters each function aesthetically and narratologically within the modernist works of Virginia

Woolf, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, and Joseph Conrad to continuously form and reform English national identity, Part 4 will explicate how the connections between these three base material paradigms function not chronologically or adjacently, but accretively and syncretically in the following chapters' analysis of works by Wyndham Lewis, Rebecca West, Nancy Cunard, and Helen Saunders. I have argued throughout that the perceptual distortions catalyzed by the English subject's encounter with the war and empire—as an entangled and distributed but inseparable event—produce a dissociative environmental affect. The material proximity of self to environment and English to colonized peoples—two moments of contact that are themselves indissociable—is represented through material images of mud, land, soil, and stone that circumscribe such boundaries and their porousness with anxiety and fear in the English national imaginary. The readings that follow analyze, then, the way these matters become indistinguishable from the base matters of native England, suggesting an anxiety of materiality becomes imbricated in England's native environmental aesthetics—its country house estates, its sea-side retreats, the democratic soil on which Westminster sits, and even its ancient battlefields and cairns. This alteration of the English subject's relationship to the base matters of the home front does not, I claim, simply distance the subject from once comfortable or familiar visions of English lands and histories. It threatens to blot out Victorian and Edwardian notions of homeland that felt solid as stone before the experience of World War I.

In revisiting the homey natures of England's rural spaces, Chapters 8 through 10 mobilize a more explicitly ecocritical methodology than Chapters 1 through 6, which were instead rooted in the environmental historiography and landscape studies that best

illuminated the national and imperial grounding of Englishness surrounding World War I. Ecocritical analyses proceed always from the assumption that “literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter, and ideas interact.”<sup>811</sup> Part 4’s examination of the interactions between material and ideal within the space of literary representation follows the work of Kelly Sultzbach and Geoffrey Mathes McCarthy in extending the conceptual frameworks developed by new materialist scholars into modernist studies and their matters. While Sultzbach, McCarthy, and a small group of other ecocritical modernists have, as discussed in Chapter 1, illuminated the many ways in which English modernists did not abandon a vital materiality in toto,<sup>812</sup> the chapters that follow will take up modernist matters and examine the way in which their ecological enmeshment is occluded and celebratory feelings of attachment thwarted rather than buoyed and cultivated by English modernist aesthetics. Natural representations are just as likely to transmit unsustainable ideological orientations towards the environment as they are to garner new levels of environmental awareness.

I have argued throughout that any environmental awareness possessed by modernist subjects was filtered through the literary landscapes they consumed and produced in great measure. Timothy Morton corroborates this, claiming that aesthetics are central in all periods to our apprehension of environments as well as to our ability to (re)formulate environmental epistemologies effectively.<sup>813</sup> He writes, the “view” constituted by literary and other arts can “change the world” because “[a]esthetics” “establish[es] ways of feeling and perceiving” through which “humans[’] experience [of] their place in the world” is formed.<sup>814</sup> Texts, then, “encode the literal space of their

inscription,” including “the physical and social environment of the reader.”<sup>815</sup> Though nature writing in its most accepted generic forms is all but absent from the modernist oeuvre, in English modernist literature, landscapes are still ubiquitous. Yet, “[l]andscapes,” Dana Phillips writes, “are more easily apprehended than the environments in which they are situated in space, for the simple reason that environments are not spaces but hyperspaces,” defining “hyperspaces” as linked to “the definition of the term ‘niche’ preferred by some contemporary ecologists: the niche is not an address . . . but a profession”; “[a]n *ecological niche* is a *multidimensional hypervolume*, and not all of its dimensions are spatial: likewise, an environment.”<sup>816</sup> Landscapes usually assume “metonymic relationships” between word and world, and I employ Phillips’ ecological framework in order to read modernist landscapes as sites where the ecological niche “has yet to develop tropes enabling it to come to terms with the fractured (and fractal) realities of nature” without collapsing into anxiety and even terror.<sup>817</sup>

Our focus need not be limited, then, to environmental aesthetics’ relative distance to or from realism and mimetic representation.<sup>818</sup> While the ontological world *is* many things, rightly or wrongly represented by modernists, our real concern should be with what subjects *do* in response to such material-aesthetic encounters. Despite not being explicitly *environmentalist*, modernist texts are read in Part 4, then, as part of our cultural mediation of the human-environmental relationship, analyzing the way in which they contribute to our knowledge of how environmentalist agency struggles to be sustainably enacted. By focusing on how the subject apprehends its too-closeness or desire for dissociation from base matters after the war, the chapters that follow make legible the stories the English national subject tells about itself and its orientation towards the world

in which it is *enmeshed*, often by pulling them forward from the backgrounds and subtexts to which they have previously been relegated by modernist scholars.<sup>819</sup>

In order to situate the English modernist subject's environmental affect within the context of its environmental epistemology, I situate war-time English modernism within the *Anthropocene* of which it is not only a part, but, I suggest, an exemplary manifestation.<sup>820</sup> Just as imperialism first made Britain a global environmental actor,<sup>821</sup> globalization after the official decolonization of imperial territories made sure the era of human species as geologic agent was here to stay.<sup>822</sup> Paul Crutzen and Erick Stoermer—the scientists who coined the term—note that given “impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proying to use the term ‘anthropocene’ for the current geological epoch” beginning in “the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century” and “coincide[ing] with James Watt’s invention of the steam engine in 1784” in England, “because, during the past two centuries, the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable.”<sup>823</sup> The Anthropocene, in its focus on the geological and ecological agency of the human species “historically and collectively,” then, makes legible not just the damage to non-human nature, but also the fact that “the warming the planet threatens is not the geological planet itself but the very conditions, both biological and geological, on which the survival of human life as developed in the Holocene period depends,” a warming that, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, is a result of “global connections forged by trade, empires, and capitalism.”<sup>824</sup> Furthermore, Bonnueil and Fressoz point out that “the Anthropocene challenges certain distinctions that were formerly deemed fundamental to the modern West: human exceptionalism and



the ontological break between the human being as *subject* of entitlement and the *object* of nature.”<sup>825</sup> Yet, they contend, recent histories of the Anthropocene demonstrate not a sudden contemporary awakening to our destructive environmental agency as humans, but rather that, “it is clear that the moderns possessed their own forms of environmental reflectivity . . . our ancestors destroyed environments in full awareness of what they were doing.”<sup>826</sup> Part 4 continues this dissertation’s quest, then, to find in English modernist war-time literature an answer to the question: what allowed for such counter-intuitive behaviors to persist?

Part of the issue is that global warming and those environmentally exploitative precursors that mark the Anthropocene as such present particular narratological and aesthetic challenges to humanity—both on and off the page. Morton has coined the term *hyperobject* to describe global warming—casting this purely material phenomenon in the phenomenological terms through which people perceive it. Because hyperobjects “involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to” they are “invisible to humans for stretches of time,” only “exhibit[ing] their effects *interobjectively*,” meaning that “they can be [only] detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between [the] aesthetic properties of objects.”<sup>827</sup> In other words, hyperobjects are never directly visible but can only be perceived partially in the effects they have on more perceptible objects—such as rising sea levels, hot days, dying animals, or human refugees. Hence, “[t]hinking them is intrinsically tricky.”<sup>828</sup> Because they can only be apprehended indirectly, they come to us as always already “distorted” images, a distortion that occurs through “the entity in which they make their mark”—the perceiving subject.<sup>829</sup> Our inability to see a hyperobject whole makes it difficult, then, to narrate the

problems of the Anthropocene. This is made doubly difficult by the fact that the “human reaction to the time of hyperobjects . . . is the dissolution of the notion of world.”<sup>830</sup> The world as we knew it is fundamentally altered and a new way of being with/as enmeshed matter must be invented and/or reckoned with. It is in this way that I suggest that World War I is, itself, a hyperobject for England. After encountering the trenches, the world as they knew it seemed to end and a new way of being in the world was called for—and along with it, a renewed commitment to modernist aesthetics. As partial and distorted, the base matters of modernism only register the war’s effects; they cannot re-present the war itself. The incomplete aesthetic registration of the hyperobject that is World War I is due primarily, I argue, to that war’s imbrication in the even more spatially and temporally distributed event of which it is itself an effect: British imperialism.

Morton’s description of the “overall aesthetic ‘feel’ of the time of hyperobjects is a sense of asymmetry between the infinite powers of cognition and the infinite being of things,”<sup>831</sup> wherein “[t]he gap between phenomenon and thing yawns open, disturbing my sense of presence and being in the world.”<sup>832</sup> This affective orientation mirrors the disjunctive material experience of World War I that I have read as encoded in English modernist literature.<sup>833</sup> Not only is the war itself a sort of hyperobject, but, the “shock of hyperobjects is elucidated” in a disjunction from national base matters that is enacted within and through it.<sup>834</sup> It is in the broken and distorted landscapes of the war that the English subject encounters those alienating environmental materialities of the colonial frontier from which it has distanced itself by depicting England as self-contained *island*. The “iceberg [that] appears” in war-time environmental aesthetics is then, a registration of empire’s inauguration of the Anthropocene, of the coming global warming and other

destructive environmental impacts—least of which is the reorientation away from habitable environmental enmeshment that this dissertation continues to trace.<sup>835</sup> Morton’s injunction that momentary aesthetic registrations of hyperobjects “preserv[e] the feeling that we humans are playing catch-up with reality,” then, correlates to my argument in Part 2: that the war actualizes a subjective dissociation from environment that was backgrounded though present before the war.<sup>836</sup> The English subject, then, does not know “whether the end of the world is already happening, or whether perhaps *it might already have taken place*.”<sup>837</sup> The ideas of Nature constituted by the English national imaginary’s dependence on an aesthetics of land have, then, long eroded sustainable environmental epistemologies through the extractive practices perpetrated at home and throughout the empire. Though largely illegible before the war, the war-time subject’s experience thrusts this awareness upon the subject belatedly in the disassembled lands and bodies of World War I’s material debasement and the sundering of English subject from comforting visions of Natural harmony once thought to be native to Edwardian England. Hence, Morton explains, “Nature is the latent form of the Anthropocene waiting to emerge as catastrophe.”<sup>838</sup> While Morton calls for any “ecological thought” that hopes to respond to global warming to “unground the human by forcing it back onto the ground, which is to say, standing on a gigantic object called Earth inside a gigantic entity called biosphere,” the entrenched and extractive English subject of those modernist texts responding to war-time succeeds only in registering the uncomfortably paradoxical feeling of being “unground[ed]” by being “forc[ed] back onto,” or even into, “the ground.”<sup>839</sup>

Part 4, then, continues, as the pages that come before it have, under the assumption it shares with many scholars of the Anthropocene that literary study is, along with the sciences and other humanities, crucial to our understanding of environmental exploitation in the age of global climate change. While public focus on solving the climate crisis has centered on science and reason, “reason may not be all that guides us in our effective collective choices.”<sup>840</sup> Because “we must understand how we entered the Anthropocene *despite* very consistent warnings, knowledge, and opposition, and forge a new and more credible narrative of what has happened to us,” we must remember that “certain socio-economic and cultural processes are far more determining than the quantity of scientific information,” especially “such phenomena as . . . story-telling.”<sup>841</sup> This dissertation is a methodological acknowledgement of the fact that “it is not enough to measure in order to understand, and that we cannot count on the accumulation of scientific data to carry out the necessary revolutions or involutions,” seeking, as Bonneuil and Fressoz claim we must, to “forg[e] new narratives for the Anthropocene and thus new imaginaries. Rethinking the past to open up the future.”<sup>842</sup>

Because my deployment of ecocritical methodologies locates within English Modernism a base material aesthetic that allows for the hyperobject of war-as-imperial-environmental-disaster to emerge, my methodology is also then necessarily bound up with the that of new materialists. New materialism takes up precisely those “material artifacts and natural stuff that populate our environment,” matters that we tend to “take . . . for granted,” it is guided by the fact that “[w]e live our everyday lives surrounded by, immersed in, matter” that “[o]ur existence depends from one moment to the next.”<sup>843</sup>

Diana Coole and Samantha Frost explain that the need to recover matter for cultural and literary studies arises from the “apparent paradox in thinking about matter”:

as soon as we do so we seem to distance ourselves from it, and within that space that opens up, a host of immaterial things seem to emerge: language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind, soul; also imagination, emotions, values, meaning, and so on. These have typically been presented as idealities fundamentally different from matter and valorized as superior to the baser desires of biological material or the inertia of physical stuff.<sup>844</sup>

Language and matter, they argue, have been erroneously separated in critical practice for decades, a statement that holds especially true for modernist studies until fairly recently. Despite our disciplinary ignorance of matter, however, “material factors,” as demonstrated by this dissertation thus far, still play a role in “shaping society and circumscribing human prospects.”<sup>845</sup> In particular, new materialism challenges “some of the most basic assumptions that have underpinned” our understanding of both individual and collective “material practices such as the ways we labor on, exploit, and interact with nature.”<sup>846</sup>

Rethinking “the nature of matter and the matter of nature,” Coole and Frost declare, “calls upon us to reorient ourselves profoundly in relation to the world, to one another, and to ourselves.”<sup>847</sup> Bill Brown’s theorization of “things” strikes at the heart of such matters:

we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls . . . the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of changed relations to the human subject

and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. And, yet, the word *things* holds within it a more audacious ambiguity. It denotes a massive generality as well as particularities.<sup>848</sup>

This dissertation has sought specifically to elucidate the “thingness” of *English* matters where they “sto[p] working” to concretize and naturalize English nationhood on that thing that is land—with all its mud, stones, and soil: on the Western Front and the colonial frontier. English subjectivity entered the modernist period very much “bound up” in “the philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends” through an “escape from materiality,” transcending it via its imagined “mastery of nature,” an “endeavor” that, Jane Bennett claims, is always “aporetic or quixotic.”<sup>849</sup> The base matters of English national subjectivity thus far theorized and analyzed are then what Bennett calls “image[s] of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter,” despite the national imaginary they enlivened.<sup>850</sup> Such images, she argues, “fee[d] human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption,”<sup>851</sup> as is seen in Part 3’s discussion of English imperialism.

The chapters included in Part 4, then, continue to trace the ways that, as Karen Barad claims, matter and meaning are “inextricably fused together,” such that “[*m*]attering is simultaneously a matter of substance and significance.”<sup>852</sup> Never entirely instrumentalizable or consumable, the material environment on which the English subject finds itself continually reconstitutes Englishness in unforeseen ways, for, as Chapter 1’s discussion of landscape illustrated, “matter and meaning are always already immanently enfolded and transitional.”<sup>853</sup> Furthermore, because, as Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino explain, “the world’s material phenomena are [themselves] knots in a vast

network of agencies, which can be ‘read’ and interpreted as forming narratives, stories,”<sup>854</sup> this “‘storied matter’”<sup>855</sup> tells a different story than England reads in its land before the war. The story of war-time matter is that signification which *Heart of Darkness* perceives anxiously as extra-linguistic. It emerges in the material-subjective interactions of English subjectivity of war and empire as in tension, therefore, with base matters of English national identity. I conclude this dissertation with chapters that, then, foreground repeatedly not just what becomes legible as a result of a modernist environmental aesthetics of base materiality, but, also, what, as I suggest in Chapter 5, is occluded by it. Oppermann and Iovino note that “[t]o overlook the complexity of this landscape of forces . . . leads not only to a very partial vision of the world’s processes, but also to behaviors whose consequences might affect the entire biosphere.”<sup>856</sup> This fact forms the ethical bases of my dissertation, for the extractivist roots “overlooked” by the entrenched English subject’s discomfort with its loss of the illusion of solid national ground does indeed have grave “consequences” for “the entire biosphere.”

Before embarking on the chapters that follow, a reading of Wyndham Lewis’s heavily nationalist Vorticist manifesto will help to illustrate the dangers of a national imaginary that distances itself from Nature but does not anchor it afresh in a more sustainable materiality. Lewis’s theorizations of the new directions he feels English aesthetics should and are well-positioned to take ground themselves in those same base matters of native English land at precisely the moment when England is on the cusp of World War I and at the height of its imperial dominance in 1914. In the first installment of Lewis’s journal *Blast*, his vorticist manifesto theorizes a national realignment of artist and environment that breaks radically from the realist and romantic forebears of literary

modernism in England. Because our art is a native outgrowth of the English nation, he suggests, “we insist that what is actual and vital for the South, is ineffectual and unactual in the North.”<sup>857</sup> Not simply life (the “vital”) but reality itself (the “actual”) is bounded here by organic senses of national land. But, he seems to contradict himself, we are not patriots. “We have made it quite clear that there is nothing . . . picturesquely patriotic about our contentions.”<sup>858</sup> Distancing modernist environmental aesthetics from those rooted in “natural” landscapes, Lewis elaborates on this “North[ern]” “vital[ism],” by explaining that “[t]he English Character is based on the Sea” and so “the art for these climates . . . must be a northern flower,” concluding there is a “specific nature of the art destined to grow up in this country.”<sup>859</sup>

The diction he uses to delimit what constitutes the national character of art is couched in a natural lexicon. The nation is a “[s]ea”-“based” “climate,” the “country” a material container “in” which things “grow” like a garden or wild landscape. But Lewis’s national nature, he is careful to differentiate, is not natural. “It is not a question of the characterless material climate around us.”<sup>860</sup> Embracing the dissociative affects that destabilize war-time and imperial subjects elsewhere, Lewis argues that “English”-ness should be conceived of as deracinated from a “material climate,” not rooted in the land of England itself, which he deems “characterless,” but rather in the “enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert of modern life.” Its enormity confounds ideas of natural space, it’s noisy “jangling” does not resemble Wordsworth or Hardy’s quiet meadows, it appears both hyper-realist (“journalistic”) and fantastical (“fairy”), and it presents as the starkness of “desert” more than the muddled complication of the jungle (or woodland). This unnatural national nature that must be the foundation of a new English art is instead



urban and industrial. Lewis founds this national aesthetic instead on the defamiliarized nature that emerges from the industrial revolution of which England is the birthplace.

In contradistinction to the many modernist war writers who saw in the war the worst products of their industrial lineage, Lewis and his fellow Vorticists felt that the future of art lay in an embrace of the urban, industrial characteristics of English materiality. Lewis's Vorticism embraces this newly transformed nature rather than mourning the losses that might be its cost. This new nature is a world remade in the English image. England, in the words of fellow vorticist Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, becomes the vortex that sucks the "LIFE," that "MOVING AGENT," of the modern world towards its center.<sup>861</sup> Lewis elaborates, stating: "our industries, and the Will that determined, face to face with its needs, the direction of the modern world, has reared up steel trees where green ones were lacking; has exploded in useful growths, and found wilder intricacies than those of Nature."<sup>862</sup> The unnatural national nature that Lewis's modernism embraces is "industr[y]," a "Will" that "direct[s]" the "world." English industrialism (and therefore extractivism) is heralded and welcomed here as the base matter of England's new nature. Reinforcing this transcendence of Nature, Englishness is characterized by "steel," "explo[sion]," and "wilder intricacies." Unable to escape nature's forms, however, these extreme matters are still "trees," and "growths," despite having dispensed with the apparently calmer "intricacies" of a "green" "Nature."

Lewis goes on to identify explicitly the industrial nature that constitutes the "Modern World," arguing that this world's "appearance" and "spirit" are "due almost entirely to Anglo-Saxon genius."<sup>863</sup> Demonstrating the explicit entanglement of racialized ethnic national discourse and environmental aesthetics, Lewis professes a nativism that

claims: “[m]achinery, trains, steam-ships, all that distinguishes externally our time, came far more from here than anywhere else.”<sup>864</sup> The natural environment of England is redefined here as those man-made industrial “forms of machinery, Factories, newer and vaster buildings, bridges and works” that Lewis describes as being “naturally, around us” as if they were so many forests and waterways.<sup>865</sup> Lewis’s “MANIFESTO” expresses then, I claim, the emergence of English modernist aesthetics *as* a reformulation of the relationship between nation and nature, whereby one (nation) consumes and replaces the other (nature). This modernism seeks to found a new aesthetic order—“electrified,” “bursting [old forms] like nitrogen,” “volcanic chaos”—in which the “character of this necessary native art” is created in the erasure of the distinction between nature and nation implied in the phrase “LIFE, that is, ENGLAND.”<sup>866</sup>

**Chapter 8—Dirt, Foreign Matters, and Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier***

As laid about in Chapter 7, the way that matter matters in English modernism leads to an epistemological crisis at the core of the English national imaginary during World War I. Chapter 8, then, analyses Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), arguing that the novel encodes the English national landscape with anxieties of empire through the representation of negative matters as embedded in and constitutive of native base matters. English anxieties surrounding empire take two forms. The first is a fear of imperial others, echoing those of Conrad’s Africa encounter at home in England. The second is an anxiety about the slippage between England’s national and British imperial identity, expressing unironically those inconsistencies that Woolf reveals in her works. As in Chapter 6, the fear of imperial others presents as a perceived threat to the English national self. Having set her text on the homefront, however, West’s novel manifests this as a fear of invasion that goes beyond the body to the land itself. This invasion is depicted not as a military incursion, but rather as a vaguer sense of unwanted penetration or infiltration through her projecting of metaphors of nonhuman infestation onto figures standing in for the imperial Other in the novel. Anxieties over English national identity as empire appear, furthermore, as a worrisome inability to locate a stable foundation for Englishness within the boundaries of England proper. England’s and Britain’s semantic invocation of two different signifieds—one imagining itself as a small bounded island in the Atlantic, the other being a distributed constellation of global spaces, only held together conceptually. The cognitive dissonance created by an imperial English

imaginary that asks the English national subject to see these two signifieds as one and the same is the subject of West's novel.

One source of this instability is the unacknowledged fact discussed in Part 3 that England is materially and economically dependent on colonial lands—on the literal spaces and peoples of empire—in order to maintain its veneer of Englishness at home. The negative matters of West's depictions of the English country house estate are characterized by an aesthetics of material oozing, of spatial permeability, of taint, of undesirable foreign spaces cropping up within the domestic via material remnants or trace elements of elsewhere. This mark of the foreign on the domestic is a negative matter because it employs material metaphors to represent the unstable boundaries of Englishness, rather than to create a sense of belonging and social cohesion. The base matters of the novel appear as landscapes subdued by Englishness, yet, in the process also call attention to the fabricated nature of Englishness itself. This mark of the foreign appears within the domestic spaces of West's English landscape in two ways: as the landscape of the front and as the unwelcome stain of "outsiders" on the interior landscape. These internal outsiders are aesthetically linked to spaces of empire and to working class spaces. Within the tropology of the novel, these three stains (war, empire, class) become incapable of disentanglement.

The spaces of foreign war that invade domestic England are marked by the familiar tropology of mud as well as other debased material aesthetics such as dirt become corpse. These function as a reminder of England's material instability, setting into relief more foundational threats to Englishness: those of its colonial and neocolonial dominions represented as nefarious and boundary-blurring negative matters on English

soil, those of its domestic industrial sites represented as unwanted stains excluded from the English vision of its purer more stable country house estates. Finally, the negative material aesthetics of West's novel reveal that a metaphoric tropicalism appears on the landscapes of Baldry Court, registering the actual dependence of the Baldry family—as microcosm for England itself—on its Mexican mines. The failure to make tropical aesthetics *matter* by reading their significance in connecting England to its neocolonial holdings, in the end, is narrated as that which puts England's future, and global environments, most at risk.

*The Return of the Soldier* tells the story of three women—Jenny, Kitty, and Margaret—all of whom welcome home Chris Baldry, their returning soldier. Jenny, Chris's cousin, narrates the novel describing its setting in an emblematic English country house estate in the countryside as distinct from the spaces of World War I that intrude on its beauty and the dirty industrial town where Chris's old lover, Margaret, resides. In addition to narrating Chris's shell shocked return to Baldry Court and his recovery that allows him to return to the Front, Jenny relays the tension between Chris's Edwardian past where he was forced to leave his love Margaret for the family's silver mines in Mexico and the present formed by his marriage to Kitty upon returning and taking up his proper aristocratic country house seat. Forgetting his present, Chris remembers only his past upon his return, and seeks refuge with Margaret who visits often to Kitty's dismay. The novel closes by revealing a triple foreclosure of Chris's future, and symbolically England's as well: he is cured by being reminded of the death of his son with Kitty—his only potential heir; this divorces him once again from his happy past with Margaret who returns to her working class life and husband and also forces him, now well again, to

return to the war where he will most likely be killed. All the while Jenny's descriptions of English lands are stained by matters of war mud, working class dirt, and colonial heat—collapsing the three environments into the English land that binds them all together as that which they exist to support.

*Matters of War and Empire Haunt the Periphery of the Domestic Imperial View*

The reader is introduced early on in the text to the English estate on which most of West's novel is set—Baldry Court. West's depiction of the country-house renders it the root and emblem of a native English history of superiority. Though the story told by its surrounding lands tempers the stony solidity of an insular English transcendence of colonial matters through the foreign matters that stain that place, the house still stands as a stone monument to the imperial view, embedded centrally in emblematic English spaces. Jenny, our protagonist, states:

[I] turned to the window, leaning my forehead against the glass and staring unobservantly at the view. You probably know the beauty of that view; for when Chris [her Soldier] rebuilt Baldry Court after his marriage, he handed it over to architects who had not so much the wild eye of the artist as the knowing wink of the manicurist, and between them they massaged the dear old place into matter for innumerable photographs in the illustrated papers.<sup>867</sup>

The passage underscores how what is envisaged is not so much a material environment as a view or picture of England's negative matters. The text accentuates this gaze, orienting the reader both through narrative and architecture: “turned to the window,” “staring unobservantly at the view,” “the beauty of that view,” “wild eye,” “knowing wink,” “photographs,” “illustrated papers.” In fact, the hyper-visuality of the landscape *as*

*viewed* from the house, becomes like a work of visual art: sculpture or painting more than journalistic photograph reporting something real. West continues,

[t]he house lies on the crest of Harrowweald, and from its windows the eye drops to miles of emerald pastureland lying wet and brilliant under a westward line of sleek hills blue with distance and distant woods, while nearer it range the suave decorum of the lawn and the Lebanon cedar the branches of which are like darkness made palpable, and the minatory gauntnesses of the topmost pines in the wood that breaks downward, its bare boughs a close texture of browns and purples, from the pond on the hill's edge.<sup>868</sup>

Like a sculpture, “Baldry Court” is “massaged . . . matter,” like a painting, “Harrowweald” is marked by “emerald,” “lying wet,” a “westward line,” “blue,” a “close texture of browns and purples.” The use of color and shape over texture, smell, and sound reduces the landscape to a picture rather than a real environ—a negative rather than base matter. This view and the landscape it manifests is constructed simultaneously as distinctly English and imperial. For the first and one of only seven times in the novel, West employs a direct address of the reader, using the word “you” outside of dialogue, having Jenny state frankly, “*You* probably know the beauty of that view,” implicating a universal national subject in the consumption and integration of such images, its readership bound by their foreknowledge of “that view.” As if we are being let in on a secret we already know, we are invited to follow her gaze. In contrast to the failure of linguistic signification in *Heart of Darkness*, this gaze appears the gaze of a successful surveyor, of an imperial eye surveying its possessions. It pretends neutrality (“unobservantly”) or indifference, but the language belies this affect.

Despite the text's seemingly successful attempts to code England's negative matters as native base matters, just where the view becomes most symbolic of England's imperialism it reveals the marginal presence of colonial matters on its lands, matters that also become representative of the English presence in the war's foreign battlegrounds. Baldry Court is described as if it were a ship sailing the seas: on a "crest," it looks down on a space "lying wet and brilliant," "sleek" and "blue." As a maritime empire before all else, the English landscape contains within its domestic spaces this motion outwards from England towards the would-be lands of its imperial dominion. Past the sea-hills, West emphasizes all else is "blue with distance and distant," repeating the word to underscore the spatial reaches of this view. At this point of "distance," the passage breaks away from an aesthetics of English bounty ("emerald pastureland") and, I claim, encounters the boundary-marker of this imperial gaze: "the Lebanon Cedar." Notable for its break in the otherwise domestically saturated space, this English landscape is marked now by a Lebanese growth. The tree's presence there is a sign of the wealth of empire, that such exotic species would be transplanted here. Though never colonized by Britain, Lebanon represented the eastern boundary line for the empire at this time (during World War I). The reference, then, conjures up the war's eastern front as well as those symbolically darker spaces beyond its imperial control. The British Egyptian Expeditionary Force advanced the Sinai and Palestine Campaign beginning in March of 1916, in the end taking Syria in the battles of Damascus and Aleppo in 1918 as a result of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 wherein French and British diplomats clandestinely divided up the Ottoman Empire (following a similar agreement with Russia in 1915) into zones of influence that would fall to the two empires after the war. Lebanon was at the



time a part of Syria and was occupied by English troops and given over to French control after the war. The material aesthetics of the passage then demonstrate the slippage between colonial lands and those over which World War I was fought.

The collusion of matters of war and empire on English land marks the limit point of a pure English space. After the foreign marker, the estate's rolling hills no longer appear "emerald" green, but manifest instead a "darkness made palpable" and the "minatory gauntness of the topmost pines," whose matters are so thick as to appear dark, threatening violence in their similarity to pointy swords. The Sinai and Palestine campaign would likely have been on West's mind as she wrote this book (in 1916 and 1917). Her choice to set it in March 1916 links this narrative to the start of that campaign, much discussed in the newspapers that West, a journalist herself, would most certainly have read, down to the very month.<sup>869</sup> Furthermore, the "wood" itself "breaks downward" and all combine to align the "Lebanese" marker of foreignness on this English landscape as constituted by the imperial gaze. Like Conrad's novel, darkness here means two things: first, there is a literal darkening of the landscape that moves from "brilliant" "emerald" and "blue" to "darkness made palpable" and a "close texture of browns and purples," second, the more "distance" there is between center (Baldry Court on the "crest" atop the "hill") and periphery (beyond the "Lebanese" tree and into a woods "downward" into the spaces of empire), the more this darkness becomes associated with racialized colonial notions of the spaces of empire populated by people of darker skin tones and nature insidious. Internal and external national spaces are collapsed together and the spaces of foreign war invade and taint West's domestic landscapes of England as threats to English imperial dominance.

West's inclusion of matters of war and empire in the emblematic countryside landscape of Harrowweald demonstrates, I claim, the simultaneous attempt of Englishness as articulated through its base matters to separate England from the threats posed by World War I and imperialism by representing them as of different natures on its periphery. Yet, by encoding them as part of that landscape from the start of the novel, the quintessential matter of *England* is revealed to always already contains its others. More than simply containing it, as the novel progresses this chapter demonstrates that debased and othered matters encroach further into the interior of Baldry Court, infecting its foundations and revealing them to be negative matters—reliant on the materiality of war and empire in order to maintain its own.

Hence, the view addressed above seems quickly to be corrupted by the war whose matters taint England's through the novel's aesthetic-affective response. Jenny immediately qualifies the lens through which the reader views this place's aesthetics, noting: "[t]hat day its beauty was an affront to me."<sup>870</sup> "[I]t's beauty" refers to the surfaces of the English landscape. That West chooses to express the tension between the landscape's legibility by "You" the shared national collective, and "me," the "I" that is Jenny is illuminated by the land's affective impact on her. In its echoing of the *Western Front*, West's use of the word "affront" indicates Jenny's apprehension over the eponymous soldier's location abroad in World War I—the dislocation of the "master" of the house. An affront semantically suggests a belligerent attack on one's senses, but semiotically, it also contains within itself the very word "front" registering without saying it explicitly that what spoils the view of England is an apprehension of that other land—the "front." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "affront" is defined first

as “[a] hostile encounter; an attack, an assault,” with the note that it is often in relation to the senses as well as literally on the battle field.<sup>871</sup> Originating as a combat term, and still most frequently used as such in the period of the novel’s composition, the word suggests warfare despite the illogic of a landscapes’ being able to wage such on a person’s senses. Furthermore, by 1918, when the novel is published, the word is considered obsolete: its earliest recorded usage being in 1588 and becoming infrequent beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>872</sup> As an antiquated term, West’s usage would have garnered the contemporary reader’s attention allowing it to stand out and opening it up for expanded reference to spaces of war without leaving the English country-side. Finally, its etymology is such that the word itself originates in French, and furthermore, its translation to French leaves it unaltered; it is legible across national boundaries.<sup>873</sup> Merging the two countries thusly through the novel’s semantics, “affront” conjures up the Western Front of France in World War I within the confines of this essential English national space, demonstrating what Barad calls the “immanen[t] enfold[ment]” of “matter and meaning,” “substance and significance” that here destabilizes the solid ground of a bounded Englishness.

Indeed, the novel’s opening sentence also highlights the ambiguity of such spaces’ stable delimitation. There Kitty responds to Jenny’s concern over Chris declaring: “[b]esides, if he’d been anywhere interesting, anywhere where the fighting was really hot, he’d have found some way of telling me instead of just leaving it as ‘Somewhere in France.’”<sup>874</sup> The line first emphasizes the importance of place repeating “where” three times: “anywhere,” “anywhere,” “where” within the space of only four words. Pointing so fervently to place ironizes and underscores the diction’s undercutting of any suggestion of specificity that one usually associates with the knowing of “where.” Kitty

instead qualifies “where” twice with the prefix “any,” and follows this generality up with the vagueness of the term “*Somewhere* in France.” As they embark on the novel, the reader is then left with the sense that location is anything but locatable, especially with regards to where the “fighting” or sites of war really are.

More than embedded in its semantics, images of the front are imagined in Baldrey Court as well, further collapsing the stability of material boundaries and generating a domestically pervasive fear. Soon after this statement, West evokes the war zone itself, writing, “[b]y night I saw Chris running across the brown rottenness of No Man’s Land, starting back here because he trod upon a hand, not even looking there because of the awfulness of an unburied head.”<sup>875</sup> West depicts the front via an aesthetics marked by the porous materiality of mud—affecting decayed earth and a too-closeness to English bodies. She describes the trodden (“running across”) surfaces of “No Man’s Land” as a “brown rottenness,” evoking the muddied landscapes of the Western Front. The (for now) absent referent of mud is constituted as “brown,” linking it to the dark pastoral colors of the seep of empire appearing through the Lebanon Cedar at the edges of the nationally emblematic English countryside (“close textures of brown”).<sup>876</sup> West constructs the surface of the front also as “rotten.”<sup>877</sup> Here the darkness of war mud is not only chromatic, but also affiliated with death, destruction, and a space not generative of life. The “rottenness” of the ground on which her imagined soldiers tread is constituted, also, by dead human matter: her soldier “trod upon a hand” and avoided “an unburied head.” She goes on to underscore the instability of such spaces’ ability to provide safety: “I see him pitch forward on his knees as he reached safety—if it was that,” for “men slip down as softly from the trench parapet, and none but the grimmer philosophers would say that

they had reached safety by their fall.”<sup>878</sup> The space of the front here is also marked by that same local indeterminacy—specificity being replaced by “here” and “there,” mirroring the “anywhere” and “[s]omewhere in France” of the opening passage.<sup>879</sup> Jenny’s words associate the *lack* of spatial determinacy with the pervasive fear that she shares with “Englishwomen today,” the phrase being repeated again at the end of this passage.<sup>880</sup> More than just a fearing for the life of her soldier, the anxiety of these opening paragraphs is semantically and aesthetically linked to the war’s encroachment on England—its threatening to collapse all distinctions as its mud does between bodies and earth, England and the Front, the Front and the empire’s colonial margins. This fear, Jenny suggests, is not individual, but a collective national affect (“Englishwomen today”).

*The Return of the Soldier* is replete with images of England’s superficiality and its being marked by absence, while war zones and imperial elsewheres not directly referenced are nonetheless more matter than meaning. Jenny’s continued musings on the relation between the family’s country house estate and the Front to which the family’s head has gone compare “the front”<sup>881</sup>—that “dreary place of death and dirt” to which Chris has gone—to the “[t]his house”—a “fine place” that “our little part of the world that was, so far as surfaces could make it so, good enough for his amazing goodness.”<sup>882</sup> Jenny, as above, inverts the inference of fine places through the lens of war, however—underscoring its “surface” constitution, for it is, even on the eve of his departure for the war, already described as debased. Jenny remembers: “the lawn . . . already had the desolation of an empty stage.”<sup>883</sup> The front is constructed at the nexus of death and dirt, a muddled composite suggesting the black and brown aesthetics mud. It is a place not

colored by the actions that take place in that theatre of war, or its local landscape—that of France, but rather by the bare ground (“dirt”) and the bodies that become a part of it, echoing her vision of that “brown rottenness” (“death”). Its “drear[iness]” marks the war zone also as a place absent bright colors, or even colors at all outside the spectrum of browns and blacks. In contrast, Baldry Court is defined as a space apart (“our little part of the world”). Both “house” and “place” are not marked by the materiality of “death and dirt,” bodies and mud, but rather by a lack of matter in toto: by “surfaces” and “empt[iness].” The matters that define war-time Baldry Court are displaced elsewhere.

This emphasis on her little patch of England’s hyper-aestheticized surfaces and material absences mark it as founded upon negative matter, in opposition to the raw materiality of war and empire that instead appear hyper-physicalized and primarily elemental. Despite the text’s efforts to keep the two landscapes separate, her final descriptor for this English landscape re-writes the surface of this domestic place with the aesthetics of the war, Baldry Court’s “lawn” marked by “the desolation of an empty stage,” aligning it more with nomansland’s “brown rottenness” than with Harrowweald’s “green pleasantness.”<sup>884</sup> Even the word “stage” suggests a theater, which hints at that other theater to which Chris is consigned: a theater of war. West’s continued description of Chris’s final days before leaving for the war mirror this merger: he “refrained from touching” things as if he was “already infected with the squalor of war and did not want to contaminate” them.<sup>885</sup> Just as the bodies at war contaminate the once pastoral landscape of France making it into a “brown rottenness” through the decay of scattered body parts planted therein, so too is this inverted pastoral infecting English landscapes despite their lack of proximity to the war zone. As an extension of this, the soldier’s

body, the head of this estate, even before combat, becomes an object of “contamination” making English verdure into an “empty” “desolation.” Indeed, later in the novel, in reference to what Chris’s own amnesia protects him from (the war), Jenny thinks, he is safe from “his body rotting into union with that brown texture of corruption which is No Man’s Land.”<sup>886</sup> Amplified from “brown rottenness” to a “brown texture of corruption” it is corrupted by the unholy merger of “his body rotting in union” with the mud of “No Man’s Land.” What is key about the notion of “infect[ion]” or “corruption” here is that it is not elicited by fear of penetration or invasion, but rather by “union”—a more total *becoming one* of body and dirt that characterized the muddied landscapes of the war and in fact constituted such mud materially in many ways.

*Shattering England’s Material Seeming in Empire’s Return on the Western Front*

The locative indeterminacy of war disrupts England’s ability to solidify its own base matters as distinct from those of its imperial violence in other lands. Later in the novel, West depicts Jenny’s domestic English site as contained within the Western Front itself. Jenny dreams herself on the Western Front. In that French village, Chris’s body lies dead in the road, but his soul stands in a shop choosing between two crystal balls—one containing his past with Margaret and the other Jenny and Kitty. Situated in that tiny glass ball, Jenny’s present England is shattered and destroyed when Chris chooses Margaret’s ball, though that England no longer exists in the present. Eschewing temporal narrative cohesion like the novel as a whole does, Jenny constructs this fear-filled vision as a “conjunction of calamitous images.”<sup>887</sup> This breakdown of narrative is mirrored in the collapsing of domestic and foreign spaces with regard to the war. What comes to be an image for the “shattering of [her] world” is represented as “happening somewhere

behind the front.”<sup>888</sup> The “front” landscape that then merges with Baldry Court and Monkey Island (the pastoral oasis that was Margaret’s childhood home) “ensphered” each in a “globe” within this foreign space of war. West’s employment of a language of circles evokes also the whole world or globe in the geographic sense that pervades the text at large.<sup>889</sup> West’s use of the word “somewhere” echoes that same local indeterminacy used by Kitty when she notes Chris is “[s]omewhere in France.”<sup>890</sup> That the war zone is unlocatable makes it available, then, to pop up anywhere. If we do not know where it is, the diction invites us to ask, how do we know it is not right here? And at times of course it is, and in this case, it turns out that “right here” in England is *always already* the war zone. The “front” is merely the boundary of the nationally demarcated combat zone between the two fronts. Nomansland is literally an aporia of national identification amidst material manifestations of its extreme opposite: the two fronts that, encasing nomansland, become one front. This nowhere that is in the middle is mirrored in the placement of the war in England and England in the war zone. It also, as I will soon demonstrate, similarly structures the England-Empire landscape relationship.

West’s novel employs a spatial indeterminacy regarding English nation that is facilitated by those debased matters of war mud. In Jenny’s vision, West writes the landscape of war thusly: “at the end of a straight road that runs by a line of ragged poplars between mud flats made steel-bright with floods pitted by the soft slow rain.”<sup>891</sup> The front that engulfs both imperial and utopic versions of England is surrounded on all sides by the debased matter of mud (“mud flats”), delimiting its spaces with porous matter. This muddied surface slips aesthetically into a register of metals (“steel-bright”) and water (“floods” and “rain”). These opposing matters are each allied differently to one



of the two spheres of England therein: the steel is connected to images of metal that litter Baldry Court's landscape echoing subtly its connection to its silver mines<sup>892</sup> and the water to Monkey Island who is surrounded by water and whose surfaces are often figured with liquid imagery. Courting also a sense of the apocalyptic, the warzone that engulfs England is situated "at the end of a straight road." More than simply at an end, the direction of its arrival there is traveled "straight" reinforcing a sort of inevitability. One must note, also, that the description of this war environ mirrors, as will be discussed below, that of Margaret's home at Wealdstone, that, as industrial English space is abjected from the authorized versions of England englobed in Jenny's vision.

Because imperial versions of Englishness ignore the material dependence of English spaces on foreign ones, the sight of English bodies literally entangled in foreign soils—be they French landscapes of war or spaces marked by seemingly out of place colonial matter—produce epistemic anxiety. West represents this anxiety producing bodily-environmental material entanglement in two ways. Whereas intrusions of the war on English space, as discussed above, are marked with bodies becoming the mud of nomansland,<sup>893</sup> England's encasement in the war zone inverts this relationship, conjuring images of the muddied landscape of the front as body itself.<sup>894</sup> Together, such aesthetic refigurations suggest that what the English national body undergoes, the homeland itself will register. Jenny's catastrophic vision of England's translocation "behind the front" is rife with such embodied matters. West writes, "past a church that lacks its tower," where there "stand[s] a score of houses, each hideous with patches of bare bricks that show like sores through the ripped-off plaster and uncovered rafters that stick out like broken bones."<sup>895</sup> The brokenness of each architectural structure expresses the material scarring

of land by war is through a bodily terminology that is itself riddles with absences and exposures echoing a disassembly and breaching of boundaries. We see absent members in the “lack” of the “church[’s]” “tower,” “houses” whose “plaster” has been “ripped-off” and ceilings missing revealing “uncovered rafters.” Moreover, this lack is a wound, the “hideous” “houses” are marked by “sores,” the holes of which expose “patches of bare bricks” and wooden rafters like “broken bones.” Such buildings are left to rot like bodies, similar to Chris’s, since Jenny tells us “his body lies out there in the drizzle, at the other end of the road” while his “spirit” ponders, “eyes glazed,” the two English spheres.<sup>896</sup>

Amplifying the reconstitution of space through debased matters, West describes one of the road’s few human inhabitants, as well as her environment, primarily through iterations of the word “dirt.” She writes:

[a] slouchy woman sits at the door of a filthy cottage, counting some dirty linen  
[and] there is a general store with . . . a brown gloom rich with garlic and  
humming with the flies that live all the year round in French village shops, a black  
cat rubbing her sleepiness against the lintel. . . . an old man in a blouse, with a  
scar running white into the gray thickets of his beard, an old man with a smile at  
once lewd and benevolent, repulsive with dirt.<sup>897</sup>

The presence of “dirt” forebodes the image of “stains” that will later be associated with Margaret and Wealdstone, aesthetically linking England’s imagined destruction in France with its proximity to the literal environmental degradation of working class spaces.

Amidst the dirt, an old man offers Chris’s disembodied self the choice, or rather, the choice again, to repeat the decision he made in 1901: to choose Baldry Court (which led to Mexico and Kitty) instead of Monkey Island (which would have tied him to the lineage

of Wealdstone and Margaret), via the two globes containing each. The dirt of war marks the space everywhere: “a filthy cottage,” “dirty linen,” “brown gloom,” “humming with flies,” “a black cat,” and a “scar[red]” “old man” “repulsive with dirt” despite his powers.

Translating the literal bodily and emotional threat of war into a national threat posed by environments of mud and dirt—by ground matters themselves—visualizes English national anxiety as a domestic one, a fear that the foundation of England is not as pure and stable as it seems amidst the crisis of World War I and especially the catastrophic failures of 1916. In the moment when the dirty old man presents Chris—the quintessential Englishman—with these two worlds, West writes, “I think [the old man] is the soul of the universe, equally cognizant and disregarding of every living thing, to whom I am not more dear than the bare-armed slouchy woman at the neighboring door.”<sup>898</sup> Jenny’s comments underscore her horror at realizing her exceptionalness as aristocratic Englishwoman is not grounded in anything so solid as she thought—so easily dispensed with as it is. I read Jenny’s anxious realization of her own lack of exceptionality as being tied directly to a confrontation with the dependence of her own material safety on the literal material repository of male English bodies on the fronts of World War I (in the macro level of the nation of England) and as the novel begins to suggest, on the extraction of resources from colonial environments (in the micro level of her family and Baldry Court). As figure for domestic England, Jenny’s exposed vulnerability is suggestive of the English nation, and her desire not to see such dependencies are also England’s own.

This moment also exposes explicitly the fear of class equality that runs throughout the novel. Jenny’s horror is that she is no more valuable in a “universe”-al sense than the

woman (“slut”<sup>899</sup>) who is legible as poor via her being marked with dirt and ill clothing (“waving her bare arms at some passing soldiers”)<sup>900</sup> and “slouchy” implying she cannot afford stays for her dress—her morals lacking uprightness as much as her body). Despite Jenny’s expensive surfaces and lifestyle, her elevated class, it is her world that is protected only by a thin layer of glass. Though class issues in the novel have been much discussed, I claim here that, within the national imaginary, anxieties over working class peoples and domestic environs are entangled in anxieties about empire and colonial peoples and places.

West continues the novel’s motif of national worlding—globes, circles, and balls abounding—in her description of the two versions of Chris’s attachment to England as “crystal balls.”<sup>901</sup> She writes: “looking down on the two crystal balls that the old man’s foul, strong hands have rolled across to him. In one he sees Margaret, not in her raincoat and her nodding plumes, but as she is transfigured in the light of eternity. Long he looks there; then drops a glance to the other, just long enough to see that in its depths Kitty and I walk in bright dresses through our glowing gardens. We had suffered no transfiguration, for we are as we are, and there is nothing more to us. The whole truth about us lies in our material seeming.”<sup>902</sup> The crystal ball reference also alludes to a sense of futurity, lending Jenny’s vision the scent of prophecy. Indeed, all the characters of the novel seem to be awaiting his choice in the present: Margaret or Kitty, rejection of or validation of the present iteration of what he calls home and the actions he has taken on behalf of it over the past 15 years since 1901 when he left Margaret to go to Mexico. Preceding the description of engulfed Margaret with “the old man’s foul, strong hands,” sets up a tension between beauty and strength, suggesting that the essential materiality of a thing is

not always reflected in its material surfaces. The man's hands are "foul" but that makes them no less "strong"; and though time has wrapped her in the much maligned "raincoat" and "plume[d]" hat throughout the novel, Margaret is here "transfigured in the light of eternity" so that she, one assumes, offers more than her exteriors suggest. Jenny's world lies elsewhere, however; in her ball, "bright dresses" and "glowing gardens" offer an image without substance, mirroring the English nation and its lack of solid foundations at home.

What threatens England is figured in the novel is a lack of material substance, especially when compared to those external sites that, ironically, constitute it from without with their excessive materiality: the war and colonies. Hence, the text constructs country house English domesticity as reflecting matters originating elsewhere, only emptiness inside. Though unaltered by time ("We had suffered no transfiguration"), Jenny's and Kitty's reality appears hollowed out and empty, like a face that, when the mask is removed, offers only empty nothingness where a familiar countenance should be. "[W]e are as we are, and there is nothing more to us. The whole truth about us lies in our material seeming." Even the structure of the sentence reflects a sort of tautology or reflective mirror logic in an attempt to get at "[t]he whole truth about us" that instead produces a self-reflexive referent: "we are" is not compared to something providing further insight, but rather "as we are"—only a repetition of the same can be offered. Just as Jeffrey Hershfield notes that "West forces the reader to face the question of whether the truth matters so much in this case" of Chris's amnesia since bringing him out of it will lead him back into the war,<sup>903</sup> so too is the prioritization of mattering over seeming at contention in this scene. The sentence refers only back to itself, like a literary fun-house.

This is reinforced by the next phrase defining them, and their world or “ball” of Baldry Court, as “nothing more” than “our material seeming.” Like *Hamlet*’s “‘Seems,’ madam? Nay, it is; I know not ‘seems,’” the “seeming” in tension already with its modifier—“material,” West’s lines foreground the inability of language to refer meaningfully at all in the post-Edwardian paradigm, echoed also in an alternative reading of the second line via the variable meanings in “lies” (which can mean either to lay down or to tell an untruth). “The whole truth about us lies” can mean the “truth” “lies” i.e. appearances are deceiving *if* truth is personified, and no rule tells us it may not be so. If it is not, then it reads as a directional instruction or map as to where to find their “whole truth” that can be found “[y]ing in” the place of their physical appearances. The passage, I argue, invites both readings at once, and the novel’s treatment of aesthetics and materiality is offered as an exercise in their lack of difference. Whether “seeming” contains a lying “truth” or the “seeming” is the only location for “truth,” both house “truth” in a “material[ity]” that is always already aesthetically constituted (as “seeming”).

The novel then declares England’s matters to be only aesthetics—imagined and not foundational, they are negative matters. Such negative matters shine throughout all the landscape representations of the novel, constituting and reconstituting a national England who is missing something structurally essential in its self-apprehension as solid country house and green grounds. And, if we consider that landscape itself is almost the epitome of “material seeming,” what I would call a its aesthetic mattering, the novel invites us to read national land as an aesthetics that points to a material reality that is always already absent, though it may speak in lying truths, i.e. a language of metaphor and deferred referentiality. In the end, this “seeming” supported by “nothing” leads to a

fatal fragility—one brought home by the war whose collapse into English spaces shatters also the distinction between England and its constitutive colonial elsewheres. Hence,

West writes that Chris:

sighs a deep sigh of delight and puts out his hand to the ball where Margaret shines. His sleeve catches the other one and sends it down to crash in a thousand pieces on the floor . . . Chris is wholly enclosed in his intentness on his chosen crystal. No one weeps for this shattering of our world.<sup>904</sup>

In reaching for the fantasy of England destroyed by his leave-taking for Mexico discussed in more detail later, this heir to England breaches the boundaries encasing English domesticity. First, let us note that the choice staged here as being opened up by the war, and England's confrontation with it, is in fact already made. Bernard Schweizer claims that, in this sense, "the one hand, [West] has no use for nostalgia, because nostalgia is revealed as an ultimately debilitating state of mind and a useless means of escape from the strictures of the present. On the other hand, there is a real hatred for the present, a present poisoned by the unspeakable horrors of the Great War and threatened by the denaturalization of the environment through urban sprawl and industrial pollution."<sup>905</sup> Caught in this double-bind, the novel, then, asserts that though Chris's amnesia elicits a nostalgia for Margaret and that Pre-war, pre-Mexico life, the choice that brought about the present cannot be unmade. His decision in 1901 stands, still, in 1916. Based on its framing in the narrative as a vision constituted by Jenny's fears, we can read the choice as a feared choice, as the fear that the war has re-opened an alternative narrative for England that acknowledges the traumatic nature of empire (leaving Margaret for Mexico). Likewise, this dramatized choice acknowledges that England sold

its own future (for Chris's marriage with Kitty is childless) and must now pay materially (with bodies of a generation of men planted in the land of the war zone) for the wealth extracted through empire materially (mines and other extractive resource operations in colonies)—a wealth that had been used to create the matter of England visible in its cities and country estates such as Baldry Court as the nation fights the war to protect its dying empire. This choice, positioned as it is, or rather, positioning the five landscapes of the novel as it does, binds national anxieties to anxieties of empire, those two to the anxieties of war, and that triad of spaces to an imagined Englishness free from its own imperial history (Monkey Island) and to a real Englishness where the stain of national avarice is not located only externally, but in its own working class cities and towns (Wealdstone).

That this is a passage concerned with the worlding of competing national imaginaries is reinforced by the continued globe rhetoric: "Chris is wholly enclosed in his intentness on his chosen crystal." The enclosure is so complete that it precipitates the "crash[ing]" to the "floor" in a "thousand pieces" of Jenny's world. Wyatt Bonikowski writes that the "the heart of [Return's] story [is] the effect of the soldier's return on the women at home," reading this effect in the "metaphors of penetration and shattering . . . chiasmic crossings of dichotomies . . . external and internal, visible and invisible, surface and depth, body and mind—which the metaphors of penetration figure."<sup>906</sup> West represents the final result as a "shattering of our world," suggesting that the impact or collision of Jenny's version of England with the world exposed by World War I is like the impact of reference through which trauma repeats itself. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth explains that, "the unexpected reality—the locus of referentiality—of the traumatic story [...] associates reference with an impact [...] the impact of the fall [...]"



the story of the falling body [...] the story of the impact of reference [in which] the story of trauma is inescapably bound to a referential return.”<sup>907</sup> This impact, or impact of reference, literally means the force of knowledge—raw sensory data coming into the brain—that lacks the attendant processing, integrating, and conscious understanding of what is happening to one and why it *matters*. Having missed why Chris’s departure for Mexico *matters* for the fate of himself, Baldry Court, England itself, this missed encounter with what has truly traumatized him—his experience in Mexico’s mines and England’s dependence on neocolonial extraction—repeats itself in the *material seeming* of England throughout the novel: first in the shell shock of World War I and second in Jenny’s image of the shattering of her world that reverberates everywhere in traces of England’s invasion by colonial matters. In this case, the repetition is the war’s repetition of the wounds of empire, only this time the shattering of worlds is felt and seen as if for the first time, as it is only now registered by the mind, or national imaginary—which Jenny supplies.

#### *England’s Absent Landscapes*

This world’s “thousand pieces” make it irrecoverable. Given that the balls are made of “crystal,” that, though stronger than normal glass, tend to break along more lines, making them more difficult to piece back together, the materiality of these separate worlds was always too fragile to survive exposure to material reality, to a confrontation of worlds. But, more importantly than that, Jenny notes that “no one weeps” for her loss, or England’s loss. This echoes the sentiment that a fall of the aristocracy, and the vision of England that it represents, is not the only version of England, that its loss is not a loss of England at all, and only an evolution, or a merging back together of the more natural

whole that the aristocratically-led British empire sought to partition into various classes, races, and cultures, in much the way that Baldry Court is a “a vast piece of space partitioned off from the universe.”<sup>908</sup> The “soul of the universe”<sup>909</sup> that oversees this “calamit[y]” of world-shattering as “images” in the figure of the old man who abides no naturalness to such partitions acknowledges no ordering of hierarchies as privileged or superior. It is almost as if Jenny is England coming to terms with the fact that the bastion of empire was not given to England by divine right after all. *The Return of the Soldier* reveals, then, I argue, that empire is not an organic outgrowth of England’s native land—as Lewis suggests in Chapter 7—but rather a result of its exploitation and emptying of its native grounds, transforming them from base into negative matters.

West’s English spaces are then characterized as much by an aesthetics of absence, this typical modernist trope, as they are by the irrepressible materiality of mud, dirt, land, or stone. As the most direct stain of war on the landscape of England, her use of mud, is then linked primarily to the color brown and images of dirt as referents of those excluded interior (working class) and exterior (colonial and neocolonial) spaces that are not as directly legible on the representative English landscape of the country house estate. Yet, the dark spectrum of this landscape aesthetics, as I have shown, extends also to black imagery and direct references to darkness through which we start to connect the aesthetic materiality of the front to that of empire. I claim, thereby, that the two become increasingly interchangeable at the aesthetic level, an aesthetics that as I have shown is all that grounds Englishness, even though the story makes little direct reference to empire. This indirect referential matrix of places not considered interior to England but still materially entangled in it are then visually intermingled collapses those spaces that

country-house English notions of place keep partitioned. In addition to creating material, visual traces of war and empire that make their invisible interdependency legible, West's text is also preoccupied with representing absence itself. This aesthetics of absence is, then, also an aesthetics of negative mattering.<sup>910</sup>

Through geographic and psychic divisions and distances and their generation of dynamics of national loss, story's absent landscapes—of war, of empire, of working class reality, of a non-imperial England—are shown, I argue, to stain the microcosmic English landscape of Baldry Court like scars on the amnesiac Chris's mind and body. By inviting us to pay attention to aesthetic presences that stand in for material absences, the novel indirectly instructs the careful reader to interpret not just for what is there, but how what is there is constituted by what is not directly figured.

More than simply peripheral matters on the edge of the imperial view, Jenny now presents foreign matters as naturalized on English soil. Seen through the rupturing experience of the war, exotic plants appear no longer to mark the bounty of English imperial dominion, but instead to transform and make England seem foreign to itself, and the war's intrusions enlighten the reader to the imperial violence that has naturalized itself on English grounds. Jenny thinks:

There are towns now, and even the trees and flowers are not as they were; the crocuses on the lawn, whose blades showed white in the wide beam let out by the window Chris had opened, should have pierced turf on Mediterranean cliffs; the golden larch beyond should have cast its long shadows on little yellow men as they crossed a Chinese plain. And the sky also is different. Behind Chris' head, as

he halted at the open window, a searchlight turned all ways in the night like a sword brandished among the stars.<sup>911</sup>

The passage focuses on a list of landscape alterations where the very environment itself becomes essentially altered: “even the trees and flowers are not as they were.” Nature is changing in England. The text evokes a seemingly native material environment through the use of the typical English landscape words of “lawn,” “turf,” “cliffs,” and “plain.” These grounds of national space, I argue, are then deconstructed to reveal the unbounded nature of Englishness at its foundations, rooting other foreign environmental matters within English land itself. *England* is, then, recoded as foreign, its land recast as environmentally akin to “Mediterranean” and “Chinese” spaces. The “lawn” and “beyond” of Baldry Court is populated by botanical entities that, we know through her repetition of the phrase “should have,” belong elsewhere—not being native to England. This alteration to English land is cast from the start as more ontological than phenomenological, since West begins her cataloguing of foreignness on English soil with the linking of nature (trees and flowers) to change “not as they were” through the verb to be: “are” and “were.” Eschewing a sense of mere appearances by excluding terms such as “like they were” or “seem to be,” the authoritative “are” functions as an equal sign in the syntax of a sentence. One thing equals the other more than merely resembling it or being characterized by it.

Those plants that belong elsewhere, the “crocu[s]” flower and “golden larch” tree, carry with them a troubling agency as well. The “crocuses” are described as having “blades [that] showed white” and once “pierced” the landscape that surrounds the Mediterranean Sea (a locale that points us once again to the region of Lebanon, also

positioned on the coast of those waters).<sup>912</sup> These flowers appear to be more than an inert decorative presence, instead they are painted as an instrument of violence made of “blades” and “piercing” the ground in which they are planted. The “golden larch” tree has the ominous effect of “cast[ing] long shadows” on the surrounding lands—evoking a dark (“long shadow”) sense of foreboding that resonates with the use of darkness as threatening elsewhere in the novel. Both plants are endowed in their personification with a sense of excessive agency, having the ability to “pierc[e]” and “cast.” In both images these other landscapes are *marked* by the presences of these plants. If these “cliffs” and “plain[s]” were paper, they would be dotted, punctured with holes, and shaded black. Both foreign landscapes, which serve as foil to England and also threaten to merge with it through the colonizing presence of the plants that now cover its surfaces, are also depicted as inhuman spaces. The “Mediterranean cliffs” are populated austere by “turf” instead of people and the “Chinese plain” is peopled by dehumanized, racialized figures of “cross[ing]” “little yellow men.” Their racialization is also doubled in the “yellow[ing]” of their bodies by West and the “shadow” that engulfs them everywhere—“long” where they are only “little.”

Furthermore, the sense in which landscape alterations represent the world itself—a global environment—is found in the way these alterations of the land are shared by the atmosphere above them. West adds, “[a]nd the sky also is different.”<sup>913</sup> This difference is marked by the presence of “a searchlight turned all ways in the night like a sword brandished among the stars.”<sup>914</sup> Its imagery of “light” and “sword” allies it with the “crocuses” at the beginning of the passage, whose “blades showed white,” linking the “blade” of the flower to the “sword” of the “light” that again echoes the flower’s

“white[ness].” The “searchlight” echoes also the ominous light-constituted presence upon the people of a landscape (like the “Chinese” under a “long shadow”), except here, England is under the “long shadow” of war as the “searchlight” comes from the Zeppelin figured elsewhere that looms often above Baldry Court, looking for bombing targets.

By linking these two sets of images through similar structures and language, West links spaces of empire and war, as well as the threat to domestic English spaces each dramatizes. Like the merging of two parts of a world made whole in the linking together of “lawn” or land and “sky,” this national landscape seems caught in a pervasive darkness—a negative materiality that aesthetically points to the hyperobject of war-cum-empire though it cannot narrate it realistically or comprehensibly. Via the historically contextual allusion to a Zeppelin, the “searchlight” represents the *World War* in which England is currently imbricated. Its violence, “like a sword brandished,” is also all-encompassing, as it “turned *all ways* in the night,” and appears not just as an isolated act of man on *earth*, but “among the stars.” There are two things of note about the *universality* of West’s imagery here. First, it is a presence that pollutes the world in every direction (“all ways”). Second, it is not confined to earth, but spreads to the universe, the outer (or “outward”?) space itself. This expansive sense of world, read back into the earthly existence of representative national subjects such as Jenny and Chris, can be interpreted as “essential.” Finally, this unidirectional agency of war is more than spatially dominant, but, West’s language hints here again, is temporally inescapable as well. Aurally, the phrase the lights of war “turned all ways” is identical to the utterance it “turned always.” The notion of eternity as a characteristic of the “modern . . . horror” of the war’s presence on England and in the world, is embedded within this suggested

“always” or forever. Exploding the temporal boundaries of the war, this “all ways” light is like the “civilizing light” of the imperial mission, associated here instead with the violence of war—the light shed by a Zeppelin’s search lights.

We see the inverted agency of English nation and nature woven once again through the view that West displays in the moment of Margaret and Chris’s first reunion at Baldry Court. West begins with Jenny’s contrasting of her and Kitty’s domestic interiority as “the impregnable fort of gracious life” against Margaret’s externally situated being as a “poor battered thing outside.”<sup>915</sup> The language of war (“fort,” “battered”) and exclusion (“impregnable,” “outside”) pervades. Their aristocratic “gracious[ness]” is juxtaposed to Margaret’s working-class “poor” – their “life” to her “thing[ness].” Thusly beaten, exiled, and dehumanized, the site of Margaret’s body out on the Baldry Court lawn is, despite its being in a certain way now included in their interior space (on the estate, though still seldom welcomed in the house), always figured as exterior to authorized English life. Though she is, throughout the text, berated whenever she is figured to various degrees, one notes that her trespassing on the indoor spaces of Chris’s house is almost never figured, and when it is, it is only in his absence.

Together, they can only exist in a vital sense beyond its walls. Jenny describes following Kitty’s “gri[m]” gaze out into the “garden” to their meeting place out on the grounds: “It was one of those draggled days, common at the end of March when a garden looks at its worst.”<sup>916</sup> The garden is described in contradistinction to all of the life-filled language that usually garnishes such representations. This garden is “draggled” and “look[ing] at its worst.” The *OED* defines “draggled” (which is cited as being out of use by the 20<sup>th</sup> century) as “Befouled with dragging through wet and mire,” “mire,”

elsewhere being defined more specifically as “Dirty or wet, typically from being trailed through mud or water.”<sup>917</sup> “Mire” itself is defined as “a boggy place, *esp.* one in which a person may be engulfed or become stuck fast,” and “Wet or soft mud; ooze; dirt,” or even “Dung.”<sup>918</sup> The word “draggled” itself seems enmired in a lexicon of mud. This usually bright and lively garden is in this moment recast as a muddied landscape, evoking yet again the absent matters of the front and other threatening margins of imperial expansion as negative matters of England itself. West notes such a landscape aesthetic is “common at the end of March,” the month in which the novel takes place. As noted above, March is a particularly interesting temporal locution for it situates the text within the moment of the war where England began its Palestine and Sinai Campaign to Lebanon, Syria, and other middle eastern sites. And sure enough, the symbolic Lebanese manifestation appears only a moment later: the cedar tree.

The cedar becomes the centerpiece of the gradual exposure of England’s negative matters—the intrusion of imperial matters onto native ones: from fertile garden to “unrestful garden.”<sup>919</sup> West writes:

The wind that was rolling up to check a show of sunshine had taken away the cedar's dignity of solid shade, had set the black firs beating their arms together and had filled the sky with glaring grey clouds that dimmed the brilliance of the crocus. It was to give gardens a point on days such as these, when the planned climax of this flower bed and that stately tree goes for nothing.<sup>920</sup>

The “draggled” aesthetics present muddied nature as dark matter. An invisible agency from without “roll[s] up” in the form of “wind.” This wind turns light to darkness, “check[ing] a show of sunshine” and transforming the “solid shade” cast by the cedar into



a shadow much like the “Chinese” “golden larch” earlier in the novel. This removal (“taken away”) of the “dignity” of “the ceda[r]” is linked to the “dimmed” “brilliance of the crocus” also found in the previous passage. Their former metallic whiteness, along with the “planned climax of this flower bed and that stately tree” now “goes for nothing.” The erotic language of “climax” attributed to the flower-bed furthers an association of this space with a snuffed generativity or reproduction. In this nongenerative space, the cedar that once provided refuge or “shade” is now cast as a figure of violence, the “wind” “set[ting] the black firs beating their arms together.” The embodied tree (“arms”) is animated by a dark (“black”) force (“beating . . . together”) that forebodes a threat. The “sky also is different” here, where violence is also threatened via an aesthetics of darkness: “clouds” are “grey” and “glar[e]” – they blunt (“nothing”) the “climax” of this English space ironically, by making it “point[y]” – more like the “blades” that “pierce” as West previously characterized the foreign flower of the crocus as seen through the lens (“searchlight”) of war.<sup>921</sup> Taken together, the “stately” “dignity” and “clima[ctic]” “brilliance” that foreign imports such as “cedar[s]” and “crocus[es]” once afforded the English “garden,” become threatening and sullied as Baldry Court is perceived to be in Margaret’s presence elsewhere. We see her mark on that landscape mirrored even in the sky: the clouds, like her surname and the place to which she “belong[s]” are “grey.”<sup>922</sup> That a shading-in of elements suggestive of war and foreignness accompanies the threatening stain of a laboring body on this aristocratic space is no accident, for they are throughout the novel, as I show below, linked.

*A Dirty Stain: War Mud? Or Colonial and Laboring Matters Beneath the Aristocratic Veneer?*

The presence of colonial materiality and the materiality of labor and class on Baldry Court are consistently underscored as a stain upon this pure English national space. The presence of colonial and domestic industrial matters, figured always as already upon or in the process of invading the landscape and spaces of Baldry Court, act as an aesthetic bridging and merging of these four material landscapes under the aegis of England (war zone, empire, working class, aristocratic). I claim that West's *The Return of the Soldier* seeks to represent their mutual, though unacknowledged, constitution of the grounds of England, despite a desire in the English imaginary to re-assert that the grounds of England lay only within the soil of that nation proper—delimited by its so-called island geographically, though with an imagined erasure of those undesirable elements that it wishes to exclude. I suggest that such exclusions are necessary to maintain a national forgetting of their own unstable boundaries, especially in the form of working-class spaces and peoples. Such spaces are often located closest to the natural resource these laboring bodies will be exploited in order to extract. In abjecting their dependence on real environmental matters, England reinforces their abjection of those laboring bodies whose closeness to such exploitative work might remind them of what lies beyond England's green parks and pastures.

In the series of close readings that follow I trace the materiality of industry as a marking of that which is already within the landscape of England but excluded from its representative spaces. The abstracting of the material foundations of England forms a structural link to the materiality of empire as that which also constitutes the domestic landscape of England from without. Surfacing in the negative matters of Baldry Court, those raw materials that England extracts from its own grounds and imports from its

colonies and neocolonial holdings, haunt *The Return of the Soldier* as the shadow matters of an unacknowledged dependence on ghost acreage. Hidden within the surface narrative's invocation of war's muddy matters, colonial and industrial dirt is also shown to stain the surface of England's "natural" spaces, exposing them as the constructions they are—denaturalizing English solidity from within.

Margaret is at the center of all of West's depictions of spaces marked by class. It is apropos then that the connection between the labor and place of Baldry Court comes also from her. Margaret exposes the landscape as product of labor and natural resources neither of which are native to the authorized vision of England. Jenny's descriptions of Baldry Court, by contrast, are marked by divisions of space and inversions of nature, painting over what Margaret's presence reveals, this aesthetics is extended to Margaret's body as well. Both uses of unnatural and divisive material imagery reinforce divisions of labor-industrial and imperial-national landscapes in the English imaginary. West writes, "[a]s the car swung through the gates of Baldry Court . . . She looked out at the strip of turf, so bright that one would think it wet, and lit here and there with snowdrops and scillas and crocuses."<sup>923</sup> The "bright[ness]" and "lit" effect of the lawn ("turf") are here connected with flowers ("snowdrops and scillas and crocuses") and water ("so wet") continuing an association found elsewhere of light with flowers and water and of both those things with the symbolic light of England's civilizing mission of empire. The grass of this lawn is figured next as a dividing line: it "runs between the drive and the tangle of silver birch and bramble and fern."<sup>924</sup> That this vegetal space functions as both a boundary-keeping presence and a representation of the light of empire within domestic England suggests the way in which English imperial ideology portions up the world,

redrawing native lines on existing territories according to a new allegiance to England and reorienting these spaces towards England as colonial metropole. What the line of turf partitions off (“runs between”), however, is the cultivated, civilized spaces of Baldry Court (“the drive”) from the wild spaces where England asserts no mastery over nature, symbolically and materially separating itself from these (“the tangle of silver birch and bramble and fern”). Their wildness is accentuated by the word “tangle” implying a chaotic mixing of the three plants named. Those species of plant are each native to England: “silver birch” is so called for its silvery looking bark, “bramble” is known for the fact that it “can be difficult to eradicate once they have become established,”<sup>925</sup> and “fern” is a “primitive” plant, one of the earliest to develop in England—before Britain was even an island.<sup>926</sup> The messy comingling of these species suggests a repressed wildness or threatening chaos is native to England, disrupting notions that external colonial sites and species only are in need of British domestication and boundary-policing.

Constructing the Baldry Court thusly, then novel then figures Margaret as materially coextensive with the chaotic natural spaces and dirty labor and industry that British Baldry Court both controls and divides itself from. By the end of the scene, Margaret’s body is cast explicitly in the *stain* lexicon, as “a cancerous blot on the fair world.”<sup>927</sup> That the stain metaphor here used via the word “blot” is itself one that elides the distinction between body and world through the image of “cance[r]” is apropos given that Margaret’s body has become representative of the materiality of the industrial world with which Jenny associates her. As ever, the landscape (“world”) is here a canvas that Margaret’s body writes upon, now, like a leaky pen, becoming a “blot” on the “fair”

canvas of Baldry Court's "delicate and decorated" estate. Margaret's body is described as "external dinginess"—a once-beauty now "lacerated by time" that makes those interior to Baldry Court's spaces, the "one[s] accustomed to live here," "wince."<sup>928</sup> Her body is literally marked by labor. Throughout the novel experience, circumstance, and wealth all manifest themselves primarily upon the surfaces of bodies: Chris' skin is changed on his return from Mexico, his father's reddened by looming financial ruin, Kitty and Jenny unchanging in their pretty garbs. For each, the labor of their lives (or its absence) is manifest upon the surfaces of their bodies. Margaret's body is consistently marked by the labor she enacts: as innkeeper, nanny, and lower-middle class housewife who must do her own baking once a week (gasp!). Her invasive presence, like a weed to be eradicated from encroachment upon the turf, is cast in the terminology of environmental pollutants. Margaret is, according to Jenny, "physically offensive to our atmosphere."<sup>929</sup> Pushing affect to the limits, Margaret's aesthetic is a physical offense, and yet atmospheric, making it distinctly ecological or environmental.

Though Jenny assumes Margaret must be pondering her own out-of-place-ness in their world as they approach Baldry Court, Margaret's utterance instead transforms Jenny's own perception of her life. West writes: "instead she said, 'It's a big place. How poor Chris must have worked to keep it up'."<sup>930</sup> Margaret's statement undermines the "philosophic" construction of landscape that Jenny had earlier expressed, reconstituting the space as negative matter and therefore making its defining characteristic not the expression of an aristocratic ideal ("*big* place"), but rather of a purely material link between labor ("worked") and ("place") that undergirds all spaces regardless of class yet is illegible in the base material aesthetics of the English national imaginary. The financial

upkeeping (“keep it up”) of such a grand estate (“big place”) makes the difference between Margaret’s labor and Chris’ one of degree and not kind. West assigns to Margaret’s description of Chris as “work[er]” or laborer the word “poor” that, though it is meant as his being worthy of pity, cannot help but drag with it also the economic charge of poverty—that financial ruin that Chris’s work must prevent which sent him to Mexico in 1901. Jenny’s shock at Margaret’s statement underscores the degree to which it inverts the English aristocratic view on the relationship between land and labor. West writes, “[n]o one had ever before pitied Chris for the magnificence of Baldry Court. It had been our pretense that by wearing costly clothes and organizing a costly life we had been the servants of his desire. But she revealed the truth that although he did indeed desire a magnificent house, it was a house not built with hands.”<sup>931</sup> Casting Margaret as “reveale[r]” of “truth” lends special importance to the interpretive significance of the image “a house not built with hands.” After the repetition of the word “costly” the reader is attuned to the role of the paradigm of cost. One almost wants to ask *at what cost* was the “magnificence of Baldry Court” wrought? Though we may expect the line to be “a house not built with *his* hands” it does not, and instead calls attention to the absence of “his.”

Whose hands did build the estate? On closer examination, the absence of a possessive pronoun before “hands” reveals the even stranger idea of a house that was “built” without the use of “hands” at all. This physical impossibility is set as the opposite of the line preceding it: “wearing costly clothes and organizing a costly life.” The two lines are linked through the imagined fulfillment of Chris’ “desire” for a “magnificent house.” This achieves a few things: 1) it calls into question, at a crucial moment when

Chris seems no longer to desire the life he created for himself so much so that he has forgotten, what it actually is that Chris desires, 2) it invites an expanded idea of what a “magnificent house” would be in real terms, and 3) it equates the verbs “wearing” / “organizing” and “built” as two opposing sides of one labor dynamic. The word, as defined, expresses an “imposing” almost excessive appearance of beauty: “liberality” and “splendor” embodied.<sup>932</sup> An excess of what remains unanswered. What is clearest in the language, however, is this pairing of wearing/organizing and building. To wear and organize is to deal in surfaces and abstract plans. It is also, as noted directly, “costly,” or more an act of consumption than creation. Building, by contrast, implies a more direct, manual laboring (with *hands*). It is in this opposition that the meaning of “a house not built with hands” becomes clearest. To build is to increase capital by the activity of labor, paying for things with bodies, but to spend is actively to decrease capital, paying money for things. If we read “hands” as a synecdochal reference to bodies that work then this statement both erases the labor that creates Baldry Court and points to the ongoing erasure from its physical appearances of the labor that built this estate, as well as erasing the origins of those raw matters that constitute its physical presence—so many rocks, trees, metals, and plants that had to be extracted and imported via mines, plantations, and colonized lands elsewhere.<sup>933</sup> It erases the labor of its creation by saying the house was not “built with hands,” begging the question, well with what then? This implies either that the house is not materially real, not being built with hands, or that it is remarkable in some way—being built by machine or magic. The house can also be considered as “not built with hands” in the sense that it appears only as negative matter—as material seeming. The hands whose labor afforded its creation and upkeep are not figured in the

world of England—a reality that the semantics of the sentence semantically mirror. The hands, under erasure, which built Baldry Court are therefore dematerialized threefold: as the local laborers who maintain the physical estate not pictured in the novel, as the non-manual labor of Chris and his forebears whose “business” work used invisible mind and money to make the additional wealth that funds the building and upkeep of such an estate, and lastly, as the hands of those workers who form the economic base of the Baldry family business—the silver miners in Mexico. Hence, not only are those who literally build the place not acknowledged, but the labor and natural resources that beget the wealth allowing the Baldrys to hire them is placed under erasure as well. These last “hands” are then the neocolonial laborers whose work in foreign spaces finances domestic English landscapes such as Baldry Court. They can also be seen to refer to whatever acts Chris personally may have had to commit when his father sent him to “keep the mines going through the revolution, to keep the firm’s head above water, to keep Baldry Court sleek and hospitable” 15 years prior—presumably involving manual violence of some kind.<sup>934</sup> This enacts, therefore, a dislocation of the relationship between land and labor—human and ecological materiality.

Already we can see that labor and empire are entangled in the material aesthetics of the novel, this continues in the construction of Margaret’s body as itself a landscape marked by class is prevalent throughout the novel. Bodies and landscapes share a materiality which record the invisible traces that connect it to other bodies and landscapes in ways underscoring the connection between foreign and domestic at the literal and metaphor foundations of English national identity in this period. Such bodies and non-human matters also point to the anxieties that surface when those traces or stains upon the



aesthetic landscape of a symbolic national space are made legible. This dynamic is clearest in the mutual constitution of a laboring body and a working-class environment marked by domestic industry: Margaret and the town of Wealdstone. West depicts their relationship thusly: “[a]nd not only did Margaret live in this place; she also belonged to it.”<sup>935</sup> Such bodies and landscapes not only become invasive unwanted marks upon Baldry Court, they themselves are marked by an aesthetics of labor and empire, representations bearing stylistic resemblance to the landscapes of war beyond and its intrusion on Baldry Court. Each landscape marked thusly by negative matters—appearances that evoke displaced or occluded material environments—is animated by an ideology of English imperialism that, I argue, *The Return of the Soldier* makes legible through its environmental aesthetic. In addition to using ecological materiality as a trope for the negative and debased matters of war, empire, and working-class spaces, the landscapes that the novel links together point also to the ecologically devastating impact of such ideologies of nation on local and global environments.

As an extension of those environs England excludes from its national imaginary, Margaret’s body is figured as an invasive presence in Jenny and Kitty’s lives and upon their estate in the same way those plants and elemental materials that invoke the foreign landscapes of Lebanon, France, China, the Mediterranean are figured elsewhere as a threatening and unwanted presence on pure, authentic English spaces of Baldry Court. When Margaret first arrives at their home to inform them of Chris’ injury on the Western Front, she is depicted thusly: “[t]he people that come breaking into one’s nice quiet day!’ [Kitty] moaned reproachfully, and as we came to the head of the broad stair-case she leaned over the white balustrade to peer down on the hall.”<sup>936</sup> Margaret’s presence is

represented as a “breaking into” their day, employing a language of rupture and violence with regard to the spaces that contain their lives. This phrase is followed by a re-assertion of Kitty’s imperial superiority via the spatial articulation of the house at Baldry Court. Kitty “peer[s] down on” Margaret, who occupies the threshold space of the “hall” or entryway to the house, its boundary-line and Kitty are ensconced at the “head” of a “broad” threshold (“staircase”), her body positioned behind a “white” railing. Each word noted above conjures the centrality, expansiveness, and purity of imperial English spaces. When Margaret leaves the house, Jenny’s language reinforces her invasive presence:

as she went along the drive, her yellowish raincoat looking sick and bright in the sharp sunshine, her black plumes nodding like the pines above, her cheap boots making her walk on her heels; a spreading stain on the fabric of our life. When she was quite hidden by the dark clump of rhododendra at the corner Kitty turned and went to the fire-place.<sup>937</sup>

Just as Margaret “break[s] in” on and becomes a “cancerous blot on” their English space, she also represents a “spreading stain” there as well. This rhetoric of invasion recalls the aggressive and war-like language of the “affront” that their own estate’s beauty presents to Jenny in the absence of Chris. This other penetrating landscape (of the war) seemingly becomes co-extensive with Margaret’s body in the same way that spaces of labor and industry will do as this section of the novel continues. Knowing this, the “yellowish,” “sick and bright” color of her attire, the “sharp[ness]” of the normally life-giving yellow light of “sunshine” suggest the deadly yellow of gas and sharp violent light of bombs that pervade the Front. This “yellow” coloration of Margaret’s surfaces evokes those foreign spaces associated with China above, but also echo a tropical resonance that will be

addressed in the final section of this chapter. The darkness of this passage entangles Margaret as well in an aesthetics of empire seen to fringe the landscape elsewhere. Her “black plumes” are associated with “nodding pines” that earlier evoked the outskirts of England’s imperial reach. When they can no longer see her, what renders her invisible is the “dark clump” of a non-native plant: “rhododendra.” A foreign darkness marks, then, both her body and this foreign plant on their estate, linking Margaret and her Wealdstone to the Mediterranean and Asian climates to which rhododendron are native; where the flowering shrub appears in England, it is often termed the “killer of countrysides” brought in as an ornamental and becoming an invasive species pushing out native plants, lending it a threatening air of penetration and consuming annihilation.<sup>938</sup> Note also that the plant is a “clump,” underscoring its disordered nature as with several plants partitioned off from the civilized parts of Baldry Court above.

The marking of Margaret’s body via her attire in ways that associate her with the landscapes of empire and of war via the shared network of negative matters extends also to her coextensivity with the materiality of labor. West writes:

She wore a yellowish raincoat and a black hat with plumes. The sticky straw hat had only lately been renovated by something out of a little bottle bought at the chemist’s. She had rolled her black thread gloves into a ball on her lap, so that she could turn her gray alpaca skirt well above her muddy boots and adjust its brush-braid with a seamed red hand.<sup>939</sup>

Margaret’s coat, hat, skirt, gloves, and boots all work together to compose her aesthetically as a lower-class individual.<sup>940</sup> The “stick[iness]” of her hat is associated with being “renovated,” something only one who could not afford a new hat would do.

The “mu[d]” on her shoes indicates that she could not afford a car to drive her here and had to walk. Furthermore, these aspects of her attire do not stop at the surface of her skin but become coextensive with her body itself. Gloves removed, West describes even her “hand” as “seamed red.” Its “seamed” nature suggests under her clothes, her skin functions as yet more material with the markers of its cheap making exposed along a seam. The seaming of her hand “red” implies that it is worn by labor, the cracks and wrinkles of her appendage bearing the raw traces of frequent manual labor that suggests her lower class status again are a *part of her*, materially, and not just worn on the surface. Margaret’s body, then, acknowledges the mattering of English bodies that its national imaginary rejects in depictions of its landscape. That her surfaces are “sticky” also reinforces the sense in which her presence seems threatening, almost as if to touch Margaret’s body would have an infectious affect making Jenny also poor and ravaged by labor—too close to the matters that constitute her. This is reinforced when, later, Jenny notes, “I first defensively clutched my hands. It would have been such agony to the finger tips to touch any part of her apparel” (West 48). There is of course an intentional blindness on Jenny’s part with regard to the fact that her surfaces are also constituted by labor (as Baldry Court is constituted by natural resource extraction), though this labor is made invisible. The economic difference between the two women’s surfaces is however furthered by the use of “straw” for Margaret’s hat, a cheap material, and also by the use of the phrasing “black thread gloves” which, by emphasizing “thread” instead of cloth (which is of course made of thread) seems to imply the gloves are thread-bare, or old and worn out—just like Margaret’s body and the rest of her clothing.

Just as matter marks Margaret's body with her laboring class, so too are her surfaces readable as a landscape, marked by the negative matters of empire. The "yellowish raincoat" and "straw" both evoke a yellow color scheme that can be associated with the tropics. Though straw hats would of course have been worn in England as well, their function as protection from the sun links them to an equatorial heat abroad and an outdoor laborer at home. The tropics bubble up in other places throughout the text as well, linking up with such aesthetics as we see here in order to engage more widely with an aesthetics of foreign or exotic spaces under the imagined aegis of empire. While Jenny's and Kitty's clothes are often figured via their textures, here Margaret's skirt, the text takes pains to point out, is named for its source material: "alpaca." Alpaca is the fur (and the name) of an animal that resides in Latin America—especially Peru—marking her skirt and body with an exoticism and foreignness that is not allowed to so explicitly wrap Jenny's perfect domestic surfaces. Dark colors also pervade the passage both in contrast to and as part of a shared dynamic with their yellowness—in fact the "straw" of her hat does not show its natural golden sheen but is instead painted darkly. Margaret's "hat" and "gloves" are both "black," and her skirt, like a derivation of her married name is "gray" (painting her once again as "belong[ing] to" her material environs for Wealdstone is elsewhere described as a drab grey place. This darkening spectrum both mirrors the perceived dullness and dirtiness that Margaret's working class life represents, and which she "stain[s]" their lives with, and also makes Margaret's body an extension of the negative matters elsewhere figured upon the English landscape. West extends this further, sharing Jenny's later association of Margaret's body as like a "glove" (wherein Margaret herself now reduced entirely to a worn object) "repulsive

when the chambermaid retrieves it from the dust and fluff” from behind the bed of a hotel room.<sup>941</sup> Margaret’s body is caked in and marked by, in this image, actual dirt and detritus. Rather than being shaken off and recovered, this dragging makes the object it encases “repulsive.” Jenny begins this thought by evaluating Margaret as “repulsively furred with neglect and poverty,” reinforcing the existentially transformative quality of Margaret’s besmirchment.<sup>942</sup>

The dirt that marks Margaret’s body extends seamlessly to those of landscapes of labor. West describes both Margaret and Wealdstone with the same turn of phrase, linking them via a statement of semantic evaluation. Of the woman, Jenny says, “Well, she was not so bad. Her body was long and round and shapely . . . Yet she was bad enough.”<sup>943</sup> When Jenny arrives at Wealdstone, Margaret’s suburban town, she notes: “*Wealdstone is not, in its way, a bad place; it lies in the lap of open country . . . But . . . factories spoil the skyline with.*”<sup>944</sup> Hence, Wealdstone is painted thusly: “Wealdstone.’ That is the name of the red suburban stain which fouls the fields three miles nearer London than Harrowweald. One cannot now protect one’s environment as one could in the old days.”<sup>945</sup> West attributes to Wealdstone this same term “stain” that she has also used to describe Margaret’s presence on Jenny’s life (“spreading stain”<sup>946</sup>). This further valence of a home-place subject to unwanted penetration (“cannot protect one’s environment”) also applies to Margaret whose person and affects are affiliated with inhuman infestations: “I pushed the purse away from me with my toe and hated her as the rich hate the poor, as insect things that will struggle out of the crannies which are their decent home, and introduce ugliness to the light of day.”<sup>947</sup> Margaret’s entomological designation is reinforced, along with one of many animalizing comments, in Jenny’s

description of her first exit from Baldry Court: “she cried, and *scurried* to the open door like a pelted dog.”<sup>948</sup> This invasive aspect of the “stain”—the sense in which it does not simply mark the surface, able to be wiped away, but scars the base matter of the place itself—is reinforced in such moments, as well as the continued dwelling on notions of unstable boundaries. West repeats a phrase twice to this effect: “With [Margaret’s] finger-nail she followed the burst seam of the dark pigskin purse that slid about on her shiny alpaca lap . . . she continued to trace the burst seam of her purse.”<sup>949</sup> This embodied inability to maintain borders and margins is the object that Jenny “pushed away” as she felt a “hate” like that for “insect things” from out the “crannies” where they belong – in darkness (“introduce ugliness to the light of day”). The “hate” is an expression of the same anxiety present in a fixation on the burst seam, an anxiety that arises as the inability to keep authorized English environs separate from the sullied landscapes of empire, war, and labor becomes more and more obvious in the aesthetics of the text.

Margaret’s body (clothing as well as skin) is consistently envisioned for the reader via an aesthetics that translates invisible ideologies of class and nation with regard to industry, war, and empire into physical markings upon the malleable matters of landscapes and bodies. Before she goes to retrieve Margaret for her first meeting with Chris upon his return from the trenches, Jenny warns him, therefore, that ““She’s seamed and scored and ravaged by squalid circumstances.”<sup>950</sup> Margaret’s “circumstances” her physical and economic environment are written upon the surfaces of her corporeal self, repeating “seamed” as with the ungloved hands and pigskin purse in the hallway of their first meeting, and “scored” as you would meat or bread with a knife before cooking, carving deep lines into the surface that bakes into and deform the material itself.

After Jenny introduces the reader to Wealdstone, then, using similar aesthetics as we have seen thus far, she notes how “not only did Margaret live in this place; she also belonged to it,” following this with a description of Margaret’s body as it is stained itself by a similar set of markings to that which plague the industrial town. West depicts Margaret in her home environment thusly:

When she opened the door she gazed at me with watering eyes and in perplexity stroked her disordered hair with a floury hand. Her face was sallow with heat, and beads of perspiration glittered in the deep dragging line between her nostrils and the corners of her mouth.<sup>951</sup>

And of Wealdstone she states:

Wealdstone is not, in its way, a bad place; it lies in the lap of open country and at the end of every street rise the green hill of Harrow and the spires of Harrow School. But all the streets are long and red and freely articulated with railway arches, and factories spoil the skyline with red angular chimneys, and in front of the shops stand little women with backs ridged by cheap stays, who tapped their upper lips with their forefingers and made other feeble, doubtful gestures, as though they wanted to buy something and knew that if they did they would have to starve some other appetite. . . . And here Margaret lived, in a long road of red brick boxes, flecked here and there with the pink blur of almond blossom, which debouched in a flat field where green grass rose up rank through clay mould blackened by coal dust from the railway line and the adjacent goods yard. Mariposa, which was the last house in the road, did not even have an almond tree. In her front garden, which seemed to be imperfectly reclaimed from the greasy



field, yellow crocus and some sodden squills just winked, and the back, where a man was handling a spade without mastery, presented the austere appearance of an allotment.<sup>952</sup>

Margaret's whole body is as if subjected to an extreme heat and dusty environ. This connects her image here with other moments of tropical residue in England, and the hot bodily or tanned surfaces of Chris and old Mr. Baldry discussed later—linking them, therefore, with imperialism through their neocolonial work. It also extends this idea of a connection to her place—Wealdstone—in particular as a site of environmentally exploitative industry. Because the town is marked so thoroughly by the presence of the railroad and its fueling by coal (mined most likely in another rural or suburban English space), Margaret's appearance conjures the look of a railroad worker who spends their days feeding coal into the mouth of its engine. Both that metaphoric labor with which Margaret is affiliated and the real labor to which West attributes Margaret's appearance (baking, at her own hearth or oven, as it is her servant's day off) are still marked by a staunchly working-class labor-industrial materiality. Her body evinces prolonged contact with extreme heat: "watering eyes," "face was sallow with heat, and beads of perspiration." She is also distressed by a wind-blown look (as if from riding on an open train car): "disordered hair." Like the coal dust that mars the fields of Margaret's home, her hands also are covered with a dusty substance, rather than the *industrial* coal of a railroad engineer, her body is caked in the stains of domestic labor seen via her "floury hand." The presence of sweat upon her face, furthermore, is not figured merely as *upon* her skin, but *within* it: "in the deep dragging line" between her nose and mouth, recalling again the permanent seaming and scoring of labor upon the body mentioned earlier.

Indeed, Wealdstone's landscape, in addition to "stain[ing]" the domestic space that is England, is also marked like these "deep dragging line[s]" within and "watering," "floury" surfaces of Margaret's skin. This working-class landscape is marked the domestic industry that employs its people and extracts its natural resources. Transported as it is through the infectious presence of Margaret, Wealdstone's environmental disfigurement becomes an invasive unwanted mark upon Baldry Court whose extractive foundations are hidden beneath well-veneered surfaces, though they begin to show through in the reading I embarked on above. Though it is aligned with Baldry Court's pastoral beauty, being, as West explains, "in the lap of open country," and encumbered only on all sides by the "rise [of] green hill[s]," Wealdstone is primarily constructed in contradiction to this concept of the natural-seeming national English space described before the "But" in Jenny's description of "Wealdstone." The space is literally constructed by industry, "freely articulated with railway arches," and with "factories [that] spoil the skyline with red angular chimneys." The streets, homes, and factories are all characterized primarily as "red": "streets are long and red," "factories" have "red angular chimneys," and houses are "red brick boxes." The "angular[ity]" of the factory chimneys seems to contrast the smooth beautiful surfaces we have witnessed at Baldry Court. The "sk[y]" like the land here, as elsewhere is also "different" than it was in the "old days." The presence of factory chimneys also gives a second cause for the "coal dust" attributed in the passage to the "railway." Yet, both sites of industry produce capital through human labor that is used to extract the environmental matter of coal. This passage suggests that in doing so, this link becomes coextensive, the connection between

human and nonhuman materiality entwined through their mutual exploitation under industrial imperial England, at home as well as abroad.

The rhetoric of “spo[liation]” with regard to the relationship to factories and skylines (industry and environment) pervades the entire passage and permeates the landscape constituted therein. The clay constitution of this space implies bricks that create the streets, factories, and houses equally—all being “red”—is deformed into a polluting presence on the land directly in the passage as well: “in a flat field” there was “clay mould blackened by coal dust from the railway.” The “blacken[ing]” as method of spoliation links once again the material-aesthetic methodology of Wealdstone to nomansland, colonial spaces, and the marring of Baldry Court by the “cancerous blot” of their presences. Even the presence of “natural” beauty upon the space is figured as a messy marking. The “almond blossom[s]” of the “almond tree[s]” there “flecked” the landscape like coal dust settling on a cloak, or are as a smudge, depicted as a “pink blur.” The almond tree, like the name of Margaret’s small bit of Wealdstone, and the crocuses that also grace her lot, hail from foreign elsewhere: that tree being native to the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Asia; and that name—Mariposa—being the Spanish word for butterfly, a creature that must be ironically conjured in a foreign tongue for the lack of flowers here has likely ensured such a species will no longer be found here. Margaret’s “garden” flowers: the “yellow crocus”—seen also at Baldry Court—and “squills” are “sodden” and “just wink” through the presence of surrounding filth. Squills, too, are a foreign plant, native to Russia, the Caucasus, and Turkey, often being blue. They, like much of the vegetation from this novel, look east to the area around the fertile crescent for its native land—the area English expeditionary forces institute a war-time

colonization of. The landscape is itself personified as a face, sullied like Margaret's, "wink[ing]." As we approach Margaret's home, this seems to be the dirtiest space of all as West hyperbolizes the stains appearing on Wealdstone elsewhere.

Her street does not simply end, but "debouched in a flat field." The word debouched is itself a military term, linking such spaces to early formulations of a military-industrial complex that emerges out of early imperialism such as England's—all linked together in the language and aesthetics of this text. Debauched means "to issue from a narrow or confined place," or "[t]o issue as at a mouth or outlet into a wider place or space."<sup>953</sup> Like the "wink[ing]" garden, this "debouch[ing]" street contains within it a sense of a place personified in both the definition and the etymology. Coming as it does from the French word "bouche" that means "mouth," they evoke a face of this landscape, and one that mirrors Margaret's own. While semantically the word means only a flowing into or rather out of, sonically, it resembles the word "debauched" that, given the dirty word Jenny uses to describe Margaret's enmirement, makes the brain first perhaps want to read it this way: as a place "seduced or corrupted from duty or virtue; depraved or corrupt in morals; given up to sensual pleasures or loose living; dissolute, licentious."<sup>954</sup> Where elsewhere streets end with "green hill[s]," here, Margaret has access only to a "flat field." Nature seems two-dimensional, making the space appear as if it is unnatural and out of place in its own environment. This is no bucolic English field, however. Though it is populated by "green grass," this grass instead of evoking life "rose up rank" for its having to fight its way through a top layer of "clay mould blackened by coal dust." This environment is also, then, stained by industry and made seemingly unnatural by comparison to Baldry's vistas. Rank things are associated with death and decay, and

often putrid smells. The smell of clay and coal has no counter-point here, however, for Margaret's house "did not even have an almond-tree."

This space builds an almost apocalyptic register. It is "the last house in the road" where nature comes to die and industrial matters reign. The "field" is then described as "greasy" implying the presence either of oil—another industrial byproduct—or of a grotesque mixture of coal and clay that is figured as yet another "stain on the fabric of [a] li[fe]." <sup>955</sup> The boundary between the space of the field beyond the limits ("at the end") of the road, and given over to industry that transforms native spaces into dirty industrial wastelands where life is forfeit, and the domestic spaces of Margaret's home, the civic space of the "road," and the private space of her "front garden," are described as "imperfectly reclaimed" from the space of industry: they have become here of a piece. The disgust that Jenny feels at this landscape's surfaces, sullied as she assesses them to be, and the fear she expresses that they already "stain" English space and may infect her own ideal English locale at Baldry Court via Margaret's "stickiness," suggest that the negative material aesthetics of English spaces links them to those externalized yet internally inexpungible spaces of war, empire, and domestic industry. Jenny then expresses a suppressed or slowly exposed anxiety over the ability to benefit from the extraction of wealth and resources from sites of material subjection (colonies, labor-intensive landscapes, and war zones) without becoming at best marked by, and at worst consumed or subsumed by such landscapes and the ugliness and injustice that British influence has made them into.

*Tropicalizing English Lands*

The negative matters this chapter has charted throughout—the novel’s staining by a war whose destructive environment England imagined as having no real impact on its own lands, the dirty places of industrial England as represented by the blot on England that is Margaret and her Wealdstone, and the traces of empire that refuse to remain on the fringes of the national imaginary—represent those environments that have been destroyed through the exploitation of English imperialism that in fact, as noted in Chapter 5, undergird its domestic existence. Furthermore, the plot of *The Return of the Soldier* weaves a different meaning between these present and absent matters than the dominant English imaginary would—at the time of its publication in 1918—have sought to see as its own national narrative. The trauma that disrupts Baldry Court’s peaceable Englishness, while on the surface is suggested to be World War I itself, and its threatening to eliminate the English aristocratic line in the portended death of Baldry’s heir—Chris, is, I claim, actually Chris’s leave-taking of England for Mexico to put down revolts in the family mines—the knowledge of temperate England’s dependency on “tropical” lands.

While not a colony proper, English neocolonial holdings in such foreign lands are revealed as that which keeps proper English landscapes, such as Baldry Court, alive. Money made in Mexico through the extraction of silver from those mines not only destroys Mexican environments, but also founds Baldry’s England on negative matters—not the industriousness of the aristocratic or upper middle classes, but instead on the exploited lands of elsewhere. Hence, when Chris’s memory is jolted back by the reminder of the death of his son and only heir, of the end of an English lineage, the memory returned to him spans those 15 years that began with none other than his going

to Mexico. The reliance of England on colonial and neocolonial environments is the traumatic aporia, then, that the novel reveals in those negative matters of England and in the temporal workings of its narrative. This narratological-aesthetic linkage of English negative matters and colonial elsewheres is bound also by a tropical aesthetics. As noted in Chapter 5, it was common practice to consider most non-European environs to be tropical—condensing all manner of diverse environments into a climatological metaphor for their otherness. West’s text resurfaces the grounding of England in external lands by activating a tropical aesthetics. In addition to the tropical resonances that I have pointed to throughout, we can see its more pointed emergence at key moments in the novel. In such places, West paints English bodies and lands with a tropical aesthetic—depicting aesthetically a material reality that the English national imaginary refused to make openly legible.

After Chris’s return from France with amnesia, Jenny persistently attempts to discover the knot that binds his memory—finding the dates of its absence strangely suggestive. Finally, alone and away from the presence of his wife Kitty, Chris divulges the final moments he remembers and Jenny realizes this is the key, “I had got the key at last,” to understanding what his mind wishes to forget.<sup>956</sup>

There had been a spring at Baldry Court fifteen years ago that was desolate for all that there was beautiful weather . . . old Mr. Baldry was filling the house with a sense of hot, apoplectic misery. . . . All night he used to sit in the library looking over his papers and ledgers; often in the mornings the housemaids would find him asleep across his desk, very red, yet looking dead. . . . he dropped braggart hints of impending ruin . . . That night [Chris] talked till late with his father, and in the

morning he had started for Mexico to keep the mines going, to keep the firm's head above water and Baldry Court sleek and hospitable—to keep everything bright and splendid save only his youth, which ever after that was dulled by care.<sup>957</sup>

This leave-taking for Mexico, which ended his relationship with Margaret and set him on a path to marry Kitty and produce no male heirs, is done in order to maintain English spaces, to “keep . . . Baldry Court sleek and hospitable.” Nicole Rizzuto has suggested, in her reading together of neocolonial Mexican history and West's novel, that Chris's work there would most likely have involved putting down revolting Mexican laborers—resisting poor pay and work conditions as well as the ravaging of their own natural resources.<sup>958</sup> Though Chris returns physically unharmed from his foray into imperial violence, I argue that something else returns with him—the surfaces of England afterwards reflect those lands he had to subdue in order to “keep the mines going” and his family's “head above water.” Bodies here reflect the negative mattering of Englishness first. Mr. Baldry appears “very red” as if he himself was immersed in the tropical environments implied by the “hot . . . misery” his trouble with the Mexican holding produces back in England. Chris's face, too, returns “dulled by care.”

These tropical traces on the surface of England crop up elsewhere, in moments when Jenny's anxieties are at their height—this time, not on the bodies of those men with direct contact with the Mexican troubles, but instead on the landscape of England itself, making it appear as if foreign and threatening. Jenny explains:

There had been a hardening of the light while I slept that made the dear, familiar woods rich and sinister, and to the eye, tropical. The jewel-bright buds on the



soot-black boughs, the blue valley distances, smudged here and there with the pink enamel of villa-roofs, and seen between the black-and-white intricacies of the birch-trunks and the luminous gray pillars of the beeches, hurt my wet eyes as might beauty blazing under an equatorial sun. There was a tropical sense of danger, too, for I walked as apprehensively as though a snake coiled under every leaf . . . Against the clear colors of the bright bare wood her yellow raincoat made a muddy patch<sup>959</sup>

The “tropical” appearance of Baldry’s “woods” marks them as “sinister.” Associating her English view with a colorful panorama more like what she would deem a tropical locale, “jewel-bright buds” and “pink enamel of villa-roofs” “hurt” her “eyes” as if they were subjected to a “blazing . . . equatorial sun.” Repeating her direct reference to the tropics, she perceives a “tropical sense of danger” as if there were a “snake coiled under every leaf.” Evoking the familiar trope of the tropics as site of threatening nature, West’s novel flips the referent, however, and locates such threats at home, interweaving them with “familiar” English environs. The passage closes by linking the threat that a tropicalization of England poses with Margaret and the war—the “yellow raincoat” evokes again a tropical color scheme and, along with the oblique reference to the war through her elision with a “muddy patch,” collapses together the three environments England wishes to imagine are external to itself: colonial, domestic industrial, and war zone.

Finally, the text connects the tropical aesthetic to that which threatens the stability of those English spaces further, in Jenny’s identification of tropical violence with English grief at what the war has revealed to the nation.

Indeed, grief is not the clear melancholy the young believe it. It is like a siege in a tropical city. The skin dries and the throat parches as though one were living in the heat of the desert; water and wine taste warm in the mouth, and food is of the substance of the sand; one snarls at one's company; thoughts prick one through sleep like mosquitos<sup>960</sup>

The passage depicts Jenny's "grief" at the potential loss of Chris and of the world he represents with a "siege in a tropical city." The body itself is besieged by its surrounds as England is tropicalized by the erosion of its imagined foundation on native grounds, and forced to see its entanglement in previously othered landscapes: "skin dries," "throat parches," liquids are "warm in the mouth," "food" becomes "sand," and "thoughts" "mosquitos." The disruption of Baldry Court's insular, englobed environment of beautiful, orderly nature and matter is transformed into an estate in "the heat of the desert." In rewriting England as aesthetically interchangeable with those spaces it consumes, West's tropical aesthetics, then, represent the English negative mattering par excellence.

## **Chapter 9—Deracinated English Material Aesthetics: Exposing and Encoding Imperial Othering in Nancy Cunard and Helen Saunders**

Chapter 9 discusses two divergent uses of negative English matter. I begin with a reading of Nancy Cunard's use of primitivist aesthetics in her *Negro Anthology* (1934) essays to expose the way in which English imperialism detaches itself from real matters of English soil in order to exploit racialized matters across the globe and at home. I then trace the inverted effect of such primitivist negative matters at home in my reading of Helen Saunders' "A Vision of Mud" (1915) as her use of mud reveals the perceived threat of base matters turned debased matters by the war. I demonstrate that her muddied aesthetics rely also on absent racialized colonial Others that, though not depicted directly in the poem, are re-encoded as other in this home-front rendering of the experience of war.

*"Negro firmament," "white hemisphere," "English soil": Nancy Cunard's Negro Anthology*

My reading of Nancy Cunard's *Negro Anthology* (1934) analyzes her use of images of stone and land, reading her base material aesthetics as a method of visualizing the often invisible problematics that arise in colonial attempts to fix English imperial power via a rooting of English stone upon colonial landscapes, specifically, in the reading below, those of Jamaica. She also highlights the racialized distortions that result from deracinated and hegemonic uses of the image of "the land" in global anglophone landscapes. In so doing, like Woolf's works in Chapter 2, Cunard exposes the function of base matters within discourses of primitivism upon the land—aestheticizing the colonial Jamaican environs in order to exposed England's already having written their own

matters upon them. As a part of this reversal of primitivism's aesthetic-material process within the English imaginary, Cunard also exposes the deracination of the idea of English soil, as discussed in Chapter 5, in order to show such abstracting of environmental matter is already implicated in racialized national discourse—at home and abroad.

The *Negro Anthology* is a collection of essays, photographs, and poetry from a group of both Euro-American and Black authors from across the globe. As editor and contributor, Cunard begins *Negro Anthology* with a statement on voice. Backgrounding her own white Englishwoman's voice as a site of authority, she claims to use the anthology to create a space for the global voice of an internationally oppressed Negro peoples. "It was necessary to make this book—and I think in this manner, an Anthology of some 150 voices of both races—for the recording of the struggles and achievements, the persecutions and the revolts against them, of the Negro peoples."<sup>961</sup> Despite good intentions, Cunard's editorial voice still problematically effects the agency to speak for the racial and colonial Other from a position of relative—class, racial, and national—privilege.<sup>962</sup> This voice asserts the importance of a voice and a people as the central rhetorical trope on which the anthology turns, in her own writing and that which she curates from others as editor, over and above land and nation. This begins to erode the primacy of national spaces and insist on a person or subjecthood that is internationally (read universally) human. Far from attempting to re-solidify Englishness, like many of her modernist peers, she attempts to disrupt such geographic divisions as road maps for the biological determination for human equality, idealizing images of what she believed to be racially diverse egalitarian societies.

Interestingly, such a disembodied and deracinated rhetoric is in tension with the primitivism portrayed in the then-famous series of photographed portraits done of Cunard by Barbara Ker Seymour, Man Ray, and others (see figures 1-3).<sup>963</sup>



As Jane Marcus notes, through these photographs, and largescale demonization of her in the press for her outspoken ideas on race and class, Cunard's very body becomes a symbol for the version of primitivism she is performing resistance to when she poses for them and compiles *Negro Anthology*.<sup>964</sup> Metaphorically shackled, ravaged, and bound, Cunard's body performs the racialized brutalities suffered by the Negro peoples as recorded throughout her volume within in verbal and photographic images. So, while her rhetoric may emphasize voice tied to no land or nation in particular, her project is bound up with the materiality of racialized belonging in a world structured by imperialist practices, especially at the hands of her home country, England. Though, like many English modernists of her day, Cunard herself enacts an appropriation of the cultural symbols and history of Africans and those of African descent, the effect is not a resuscitation of English identity, but, within the context of Cunard's other life performances—such as her relationship with Henry; her publishing of *Black Man, White Ladyship* (1931); and her public disinheritance of her class and her Anglo identity—her efforts attempt, however successfully, to expose the bondage and *English* savagery upon

which their supposed superiority is founded. She aimed to scandalize Anglo-Americans into change by confronting them with the Other they seek to both consume and abject through images evocative of her own supposed miscegenation and that erotically/corporeally *bonded* her English body to the “Negro” peoples, lands, and history of subjection using the matter of her body and its aestheticized material surfaces.<sup>965</sup>

Her emphasis on the visual both furthers this disembodied rhetoric within the anthology and also makes sense of her performances in Ker-Seymour’s photography. The second sentence of the forward reads, “[t]he reader finds first in this panorama the full violence of the oppression of the 14 million Negroes in *America* and the upsurge of their demands for mere justice, that is to say their full and equal rights alongside their white fellow-citizens.”<sup>966</sup> Cunard characterizes as a “panorama” the “full violence” oppressing African-Americans as well as their “full and equal rights”—the topic to which the first quarter of the book is devoted. This ocular-spectacular rhetoric emphasizes the visual qualities of these racialized issues, both playing on its absurd emphasis on color as a standard for rights and presaging the visually horrifying scenes or landscapes that became all too common by 1930s America, especially in the south (alluding to the ample disturbing photographs within the volume of African-American bodies subjected to lynchings and slavery by another name in prisons). The visual spectacularness of “panorama” immediately conjures up and resists the sense of the word that was often and still is applied to American landscapes—especially of the west. It resists ideologies of a nation defined by the vast open *panoramic* spaces emblematic of the freedom its democracy mirrors hinting that the anthology will expose this as a mere image and no reality. That most of the image of lynchings included in this panorama figure black

bodies hanging from trees, invoking that infamously disturbing image of the “strange fruit” to which Billie Holliday’s song refers. It is as if they too are a natural outgrowth of the materiality this nation engenders upon the land, demonstrating that Cunard’s evocation of the term here is no accident, but rather part of a concerted effort to call up then undermine such beautified fallacies that circulate around tropes of “the land” in nationalist discourse. Her treatment of the relationship between black bodies and English lands is meant to effect a similar resistance.

Her discussion of other African-American arts outside poetry complicates the equating of the black subject solely with victim, something such phrasing as “the coloured poet, doubly sensitive. Perforce he carries the burden of his race, it is mostly his theme” is at risks of suggesting.<sup>967</sup> She continues, “[w]hat shall I say of the miraculous *Theatrical* and *Musical* Negro firmament? That here are only the pictures and descriptions of all too few; that it is high time a separate book were made to do justice to a people so utterly rich in natural grace and beauty . . . the as yet in our white hemisphere almost unknown and unrecorded splendor of African rhythms.”<sup>968</sup> Here she terms to purpose of her “separate book,” to “do justice to a people so utterly rich” in culture. The absence she seeks to fill is again cast in terms of the visual, identifying a lack of “pictures and descriptions” that this book, with its hundreds of images will fill with an almost excessive visibility. She also makes recourse to a language of land in order to deconstruct its notion as linked only to bounded, national spaces as she began to do above. The collective practice of musical and dramatic arts by peoples of African descent is termed a “Negro firmament,” lending it a material fixity akin to that of land. Land itself takes on an expanded sense, however, under the phrase of “our white hemisphere.” This

hemispheric sense evokes the attempted global hegemony by European cultures that Cunard seeks to dismantle by making known the “Negro firmament” that is currently “unknown” because not pictured in the hegemonic white cultural imaginary. The “splendor of African rhythms” links American and other predominantly Caucasian nations under critique here—in particular Britain—to the African continent, in an attempt to create a new “world-order.” A global visibility via geographic rhetorics such as “firmament” and “hemisphere” unite “Negro” peoples and cultures transatlantically and place them *firmly* into a place of equality the world over. This geophysical tropology also becomes increasingly entangled in the environmental with the naming of this “Negro firmament” as “rich in natural grace and beauty.” Hoping to reverse the naturalization of racist forms of national belonging, Cunard’s rhetoric attempts to naturalize black and brown subjects’ rightful and beneficial place in the hemisphere echoes and offers a corrective to the rhetoric of biologic inferiority that many promulgated as “natural” to the “Negro” race and “African” peoples.

Cunard’s movement away from tropes of national land towards global, diverse geographies as a method for the erosion of negative ideologies of race is furthered when she links references to hegemonic states with geologic metaphors for racial oppression. She writes that this is “crowned” by the Governor of the State of California’s “broadcast [his] sanction of and encouragement to lynching.” The spirit and determination in the Negro to break through the mountain of tyranny heaped on him is manifested in his rapid evolution, since Emancipation in 1863, of his own cultural organisations, as is shown in every sphere of activity—literature, education, business, the law, the press, the theatre, etc.”<sup>969</sup> This “mountain of tyranny” is an outgrowth of the official rhetorics from



imperialist (“crowned”) California governance. The “mountain” is “heaped” on “the Negro” as in a rapid depiction of the geologic formation of such impassable topographies. The notion of cultural evolution in the fertile ground of freedom (“since Emancipation in 1863”) remakes the concept of “evolution” as a product of social and not biological environments. It is the actions of the rulers of this state, whose symbolic invocation of Western Frontiers as the landed metaphor for American progress and manifest destiny, that are substituted as the backwards primitive in the promotion of primal and undemocratic violence (“sanction and encouragement to lynching”) instead of the “Negro” who was often pictured as “evolution[arily]” inferior. The African-American who “breaks through” it does so via their own “rapid evolution,” naturalizing the African-American population’s right to a free existence on American land.

Though Cunard establishes her subversive anti-motherland (antinationalist) rhetoric in the American sections of her forward, it is her comments on England and its colonies that of course have the most bearing on the dynamics under exploration in this dissertation, and moreover, to Cunard personally as a British citizen and Englishwoman by birth. She explains that “[t]he writings in the *European* section are mainly on th[e] theme” of the “Colour-bar,” which was England’s version of the U.S.’s segregation, barring people of color (with the exception of wealthy Indians) from entry or residence at certain hospitality establishments (primarily hotels and restaurants).<sup>970</sup> The British sections of *Negro Anthology* continue to root the racial inequities of imperialism in the trope of the land as a metaphor of special substance to the national ethos. In her discussion of segregated public spaces in England, “Colour Bar,” she writes, “[b]y what agency then does this same Negro, as soon as he strikes English soil, become ‘a Nigger’?

. . . The English hold that they must keep the blacks down; it is their 'divine right'."<sup>971</sup>

Her rhetoric comingles the power of the "soil" to transform and degrade personhood with an English "divine right." The land itself is sacrosanct and its sacred value is constructed as a form of white English racial purity. Hence, it catalyzes the English "right" to "keep the blacks down." Though Cunard critiques rather than participates in this ideology, what she hits upon is the dangerousness of laying a national foundation on the sacredness of its native soil, which often ebbs towards regressive ideas of racial purity and the fascist policies they tend to elicit. Cunard goes on to demonstrate the reality of such ideologies of purity: "[w]e need not remind our readers of the terrible race riots which occurred in Liverpool, Cardiff and other ports during and immediately after the war . . . hundreds of African and West Indian seamen, many of whom fought to defend the Empire, were brutally beaten by chauvinist mobs, under the protection of the police."<sup>972</sup> Though her point is solely to identify the more extreme outcomes of the color bar in England, she draws together an important set of ideas: war, empire, race, and English ports. Jane Marcus notes that the trauma of World War I had a lifelong impact on Cunard who felt a sense of guilt for the loss of life she felt no agency to prevent for the sake of an English soil she disavowed and a British empire she despised. This scene of war-violence, which persists beyond the war proper onto the shores of England, represents a shift towards explicit intra- rather than inter- empire violence, rooting racial violence in English land breaking down the barrier between nomansland as foreign site of war and native soil as peaceful kingdom.

But, Cunard notes, "English soil" is not the only land where Britons have claimed the "right" to "keep the black man down." It is here, where Cunard turns from public

segregation in England proper to its spaces of empire beyond that hallowed ground of island soil, to another island, whose ground has been more hollowed than hallowed by imperialism, that the trope of the “land” comes into play, in highly ironic form. In “Jamaica—The Negro Island,” Cunard writes of the “the lofty outline of a new land.”<sup>973</sup> She begins by echoing the temporal backwardness of English rhetorics of racial equality when it comes to colonial spaces. Cunard writes of the history of civil rights in Jamaica: “[i]n 1772 the matter of whether or no slavery was legal in England was settled. The words that record this are, ‘as soon as any slave sets foot on English ground he becomes free’.”<sup>974</sup> Pointing this wording out verbatim with an exact date immediately reminds the reader of the anachronistic quality of the current state of English racial (in)equality in 1934—162 years later—what she will in that later essay, “Colour Bar,” term the quality of “English soil” that ludicrously transforms “Negro” into “Nigger.”<sup>975</sup>

I will discuss momentarily how this advancing backwards of progress is painted by Cunard on the landscape of Jamaica as well. But first, note that the choice of the word “matter” seems to pun on “English ground,” materializing the issue of bodily freedom as if it is rooted to the soil itself. Even “settled” comes, in this context, to carry a sedimentary significance. Cunard actualizes such matters in the aesthetics of her essay, where she asks rhetorically, “And the Jamaica of today?” and offers a reply based on observations from her own recent visit there. Jamaica is:

Evidently and most essentially a land of black people . . . Of Kingston, the capital, I cannot say otherwise than that I found it a very ugly town, contrived by that singular British spirit which is quite desperately without any concept of even the existence of a plan, architecture or form. Yes, totally in keeping with the

administrative and official atmosphere, which in other words signifies no geographic or human atmosphere of any kind. Spanish Town is different; the latins made it, and though frequent earthquakes have shaken half of it down the sort of warm yellow sunset colouring on the lovely 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings gives an idea of what the white man's past must have looked like.<sup>976</sup>

The passage is bookended with temporal markers that conflate black Jamaicans' present with white British pasts in the image of the Jamaican landscape, or more specifically, the "land" in a geographic sense. Cunard first describes the "[e]viden[t]" present of the "land" as "essentially a land of black people" but ends by associating its scenery with "an idea of what the white man's past must have looked like." Conradian primitivism equates black bodies and the lands they inhabit with an absence of civilization that is directly compared only to English landscapes of the ancient past, denying the coevalness of European and African cultures and reinforcing racist ideologies and the dangers of a too-closeness to wild nature.

Though the temporality of her phrasing echoes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, she does not reproduce it. Instead, Cunard describes two landscapes marked by the sculpting presence of European influences rather than native or African ones: "Kingston" and "Spanish Town." Though she seems to idealize a certain European ("latin") aesthetic upon the land, with its "sort of warm yellow sunset colouring on the lovely 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings," still "lovely" despite the "frequent earthquakes [that] have shaken half of it down," Cunard terms the "capital" of the colony "a very ugly town." This denigrating remark is attributed not to the "land[s]" "essentia[l]" blackness but is "contrived by that singular British spirit." Britishness appears as a stripping away of culture and history.

Cunard notes that it “signifies no geographic or human atmosphere of any kind.” It is like Conrad’s placeless “blank space” on the map, but in the inverse. Cunard’s prose plays purposefully on such Conradian primitivist tropes via this strategy of inversion, or irony, a turning of their inner logic in onto themselves. Hence, instead of an apparently dangerous excess of environmental matters that leads to an inability to signify being inherent to the colonial space (i.e. *Heart of Darkness*), here, Cunard depicts a land that *becomes* (“contrived”) blank (“signifies no[thing]”) upon contact from the British colonizer. That the space’s lack of signification, its “desparat[e] without[ness]” is a quality of its “administrative and official atmosphere” suggests that this lack of “plan, architecture or form” is what the British empire exports to its colonies, and the method with which it transforms, via radical reduction of human and nonhuman diversity, its colonial environs. In using the term “in other words” and repeating the phrase “atmosphere,” Cunard sets up a grammatical equation between the “administrative and official” and the “geographic and human.” Because one set of words is under negation (“no”) the equation also becomes a dichotomy: the presence of empire is the absence of humanity and nature. Furthermore, the “British spirit” is said to be synonymous with the administrative and official characteristics that its imperialism wreaks upon a land. Thus, Cunard constructs Britishness as the great eraser of environment and human habitability on the land (“geographic” referring to the “physical features of the earth and its atmosphere, and with human activity as it affects and is affected by these”).<sup>977</sup>

Cunard continues to invoke the Conradian primitivist trope of an atavistic racialized non-European Other only to redirect it back towards Britain as origin. She follows the preceding passage with, “[o]f the black man’s past ... still observe his

present.”<sup>978</sup> According to Cunard’s geographic rhetoric, the collapsing of past and present—a stillness in time or historical flatness that British imperial discourses of primitivism attribute essentially to the “savages”—is thrust *upon* colonial peoples and the lands they inhabit by the British, “contrived by” the English invader, rather than found in native squalor by the British colonizers on arrival. She continues: “[t]hose wattled huts the slaves lived in . . . all this is swept away? Indeed no. In the north, at least in the parts as I saw, the description of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century writers is exactly appropriate still . . . It was a market day, a sea of black people, a most vivacious crowd. What are they selling? The fruits of the earth: akees, yams, plantains and various delicious exotic half-fruits, half nuts.”<sup>979</sup> The living conditions of Jamaicans are characterized by “wattled huts” built to house “slaves.” The colonial landscape is synonymous with a place of enslavement, not with free subjects of empire, for “the description of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century writers [during the time of slavery’s prominence] is exactly appropriate still,” as if they are stuck in time. In this passage an interplay between images of water and earth as arable soil moves Cunard’s rhetoric of colonial critique forward. The natural function of time is to “swe[ep] away” the landscape of the past in aligning political and social progress with material environs. The population is a “sea of black people.” This oceanic conceit echoes the middle passage across the Atlantic that brought Jamaican’s African descendants to the island from Africa. Though this “sea”-like “crowd” reminds one of the dehumanizing rhetorics of “swarming” colonial others that the English metropolis fears, its “vivacious” connotation smooths out its deindividuating force, emphasizing the life-filled vibrance of the Jamaican people. Their alliance with productive life and not with threat and danger is furthered via Cunard’s agricultural imagery. The locals are “selling”

the “fruits of the earth” – “exotic” but native to this place. Though in this passage she cannot help but evoke a sense of colonial exhibitionism, it is attenuated by the preceding pages of personal interviews with her hosts and other island inhabitants, depicting them in tones of shared humanity and equality.

The essay is continually punctuated with images underscoring the English mark upon the land as the true originator of a bewildering blankness. In contradistinction to the colorful “market” or “Spanish Town,” Cunard describes, “[a]long the road there would suddenly be an expanse of English park land, not a palm or banana tree in sight. And the rain made it all go black and dark green, as if one were looking up from under a deep water at the slow knotted hills of the old Maroon country.”<sup>980</sup> The “English park land” is devoid of native plants such as “palm or banana tree.” But the water, by now associated with the “black” populace and their entrapment in an English colonial outside-of-timeness, transforms the “park land” imported from England via “rain [that] made it go all black and dark green.” Saturated with moisture, the landscape still reflects that this island, unlike England, is “most essentially a land of black people,” painting over English pastoral chromatics of bright green with a deep “dark green” that appears as if it is ocean instead. Cunard’s evocation of this underwater orientation via her simile, “as if one were looking up from under a deep water” reorients the land from the view of the bottom of the Atlantic, a perspectival shift that places the reader again in mind of those lost in the middle passage on English slave trading ships en route to Jamaica over the hundreds of preceding years of colonial rule. The landscape they sight is the “the slow knotted hills of the old Maroon country”—a locale that historically housed and hid the encampment of escaped slaves that long resisted violent white colonial attempts to press them back into

slavery—discussed elsewhere in the essay. The “knotted” nature of the “hills” suggests the thickly rooted trees that made it so difficult to uproot the Maroon rebels. The attribution of “slow” to a still landscape of “hills” evokes a sense of motion and naturalizing the movement of time on the island that Cunard has been elaborating, referring back to the “swept away” oceanic conceit that at the outset of the passage demonstrated time’s failure to show progress in the colonies as evinced by the conditions of its majority “black” population.

In contrast to the rest of her writings in the anthology, in her in-depth look at a characteristically English colonial site, she makes recourse directly to the rhetoric of land and a general environmental aesthetics that are so essential to English ideologies of nation and British imperialism. In doing so, Cunard reinscribes the history of violence erased by British imperialist transformations to that land and people on the Jamaican landscape, including transatlantic African histories. She calls the view before her an indescribable scene of “rapid changes of this beautiful land” attributing to the geography itself a speed and beauty that British incursions have elsewhere erased.<sup>981</sup> This beauty extends to the “Black river, banana, plantain and palm fronds fiercely tossing in the rain, deserted roads on completely empty mountains . . . several of the roads that seemed to go [to Maroon Town] ended after a time in a flank of forest. . . . the sense of the utter remoteness of a barely inhabited region . . . the forests closed in the steep roads.”<sup>982</sup> Her appreciation without fear of Jamaican environs dismisses the terrifying ethnocentric darkness that *Heart of Darkness* depicts as an essential English response to colonial wilds. Cunard employs primitivist diction in her painting of Jamaica, as the reader finds similar “fierc[e],” “flank[ing],” “closed in” fauna and the “deserted,” “empty,” “utter



remoteness” of jungles “barely inhabited” in Conrad’s Congo. Swinging back to a colonially dominated space, as her essay continually does, like the swaying palm or ocean tide, Cunard describes “Montego Bay” in “sharp contrast”: approached via “a flat land-stretch”— more blankness and no “slow . . . hills.”<sup>983</sup> The population is as a “dense, moving, vivacious black crowd, round a preacher in the open square. The whites have planted Christianity in Jamaica in such a way that it is as much *there* as the native vegetation.”<sup>984</sup>

The density of the “black crowd” mirrors the “slow knotted hill” and the “black and dark green” “English park land”— tying the people to the land where Englishness appears not to have tainted it. Their gathering, however, in its alignment with dehumanizing primitivist rhetorics is immediately attributed to “whites” via an agricultural metaphor. Cunard describes colonizers as having “planted Christianity,” now “as much *there* as the native vegetation.” The process she describes is that of an invasive species, and it echoes a similar sentiment to the deadly implantation of colonial systems in Africa from her forward. Through her georgic imagery, the idea of nativity is eroded, however. This undermines the threatening valences of the “invasive,” much as Cunard’s rhetoric has neutralized the threat of the “dense, moving, vivacious black crowd,” by revealing that its more dangerous connotations are actually an outgrowth of white culture’s own colonial practices.

The final comparison I will make is between a vision of imperial English space embedded in Jamaica surrounded by enclosed cultivated exotic spaces. Reading this alongside Cunard’s revision of the trope of soil, I claim Cunard uses these environmental aesthetics to reassert the agency of black Jamaicans upon the land over the dominant

force of imperial Britishness that expresses itself in the landscape through an aesthetics of stone. The imperial site is characterized primarily by stone whereas the black Jamaican presence is rooted in images of native vegetation, putting the geologic and the organic at odds. Cunard attempts to resolve these via an image of soil that replaces the nationalist-imperialist fixity of land with a communist or almost anarchic organicism of agriculture. She writes:

Imagine a landscape of gravel, of glaring white concrete posts, railings and flower-beds round an immense, exotic, though somewhat humanity-scarred tree, with a small arrogant statue of the good Queen in whitest marble like the apex of the Victorian wedding cake—that is the centre of Kingston under a flaming sun. A vast number of tropical plants, . . . has been gathered into a special garden nearby. This too is a pineapple farm. . . . The pure black people are on the land, an agricultural peasantry. . . . This is indeed the white man’s doing. As there are so few whites they have established on the rock foundation of British empire custom the ‘mulatto superiority’ to fill the place of the ‘white superiority’.<sup>985</sup>

Here attempting to fix a pre-imperialist English identity on native soil now sullied from within by domestic stains of British imperialism, the stones of Cunard’s Jamaica are markers of white imperialist domination and power. They are quite literally white, and attempt instead to fix British power abroad upon these marginal spaces of empire, as if the presence of English imperial stones in Jamaica could solidify the globally distributed spaces of empire with a materiality akin to the local rootedness of Queen Victoria herself in London at the time of the statue’s implantation. The “landscape” itself is “of” white stone: “gravel,” “glaring white concrete posts,” “a small arrogant statue of the good

Queen in whitest marble.” Cunard likens this statute whose white brilliance is underscored further by the “flaming sun,” to a symbol of that most Victorian and therefore imperialist of English institutions: marriage. She states that these stones erected in the “centre of Kingston” are like “the apex of the Victorian wedding cake”—a marriage of colony and motherland through a symbol of the ultimate imperial mother—Queen Victoria.

That the white stone fixture stands adjacent and is encircled together (as with a wedding ring) to “flower-beds round an immense, exotic, though somewhat humanity-scarred tree.” This links stony acts of empire to the natural and human destruction that is their outcome. The “flower-beds” are evocative of that fertility that Victorian empire and domestic marital institution favored. The “tree” seems to stand as a substitute for the human victims of empire, while also standing for its environmental ones – the compound word “humanity-scarred” evokes both the scarred humanity of black Jamaican’s (reinforced by the tree’s “exotic” label) at the hands of the British, as well as the notion that humans have scarred the nonhuman environment through their imperialist actions. There is another adjacent site of fertility, a “garden” that, as opposed to the sprawling natural environs which appear elsewhere, is “gathered” together, cordoned off into a “special” designated place, like an encampment where native things are displayed or interned. Finally, the “pineapple farm,” is populated by “[t]he pure black people” “on the land,” referring to the tiered system of people of color that colonialism has implanted—where those black Jamaicans with lighter skin hold socioeconomically superior positions. This “agricultural peasantry” is therefore a racialized one, marrying the rhetoric of race and land to make the point that the inequities that “the land” now represent in Jamaica are

not native to that place, or the Africans who were brought there by slavers, but is “the white man’s doing.” The hierarchy of black peoples is expressed again with a rhetoric of stone—tied now explicitly to imperial sociogeographies—“mulatto superiority” acting as a substitute for the absent “white superiority” via the calcifying and hardening agency of “the rock foundation of British empire custom.”

Cunard closes the essay, a few pages later, on this same theme and via the same landed symbolism, after many more similar descriptions to those discussed here. She writes: “[t]hat is the Jamaica I saw. It culminates into a certainty that comes like a voice out of the soil itself. ‘This island is the place of black peasantry, it must be unconditionally theirs. It belongs undividedly and by right to the black Jamaican on the land’.”<sup>986</sup> These final words echo the subversive use of imperial metaphors of land throughout. They also directly correlate to the soil metaphor she uses in her later essay on the color bar. Her visual evidence, like a series of photographs, is meant to make as concrete as the stones of empire she seeks to shake and crumble the natural right of black Jamaicans to the land. All she “saw” “culminates into a certainty” like the stone Victorian cake-topper in Kingston, “that comes like a voice out of the soil itself.” Establishing a new authority of nativity—Cunard locates black Jamaican rights to a life free from literal or economic subjection in the link to the land—naturalized in this metaphor of the ground itself speaking that the “island is the place of black peasantry, it must be unconditionally theirs,” “belongs undivided and by right” to those people “on the land.” This suggests that those who expend the labor of their bodies to live upon and produce fruits of the land are the ones who own it—just as they own the right to the labor of their own bodies historically denied to them.

*“[T]he Deluge of Mud” as “India-rubber-like shapes”*: Helen Saunders’ *“A Vision of Mud”*

British painter and poet Helen Saunders’ poem, “A Vision of Mud” (1915), presents a woman’s vision of the mud from the homefront. Looking at the translocation of war matters in the form of mud outside the front, the setting of Saunders’ poem at first appears as if resemblance to a flooded trench, but is in the end revealed to be located in a health spa,<sup>987</sup> estranging both war from the trenches and English subjects from a sense of safety outside the war zone. As my readings of these texts will show, the anxiety invoked by muddied images develops the bodily and psychic boundary breakage seen in the war writers by drawing more heavily than ever on a racialized sense of mud and its connection to the national boundaries and spaces of empire. Saunders participates in an aesthetics of debased matter that, aligning itself with writers such as Sassoon and Blunden (who themselves write *after* Saunders), and producing an environmental aesthetic that increasingly affiliates base matters (including one’s own body) with sites of fear and unwanted contact that draw on and reinforce fear of the boundary between imperial and colonial others as one and the same affective-material experience of the English subject’s encounter with World War I—aligning, in the subject’s internment in estranged and othered grounds, as discussed in Chapter 5, entrenchment with extractivism.

### *In the Trenches*

The title of Helen Saunders’ poem, “A Vision of Mud” (1915), immediately announces two foci—sight and matter, at their intersection in the body. Being “A Vision,” the title suggests the poem conveys a sense of religious or sacred sight, inviting

one to read what follows as an ecstatic experience. That this ecstatic, or out of body, encounter is “of mud” introduces a foundational tension between our ability to locate the speaker in a material body or a purely metaphysical poetic “I.” The decision over whether or not to interpret the poem’s “mud” as material threat or metaphorical musing hinges on the reader’s understanding of the materiality of the body within the text and the body’s relationship to its environment, its material surrounds. This erasure of the body in the poem, however, is less a product of the vision’s ecstasis, and more of the excessive materiality of the mud that it beholds. Saunders writes:

There is mud all round

This is favourable to the eclosion of mighty life : thank God for small mercies !

How is it that if you struggle you sink ?

I lie quite still : hands are spreading mud everywhere : they plaster it on what  
should be a body.

They fill my mouth with it. I am sick. They shovel it all back again.<sup>988</sup>

The pervasive nature of the mud is denoted by the speaker’s description of their surrounds. It is “*all* around,” “mud *everywhere*,” all orifices are “*fill[ed]*,” “*all*” “shovel[ed]” in, “*full* of” this “mud”/“it.”<sup>989</sup> The totality of mud’s presence is heightened by the fact that each spatial or qualifiable locution is a marker of the absolute. The speaker is pictured as being practically drowning in mud—their own life, indeed, seems threatened by it—as mud is “shovel[ed]” and “spread” by an anonymous “They” inside and all over the speaker’s body—mouth, ears, nose, and all.

Neither the boundaries of the body of the speaker nor their agency are ever stabilized within the poem. The too-closeness of inert matters discussed in Chapter 3 is

here amplified as all points of contact with the outside world—bodily orifices—are forcefully saturated with mud: the skin of the speaker is covered as with a new external layer, a new skin, with it (“spreading mud everywhere” [4], “plaster[ing] it on” [4]), the “mouth,” “eyes,” “nose and ears” are all filled with mud.<sup>990</sup> Two from this catalogue of sensory organs are emphasized. The “eyes” hold more significance because of the title’s emphasis on “vision,” and the “mouth” is dwelled upon as the speaker explains in sanitized terms that their mouth is forcefully filled with mud (“fill . . . with it,” “am sick,” and “shovel it all back again” [6]). They vomit the mud back out implying that the mud not only exceeds a filling of the space of the mouth alone, but is actually swallowed as a result, allowing it to fill the esophagus and stomach areas. And still the regurgitated mud that has been outside, inside, and back outside this body, is forced inside once again. This depicts a grave violation, and yet, the language is bare of such personal shock. Aside from the violence of the word “shovel,” the tone appears dissociative, almost a depressive mirror to the title’s ecstatic tone. The word mud itself remains absent from the line, referred to multiple times as “it.” Yet, eyes—less spacious than the other holes—are still “full” of it. This mud’s relation to the body appears more matter than metaphor. The base materiality of the grotesque image suggests eyes literally caked in mud, blotting out the possibility of vision altogether.

Like the boundaries of the body as violated by the mud, the body as it is positioned in space is also left vague within the poem, resonating with the spatial reorientations expressed by Sassoon and Blunden. Like the soldier writing the experience of the trench, place markers are, for most of the poem, constricted to the immediate space around the speaker and are primarily constituted by demonstrative pronouns that refer to

nothing determinate elsewhere, such as the unqualified “There.”<sup>991</sup> Saunders writes, “My hand gropes out restlessly,”<sup>992</sup> denoting a sense of endless space, as if the speaker’s body merely floats there in an endless sea of mud and mirroring the permeability of the body/mud divide with an equally absolute sense of the excessive saturation of everywhere by mud. This spatially unbounded saturation of mud echoes the presence of this new muddy world view that needs must exceed the war zone for it to appear in the homefront poem of Saunders who never saw the Western Front. Just as the body is covered, so too is all space seemingly filled with mud. This indeterminacy via the use of demonstratives continues with first person pronouns acting as subjects as well. Aside from the speaker (“I” [4, 6]) other personas referenced are always “They,”<sup>993</sup> except where their body (parts) stand in for “They,” as with “hands” that “are spreading mud.”<sup>994</sup> Possessive pronouns in the first person mirror the pattern of “They.” Uses of “my”/“My”<sup>995</sup> refer always to body parts. The speaker, too, is often substituted for a body: all matter, no voice. Saunders writes of: “what / should be a body,”<sup>996</sup> “my mouth,”<sup>997</sup> “My eyes . . . nose and ears.”<sup>998</sup> When the speaker evokes the use of a “you” general, this second person address still refers back to the condition and position of the speaking subject. It references a “struggle[ing]” that causes one/me (“you”) to “sink.”<sup>999</sup> This, as well as the substitution of voice for body parts, displaces the speaking subject onto a dissociated subject (“you”) and a dispersed body (all the parts of which are sprinkled throughout the poem), evoking the war-time sense that the experience of such debased matters and their closeness to the human subject dissolved subjective coherence.

Like the effects of Blunden’s estranged landscapes, one of the consequences of Saunders breakdown of personal boundaries is, then, a sense of diminished agency. The



conditions of the totalizing muddy environs assert that “struggle[ing]” leads to “sink[ing].”<sup>1000</sup> The “I” is characterized as immobilized from the outside, “[l]ying] quite still.”<sup>1001</sup> It is also acted on instead of acting upon: others spread and “plaster” mud on “what / should be a body.”<sup>1002</sup> By using the subjunctive “what / should be,” Saunders casts doubt for the reader on whether the speaker’s body is in fact a “body” at all. That it “should be” implies it is not.<sup>1003</sup> “[W]hat” is also an interrogative. Hence, Saunders’ rhetoric poses a question here: if it is not “a body,” “what” is it?<sup>1004</sup> The poem provides a partial answer. The permeability of this body, and its invasion by mud, makes it harder to differentiate between the two just as war mud stains Sassoon’s mind even when returned to England. Saunders writes, “I try to open my eyes a little,” and then two lines later, “My eyes are shut down again.”<sup>1005</sup> The self exerts ownership of the body with “I,” mastering the “eyes” with the repetition of “my.”<sup>1006</sup> Yet, the failure of subject and body to resist the mastery of the mud is here underscored. Causal grammar links the attempt (“try” [21]) to “open . . . eyes”<sup>1007</sup> and then to their being “shut down.”<sup>1008</sup> Because of the placement of the lines one is led to believe it is the work of the interceding words that directs this causality. The locus of agency for the “shut[ting] down” of the speaker’s eyes is absent, the reader gets only the ontological verb to be: “My eyes *are* shut down.”<sup>1009</sup> The mud appears, then, to saturate grammar itself, making it incapable of fixing distinct meanings and indicating an epistemological shift for the English subject as a result of being subjected to war’s debasing matters. Body and mud become inseparable, but rather than bringing forth “mighty life,” when aligned with body, this substance degrades the body. Mud is thus associated with a base, debasing materiality. The mud acts as a sensory barrier between the speaker and the world: they cannot see or hear, or even feel properly

because, similar to Conrad's depictions of Africa's negative matters, its excess materiality generates no sense at all.

*Feminizing War: Mud in Domestic Spaces of Empire*

Amidst this imagined disintegration of subjective and bodily integrity, the site of the speaker's subjection to this invasive mud slowly accrues a murky specificity, only to have that designation undermined as the encounter between mud and the speaker's body appears to happen in a militarized space that is later revealed to be a space of leisure: a health spa and not a trench at all. The poem's original publication in the pages of the "War Number" of Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist magazine, *Blast*, has already set the reader up to expect this reference to World War I from the beginning.<sup>1010</sup> The reader, furthermore, is not aware of the gender of the poem's author. She is listed with the abbreviated and intentionally misspelled moniker of "H. Sanders."<sup>1011</sup> The military associations conjured by the muddy images in Saunders' lines, furthermore, suggest a liminality not so much of the simple threshold between life and death that one might expect in a war zone but of sexual violation and colonial contact:

Now things get through: an antediluvian sound comes through the Deluge of Mud  
It is something by way of an olive branch.  
It seems to be a recruiting band,  
The drums thud and the fifes pipe on tip-toe.  
They are trying to pierce and dart through the thick envelope of the drum's  
beatings  
They want to tear jagged holes in the cloud.  
I try to open my eyes a little.

A crowd of india-rubber-like shapes swarm through the narrow chinks.  
They swell and shrink, merge into one another like an ashen kaleidoscope!  
My eyes are shut down again.  
A giant cloud like a black bladder with holes in it hovers overhead.  
Out of the holes stream incessant cataracts of the same black mud that I am lying  
    In. There is a little red in the mud.  
One of these mud-shafts is just above me.  
It is pouring into me so that my body swells and grows heavier every minute.  
    There is no sign of sinking.  
It floats like a dingy feather on stagnation.<sup>1012</sup>

“[R]ecruiting band[s]” were military bands playing music at recruitment events to try and get soldiers to sign up to go fight and in other patriotic displays of support and propaganda for the war.<sup>1013</sup> Saunders describes their sounds as the warring of two instruments: “drums thud and the fifes pipe on tip-toe. / They are trying to pierce and dart through the thick envelope of the drum’s beatings.”<sup>1014</sup> Fifes and drums struggle and the drums seem to mirror sonically the effect that the mud had on the sensory body, drowning out other sounds. The sounds of the drum—the musical valence more associated with battle than mere recruitment as they have a long history of accompanying the march into battle—are again given physical form, constituted as a “thick envelope,” whereas the fifes are associated with the human body itself “pip[ing] on tip-toe.”<sup>1015</sup> Both sounds are embattled, however, as the fifes “pierce and dart” and the drums “bea[t].”<sup>1016</sup> This language of violence and sonic materiality continues as fifes also “want to tear jagged holes in the cloud.”<sup>1017</sup> Tearing, piercing, and darting all support the destructive

power of the sound. However, they also evince a sense of freedom, of opening out here, since they do not destroy blankly, but seek to open barriers—the barriers of the drum sound—first materialized as a “thick envelope” and now as a “cloud.”<sup>1018</sup> Each action, like those of the mud, seem to dissolve formal boundaries. The mud-drum world is becoming less matter and more ephemeral gas. Meanwhile, the possibility of “holes” torn in this veil that blocks the world out for the speaker is introduced.<sup>1019</sup> Here, the fifes themselves seem to have agency, they “want.”<sup>1020</sup> This latent agency is significant for Saunders has linked the fifes to the body, associating them with legs that “tip-toe.”<sup>1021</sup> Here again then a body in pieces possesses the agency the whole does not—trapped as it is in this militarized mud-barriered enclosure (“envelope”). The embodied cloud/envelope, it is soon revealed, is only a container for mud like the speaker’s body has also become.

The “Vision of Mud,” that mud which occludes all, is, I argue, embodied in another form that associates it not just with the anxieties of war, but also with racialized metaphors of empire, and the imperial anxieties those affect. Though Kate McLoughlin associates Saunders use of mud in the poem with a conduit for female creativity, I contend that the freedom of form and artistic expression herein enabled expresses a white Englishwoman’s agency only by participating in the racialized environmental aesthetics produced by England’s imperial imaginary.<sup>1022</sup> Hence, the swirling agency of mud invades the body through the eyes this time as “[a] crowd of india-rubber-like shapes [that] swarm through the narrow chinks. / They swell and shrink, merge into one another like an ashen kaleidoscope!”<sup>1023</sup> “A crowd of india-rubber-like shapes” connotes two things. First, it evokes a “crowd” (22) of people who cannot be quite made out [“-like

shapes” [22]); on the other hand, it suggests these figures are a non-human (“shapes” [22]) crop (“crowd” [22]) of rubber plants (“india-rubber-like” [22]). Though the crowd of rubbers resonates with soldiers marching in their wellies, the lines also affiliate themselves with the swarming racialized populations of the English colonies and their material indistinguishability from the natural resources they harvest for England. Though rubber production in India and Africa, as discussed in the Introduction, had largely shifted to Malaysia in the twentieth century—the invocation of the colony of India ties this matter also to a population who sent many soldiers to fight alongside the English regiments in WWI. Read together, these two connotations denote a dehumanized (“shapes” [22]), naturalistic (“rubber-like” [22]) mass of colonized people, more shape and plant than human, and deindividuated as a “crowd.”<sup>1024</sup> The use of “swarm” furthers the dehumanizing connotations of the line, invoking an insect horde.<sup>1025</sup> That the term “narrow chinks” is used to describe the speaker’s partially open eyes continues the subtle racialization of her encounter with mud as “chinks” is also a racial epithet for East Asians who are derogatorily characterized in such imaginaries as being marked by their narrow eye apertures.<sup>1026</sup>

The “swarm[ing]” through also implies a sense of its being an invasion of the speaker’s English self.<sup>1027</sup> This invasion goes on to gather connotations of unwanted penetration and an inability to differentiate between individuals and races as the poem describes the “swarm” of “shapes” as “swell[ing] and shrink[ing], merg[ing] into one another.”<sup>1028</sup> The sentence ends in an exclamation point emphasizing the speaker’s shock and discomfort with this scene. While in a literal sense, if the eye has mud in it, this would be a swirl of the dirt and water on the cornea as the sight of what lies beyond is

distorted based on what the mud occludes, the racialization of the image and its association with existing rhetorics of empire cannot be ignored. The final image of these lines, an “ashen kaleidoscope,” implies both a rainbow of colors, like the many races of the British empire, and a surreal mixing of them as the toy does with colored glass or plastic. What is mixed in this place, however, is only “ashen” or grey. The evocation of “as[h]” itself can carry racial connotations as darker skin is often called ashy as the effect of dry skin on a darker pigment is more visible to the naked eye than it is on light skin. More than that, however, is the way “ashen” links the color of mud (a browny-black-grey, though it can also be yellow, red, or green depending on where and when you are in the world and at what time) with the racially othered populations of empire. That this is linked to an uncomfortable “merg[ing]”<sup>1029</sup> seen as invasive (“swarm through” [22]) furthers the derogatory racialization of the speaker’s unwanted material surrounds. In this sense, mud itself starts to signify a discomfort with the threat of racial mixing of empire (opened up particularly in WWI as troops fought alongside each other, and fronts world-wide brought colonial troops to Europe and English troops to the frontiers of empire in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia to fight alongside darker-skinned British subjects). The presence of the racialized mud is seen consistently as a threat to the speaker’s (English) integrity as the mud causes the speakers “eyes” to be “shut down again,” foreclosing their agency.<sup>1030</sup> The agency of imperial or racial others is depicted, therefore, through the metaphor of mud as an existential threat to the agency of the (presumably) white, English speaker or “I” of the poem.

The association of the mud with a fear of other bodies’ agency over the speaker’s continues. Saunders writes, “[a] giant cloud like a black bladder with holes in it hovers

overhead.”<sup>1031</sup> That the “cloud” is colored “black” continues the racialization of the mud and its largeness and amorphousness as “giant” and “cloud” continues the uncomfortable indistinguishability of the imperial other within the British empire.<sup>1032</sup> The presence of “holes” links this “cloud” to the earlier drumbeat.<sup>1033</sup> Be it the sound or mud, or some representation of their combination, its status as “hover[ing] overhead” gives it a sense of ominous mastery over the speaker, and a threat of smothering or smashing. Its affiliation with body parts (“bladder”) returns us to a familiar theme of dismembered bodies. Given that the poem continues however, “Out of the holes stream incessant cataracts of the same black mud that I am lying,”<sup>1034</sup> one must assume that this is either a mechanism of mud replenishment or body-immersion, or that symbolically, the music—war like, violent, yet representative of a return of the senses, and therefore of the contact-ability between body/self and world before blocked by mud—is an extension of, or vessel for, this mud. The mud is now shown to quite literally “stream[s]” “Out of holes” in it as if they are “cataracts”—a term that, geologically, refers to a water-fall like area of a river, often broken up with stones or fast flowing.<sup>1035</sup> This also continues, however, the sight tropology, as a cataract is also an occlusion of the eye on its surface (a clumping of the proteins in the lens of the eye, usually clear, which then presents clouding, especially as we age), distorting images seen. The mud, like the bladder, is also now exclusively “black,” mirroring the bladder. This further collapses the distinction between inside and outside the speaker’s body and continues the racial tones of the earlier lines that also evoke a fear of the inability to separate self from external other—English subject from colonial other—as broken open by the war. The invasive agency of the mud is expanded

as the violent encounters of war reveal their imperial fears and then take on an erotics of sexual encounter.

The invasion of the speaker by Others through the orifice of the eye as it regains sight bleeds now into a deeper invasion of the body by this alien mud, which infiltrates the speaker's body using sexual metaphors of rape and impregnation. The speaker explains, "[o]ne of these mud-shafts is just above me."<sup>1036</sup> The image of a "shaft"—itself a phallic term—with liquid ("mud" [28]) pouring organically (the word is merged via hyphen with "shaft" as if they cannot be functionally separated [28]) from it is suggestive of a penis ejaculating semen.<sup>1037</sup> Its position "just above" the speaker connotes a sense of their being overpowered by it, subservient to it, or at least unable to escape immediately.<sup>1038</sup> This uncomfortable sense of the speaker being spatially trapped beneath an ejaculating phallus evokes a connotation then of rape or forced sexual contact. The metaphoric evocation of rape continues as the next line reads: "It is pouring into me so that my body swells and grows heavier every minute."<sup>1039</sup> The "mud," which we read as semen, "pour[s] into" the speaker as it did into her mouth in the opening lines of the poem—forcibly then as well. In fact, if we look back at mud's association with the "eclosion of mighty life"<sup>1040</sup> in those opening lines, we may find there too a slippage between semen and mud, as well as the suggestion of unwanted sexual penetration where the speaker vomits out the substance and had it "shovel[ed]" "back" in.<sup>1041</sup> If we continue with this sexualized reading, the causal effect of this "pouring into" the speaker of mud ("so that" [29]) is impregnation since their "body swells and grows heavier."<sup>1042</sup> The notion of "grow[ing] heav[y]" when referring to the female body or a fruit bearing plant, is often associated with pregnancy and fertility: reproduction. This moment also elicits



feelings that the body-mud boundary is dangerously permeable and a sense, again, of invasion. Though we do not know this time into which orifice the mud pours, the unwanted penetration of the body by mud associates it with the racial anxieties of Empire once again and, together with the bodily increase (“swells” [29]) of the speaker as a result of this “black”<sup>1043</sup> seminal mud, the imagery gathers tones of a fear specifically of miscegenation—or the intermarrying of races and procreation of a mixed-race generation that might destabilize the basis for an insular Englishness.

The speaker’s discomfort with the excesses and penetrability of mud and material body are underscored by the grammar’s continued figuration of a mind-body dissociation. While above “It”<sup>1044</sup> refers to the mud or semen, in the next lines “it” transmutes into the speaker’s body when two lines later their body is the referent of “It floats.”<sup>1045</sup> This objectification of the body through the nonhuman pronoun “it,” resonates with the dissociation of “me” from “my body” in the previous line.<sup>1046</sup> Rather than writing, as Saunders could have done, “It is pouring into me so that *I* swell,” “me” and the thing that “swells and grows heavier” are syntactically distinguished so that the two do not necessarily refer to the same self. The implication is that the presence of mud in the body (that which causes its growth in the moment of dissociation) makes the speaker’s body alien to itself. Once alienated from their own body, the body is figured as dead, dirty, objectified, and animalized. Saunders writes: “There is no sign of sinking. / It floats like a dingy feather on stagnation.”<sup>1047</sup> The body appears to be dead since it will not “sin[k],”<sup>1048</sup> and “It floats”<sup>1049</sup> an image typically associated with a dead body in water. Its lifelessness is furthered through the use of “It” as a referent.<sup>1050</sup> The surface of this mud pool is coded as dirty as the simile for the floating body takes on the qualifier of

“dingy” and the liquid in which it floats is described as “stagnation.”<sup>1051</sup> Stagnant bodies of liquid tend to be dirtier since the filtering effect of a current of flow that carries filth away is not present: dirt collects instead. Furthermore, the lack of motion itself echoes the sense of death that pervades these lines. More than a dead object, the speaker’s body is dehumanized further with its association with an animal body part—a “feather.”<sup>1052</sup> Not only an animal body, it is the dead matter that the bird sheds, a waste-product of animal bodies. This association with effluent recalls again the mud as an expulsion of semen, but also an evocation of anal excrement being a part of this “dingy” pool of “black mud.” The sullied connotations of this contact with mud ramp up in this moment ironically, since the next few lines reveal for the reader for the first time a sense that we are not in a trench, but rather at a health spa—a place of cleansing and rejuvenation—quite the opposite of the filth evoked here.

The slippage between bodily and subjective insides and outsides is mirrored in the poem’s setting that begins by vaguely suggesting a war zone, only to abruptly announce its locale is a health spa. Despite the medicinal context this evokes, the poem’s images undercut this association by continuing to invoke a scene of violent contact in the supposedly curative mud in which the speaker sits—breaking down the boundary between civilian and military spaces via the environmental aesthetics of mud and a fear of invasive interpenetration that it carries regardless of its setting. Saunders writes, “(Such mud, naturally, is medicinal: that is why they have set up this vulgar / “Hydro” here. / It is a health-resort.)”<sup>1053</sup> Up to this point the poem was heavily punctuated and full of elliptical clauses and colons. Words and lines, often enjambed, seemed to flow onward and forward like the “cataracts of the same black mud” that the poem speaks.<sup>1054</sup>

Flowing out of the speaker's mouth, the poet's pen, with wayward legibility and incomprehensible sensory overload, the reader crashes finally into this aside and the structure of the poem becomes clearer employing a commonplace, mundane diction: an interior monologue or stream of consciousness now interrupted by an exterior statement to the reader in the form of grammatically coherent dialogue.

(Such mud, naturally, is medicinal : that is why they have set up this vulgar

“Hydro” here.

It is a health-resort.)

I have just discovered with what I think is disgust, that there are hundreds of other  
bodies bobbing about against me.

They also tap me underneath.

Every now and then one of these fellow-monstrosities bumps softly against me.

I should like to kill it.

The black has a deeper tinge of red in it.

Perhaps some of them do kill one another.<sup>1055</sup>

Saunders' statements evoke referential capacities that were before more elusive. The punctuation and formation of lines switches as well. Short, telegraphic lines follow, with very little enjambment,<sup>1056</sup> and mostly periods end lines.<sup>1057</sup> In addition to the potential switch in projected locale from trench to spa, the demonstratives and pronouns that refer to the location underscore its continued indeterminacy, as Saunders describes them as “It”<sup>1058</sup> and “here.”<sup>1059</sup> A similar semantic instability surrounds the sense of agency associated with the action (mud moving) of the locale: who is the “they”<sup>1060</sup> that “set up” the “Hydro’ here”?<sup>1061</sup> This “they” is a continued referent, it is the same as described

above: “they plaster it on”;<sup>1062</sup> “They fill my mouth”;<sup>1063</sup> “They shovel it back.”<sup>1064</sup> In each of these lines, the “they” applies mud to and in the speaker’s body. “They” is also used in reference to the “fifes”: “They . . . pierce,” “They . . . tear”; and to “shapes”:<sup>1065</sup> “They swell and shrink”; and later on the bodies around the speaker: “They . . . tap me.”<sup>1066</sup> “They” is a refracted agent in the poem. Peaceful music, martial mud; muddied sight, invasive racialized others; spa workers, unknown torturers; fellow vacationers, murderous cell-mates—each of the more positive connotations is always entangled in its more threatening other half: part of the mud, rather than curative engager with it. The previous descriptions tell us that even if we truly are at a spa, it does not feel relaxing and healthful to the speaker. Saunders seems to confirm this as the speaker calls the “Hydro” where she resides “vulgar.”<sup>1067</sup> “Hydro” is a British shorthand for a “Hydropathic establishment” or “treatment” associated with “hydropathy” whose usage began in 1843. The term, as a prefix, from the Greek, just designates water, but at these hydros, there were various water-based treatments, including mud baths, applied.

The sense of unwanted contact in the mud of the health resort moves from the sexual valences above to a more murderous violence and a purer abjection of the Other. Saunders describes the “bodies bobbing about against me” with “disgust.”<sup>1068</sup> Bodies seem to lack agency, direction as they “bo[b] about” rather than touch the speaker intentionally.<sup>1069</sup> The “against me” into which they are “bobbing” implies contact, while the “disgust” implies the contact is unwanted.<sup>1070</sup> This “bobbing . . . against” gains intentionality and apparent agency as “[t]hey also tap me underneath.”<sup>1071</sup> The “tap” conjures visions of a finger-tip, mirroring the phallus but also the speaker’s own hands of before poking her body.<sup>1072</sup> The adverb “underneath” is unclear in its modification: does

the tapping occur under the surface of the mud in which all the bodies, the speaker's included, lies, or, is it the under-part of "me," the speaking "I" whose body is tapped—that is poked at in its neither-regions (buttocks, genitals, breasts or thighs under the clothes)?<sup>1073</sup> This continues the invasive thematics begun by the mud, but also heightens the erotics of the poem. Again, the bodies' contact is underscored as Saunders adds they "bump softly against me" intermittently ("Every now and then").<sup>1074</sup> This returns us to a lack of agency, softening the touch and removing its intentionality as the bodies appear to only touch by accident as they float nearby each other. Yet, intentional or not, Saunders describes the bodies themselves as "monstrosities," underscoring their maliciousness and implying that unagential bodies may, like the corpses merged into the earthen walls of the trench, do the most violence to the mind.<sup>1075</sup> It connotes excessive materiality that is beyond the normative human form, linked as well to the swarming horde.<sup>1076</sup>

Saunders' poem reveals precisely the threat, of that too-close materiality exposed by the war engenders with regard to English imperial subjects and their colonial counterparts, that Cunard seeks to subvert. Base matters are in both works transformed—one by the war and the other after it. Whereas Cunard exposes the racialized environmental rhetorics that undergird imperial landscaping of its colonies in stone and land to reinforce the denial of coevalness and imaging of its own lands as conveying rights only for people of light hue through its soil, Saunders' poem participates in the violent material imaginary of war as her unbridled exploration of war mud's potential to break down boundaries relies on both a racist and environmentally othering imperial tropology.

## Conclusion

I conclude this dissertation from the shared isolation of the global coronavirus pandemic. I am struck by the similarities our current situation presents to those experienced by people living through World War I. Though the violence and suffering are distributed differently, the death tolls and anxieties are not. World War I's coincidence with another pandemic—the so-called Spanish Flu of 1918—increases such similarities. That outbreak's pandemic status was, as many scholars have noted, catalyzed by World War I.<sup>1077</sup> World War I killed almost 10 million. The influenza epidemic of 1918 upwards of 50 million.<sup>1078</sup> And, as of August 2020, COVID-19 has taken almost 1 million lives and counting.<sup>1079</sup> Somewhere between the two, but hardly over, coronavirus bears similarities to another massively distributed and difficult to conceptualize event: climate change. I have argued: World War I in its apprehension as an imperial resource war can be considered what Timothy Morton has called a hyperobject. His project is primarily to assign this status to global warming, but—and I am sure he has thought this himself—the coronavirus pandemic is also, in many ways, a hyperobject.

We cannot *see* the virus—literally because it is a virus—but also because of the necessity of our response to it as a global community: the closures, the quarantines, the social distancing, the masks, its high asymptomatic transmission rate. It is, in fact, this very invisibility that most marks many people's experience of the virus. This may amplify our anxiety. *How do you protect yourself from an unseen threat?* Or, it can contribute to its devastating effects and its ability, like that other hyperobject—global warming, to sufficiently hide its effects. In hiding its violence some people do not *believe* in it and, as Rob Nixon notes of ecological violence and the damage to large swaths of

socio-economically disadvantaged populations across the world, people then see no reason to act. This inaction and noncompliance with health and safety measures meant to slow or stop the spread of the virus can be likened to the decision not to make more sustainable choices simply because global warming and other systemic forms of environmental degradation cannot be plainly seen.<sup>1080</sup>

As a result, here as elsewhere, such invisibility and inaction leads to disproportionate effects on those already vulnerable and precarious as a result of economic inequality and systemic racism. In the U.S., people of color are more likely to be hospitalized or die from coronavirus. Likewise global warming. Climate changes that lead to rising seas levels, to the increasing prevalence of volatile weather systems, to dangerous heat waves—the list could go on—disproportionately affect already vulnerable populations who have long been subject to systemic disenfranchisement and oppression. We now have climate change refugees—people forced out of their homelands by “natural” disasters that are, in actuality, a result of anthropogenic climate change.

And so, I conclude this dissertation by claiming the invisibilizing and abstracting of matter, those dissociative affects with regard to material enmeshment, that dangerously fictitious relationship of nation to land, all, in the ways I have discussed throughout result in part from World War I’s mediation of its violent disruptions through an environmental aesthetic of base materiality. That moment in our shared history of environmental epistemology contributes to the affective and aesthetic relationship in which we find ourselves today—on a warming planet suffering a deadly pandemic. The racialized environmental discourse reified by the war, though its presence in forms of English nationalism and imperial discourse pre-date the war, is now, as Paul Fussell would say, a

part of our modern consciousness. This consciousness occludes, I argue, potential ways of apprehending the environment, ways of seeing that might have aided us today. Such ways of environmental knowing may even have prevented us from arriving at this place of climate crisis in the first place. Just as World War I is a part of the larger hyperobject of imperialism, so too is coronavirus a part of the larger hyperobject of global warming. The acute death tolls and alterations to daily life of both that war and this virus register the catastrophic nature of the latter two, of imperialism and global warming. My hope is that, in analyzing the way in which larger catastrophic events are registered aesthetically—garnering a lasting impact on our collective consciousness as nations, or now, as a global community, this study succeeds in shedding some light on larger issues of systemic racism and environmental destruction—in both England and abroad.

To demonstrate the contemporary echoes of my argument, I offer a brief reading of British-Polish Mixed Media Artist Joanna Zylińska's *Exit Man*. *Exit Man* is a 2017 photo-film piece in conversation with her book *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse*.<sup>1081</sup> A voice-over explaining what is meant by “the end of man”—that the crisis of the anthropocene in which life as it has formed under capitalism will at some point, if left unchecked, lead to our demise as a species—accompanies a series of defamiliarized images of intermittently banal and violently destructive scenes. A moment grabs me as I listen to the haunting music and a voice that states: “the Anthropocene cannot be seen . . . It can only be visualized singularly yet repeatedly,” appearing as if torn “from the pages of revelations”: “images like the blackening of the sun.” The words are spoken as the banal yet unsettling image below appears:<sup>1082</sup>





What strikes me about this image is the way it, along with the words spoken over it, defamiliarize the *natural* in order to create an *estranging* effect. The photograph captures the sun's reflection in a body of water somewhere surrounded by plant life. The contrast between light and dark, however, makes the bright sun appear to aesthetically reflect the blackening of the sun described in the voice-over. This unremarkable scene appears now to be ominous. It appears as a foreboding not of the life-giving rays before us but their opposite: a world without light—the end of humankind. The video, and the book it accompanies, go on to postulate a radical possibility for alternative futures. Yet, the defamiliarized environment depicted here resonates heavily with the distorted matters represented by writers responding to World War I. In both cases catastrophe is registered not as a cataclysmic difference from the everyday but as an estrangement of the base matters of our quotidian encounter with the environment that surrounds us.

The video certainly invokes a sense of anxiety about climate change. Though the author and her audience have the foreknowledge of our environmental precarity, readers of English Modernism did not, or at least not in the same sense. The environmental aesthetics of World War I, and the larger imperialist framework of which it is a part, helped to create the aesthetics mobilized by this video. It is a reminder of the importance,

as Eric Hobsbawm has argued, that “we cannot understand the events at the end of the twentieth century unless we know about its beginnings.”<sup>1083</sup>

Bonneuil and Fressoz argue that “[r]ather than suppressing the environmental reflexivity of the past, we must understand how we entered the Anthropocene despite very consistent warnings, knowledge and oppositions, and forge a new and more credible narrative of what has happened to us.”<sup>1084</sup> It has been precisely the project of my dissertation to begin such a narrative. I sought to examine and elaborate why, despite the knowledge of empire’s destructive extractivism, English national subjects that were so attached to their lands at home still continued on the path that lead us here: to our current environmental precarity and the rise, once again, of racialized ethnic nationalisms.

My argument has been that it is the very rooting of their national imaginary in base matters—in images of ground—that allowed for such a trajectory to continue. Having long defined what it was to be an English nation through images and rhetorics of nation as land—created by and imaginatively *as* land, the experience of World War I brought to light the instabilities in such a self-definition. Billed as a nationally defensive war, the conflict was anything but and was therefore riddled with contradictions from the start. Barracked away in a foreign field or bunkered and blinkered at home in England, men and women sought to process the trauma of this domestic-foreign war through the same aesthetic-material tools upon which their subjectivity was already settled: an environmental aesthetics of base matter. Having never been a contained, insular nation in the first place, however, this lie gives way for the English subject as the war experience actualizes imperialism’s always already having built a breach into such solid national grounds—socially, politically, economically, and environmentally. Globally distributed

and materially dependent on its colonies and neocolonial holdings to feed its population and the industries that made it a wealthy world power, imperial England is forced to encounter its foundation not upon solid, grounding base matters but on an uncontainable and destabilizing negative matter. The base matters of native England now revealed to be only imaginative substitutes for the real matters of environments subjected to extraction elsewhere—the ghost acres of the English empire. As a result, texts responding to the war depict base matters as debased matters, producing an anxiety that resolves only in dissociation with regards to the imbrication of themselves in land—in ecosystems that before brought a sense of comforting at-home-ness, now estranged and unreal.

## Epilogue

As a teacher-scholar who believes ethics motivate our engagement with aesthetics, who came to this profession not just for a love of literature, but more urgently, as an expression of an activist impulse, certain words and images that I encounter in the world around me haunt my work—in the classroom and in the pages of this dissertation.

Despite the environmentalist impulses of this project, the contemporary image that haunts my work of late is the repeated encounter, in social media feeds, in the news, in the world, of a falling body.

On the day I composed this epilogue, a situation occurred whose unfortunate recurrence has become almost banal, except for the strength of emotional response it still elicits. The hot face and tight chest that grow as a set of images repeat in my mind, without my wanting them to, long after the video on my screen has stopped playing. I click on a link and watch. Today it was Ahmed Arbery: I watch as a black body suddenly falls to the ground. He was shot three times by angry white men because he dared to be a black man out for a jog alone.

My initial instinct was not to watch it. I knew it would throw me off and stick with me for hours after I closed the page. I also knew I had already avoided engaging with several other articles and videos this week for the same reason. I felt guilty, it had happened, would my closed eyes undo those shots? Not to watch it is a refusal to bear witness, I told myself. To reinforce an already unjust silencing and erasure. Collecting myself afterwards, I went outside for a cigarette to clear my head, still bleary eyed and blotchy faced. Thinking about what I would say if my neighbor, who has two teenaged African American sons, were to bump into me and ask me what was wrong, I

remembered all the essays I have read by black women on allyship. It is not about your pain, your guilt, their voices echoed in my mind, bouncing off of the image of the falling body as it replayed yet again.

I felt guilty again, this time for a new reason. I would say nothing. There are other uses for my pain. What is this feeling? I am not fallen. I do not know this man. It is helplessness and hopelessness I decide. What can I do? I thought about the video again. All the videos. White people perpetrating racial violence against black people. To whom was I responsible? For whom? Then I remembered Tamika Williams. Tamika was my first year seminar instructor at The New School where I started undergrad. She was a graduate student doing research on activism and Jamaican music hall culture, and a black woman. For this class we had to write a series of short essays to contribute to the class Zine. One of my essays was on activism and social justice. After reading it Tamika said something that stuck with me. It comes to mind periodically, and always unexpectedly, but with regularity over the years. I can't remember exactly but I am sure I had referenced a small non-profit I had started up in high school. It aimed, naively and absurdly, to fight world hunger by raising funds via profits reaped from the production of haunted houses each Halloween.

In response to my unpoetic aspirations, Tamika told me: your drive is good but you have to fight your own fight. Her words had ironic echoes with something my racist grandfather had said to me when he learned about my charitable ideas in high school: "why are you helping people all over the world, we have Americans right here who need your help." I brushed this off angrily as misguided patriotism. This was the man, after all, who "helped America" in the 40s by spying on homosexuals in the navy to find grounds

for their dishonorable discharge and who had been vaguely involved in the Bay of Pigs when he freelanced for the CIA in the 60s all while under the cover of his traveling sports equipment sales position—a job he moved my father’s family from Philadelphia to Miami to supposedly fulfill. Not my ethical role model by any means. So, what could Tamika Williams and Tom Kelleher Sr. have in common? When she said it, it sounded weird, irresponsible almost, but I knew on some level she was right. She had told me to work for a change that affects you. Help white people, and let black people fight their own battles. You can be an ally, but you can’t lead the charge. “Perhaps,” thought my eighteen-year-old self, “I can ‘help Americans,’ by finding a way to help white people be less shitty.”

A few years later I was completing a graduate program in education and still wrestling with what Tamika’s words meant for me. Looking back on it, I am fairly certain that she was a huge part of the reason I switched my major from international relations to English and was now pursuing an education degree—I was trying to work for causes a little closer to home. Required to read Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for a class, I finally found a way to make sense of Tamika’s words. He explained that leadership needs to come from within the group being oppressed, be a part of that organic community, or they will fail to create *lasting* change. He explained that the single most important thing anyone can do to make sure oppressed minorities have the opportunities for those leaders to emerge, is to educate them, and more specifically, to teach them to be learners, to be thinkers, and not receptacles for knowledge under the banking model of education.

*This* was it, I thought. This was my fight. I would teach people how to think and I could think of no better place to do this than in a classroom whose centerpiece was literary analysis. As the falling black man plays over and over in my mind, these memories all race through my head as well. I am responsible, I thought—combining Tamika and Freire’s philosophies on the activism of education—for teaching those white men how to think. And this is why I am writing *this* dissertation. While there are many days I am drawn to and wonder if I should be working exclusively on literature written by women, by people of color, by the working class, or by queer writers, I remember that until I know why those men did that, I need to keep searching for the answer in the cultural artifacts of our past and present.

This dissertation’s reading of British modernist literatures surrounding World War I has been a manifestation of this impulse. It seeks to understand how we came to inherit a world where ethnic nationalism is on the rise once again under the dominant political paradigm of Trumpism and Brexit. Though I love as much as the next anti-social hippy to immerse myself in a space as full of trees and grass as it is absent of people, I am not a natural lover of the great outdoors. I grew up in a city with more concrete and tar than grass and leaves and my first instinct when I left home was not to move into the deep woods of New Hampshire that I later fell in love with, but to hurry off to the New York City that my cosmopolitan eighteen-year old self thought was the best place in the world.

I come slantwise, then, to environmentalism. As a bit of a misanthrope and a pragmatist, my thoughts about the environment tended to conclude that the death of a sustainable world was inevitable. Stupidity would neither be bred nor beaten out of

humanity and at least we could take comfort in the fact that “Nature” would never die, only the version of it that supports human life. But, the more I learned, the more I realised that those who would (and already did) suffer most as environmental destruction ramped up from pollution, overharvesting, and climate change, were the same people systemically oppressed by other means—the poor, the people of color, women, and other minoritized peoples. Nonetheless, as a centrifuge of ignorance, people’s general lack of actionable awareness of the environment had long been a curiosity for me—right up there alongside all the other ignorant isms: racism, homophobia, speciesism, sexism, classism, ableism, religious discrimination—the list goes on. As it turns out, my early research showed these two contemporary crises were not separate, the structural similarities between contemporary white nationalism and climate denialism in the west were matched by the entanglement of their ancestral discourses of racialized nationalism and environment in the past, a past most visible, I have argued here, in modernist works surrounding World War I.

Though it seems tangential at times, and even I must remind myself on occasion—as I did after I watched Ahmed Arbery fall on my screen—as a cis white American, I am responsible for the cultural history that made this hate seem viable, for trying to discover how the stories we told ourselves in the early twentieth century have helped to create whatever story those white men told themselves and about themselves and the world we live in that made their actions seem to them to be righteous and sane rather than inconceivable, impossible, and unnatural.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rather than Plowman's name, the title is listed under the pseudonym Mark VII, itself a reference to this war's weaponry and the mechanization of soldiering, as if the guns and tanks which inscribed the bodies and lands in the war zone themselves wrote the pages of Plowman's book in an ink mad of blood and mud.

<sup>2</sup> Plowman, 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> Plowman, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I will use the capitalization and no capitalization of the word "nature," to differentiate between two connotative effects of the word. Firstly, nature, uncapitalized, refers, though still problematically in ways that will be elaborated throughout the study and explicitly in Part 4, to the most common sense of the term, as synonymous with environments, our material world—regardless of whether that is taken by the thinker or author under study in that moment to mean a nature separate from humanity and culture, or one in which the human is imbricated. My capitalization of the word, Nature, will, instead, like Timothy Morton does in his *Hyperobjects*, be "capitaliz[ing] Nature precisely to 'denature' it" (Morton 4, italics original). Nature with a capital N is evoked with the understanding that I refer to an idea not a tangible reality or entity out there or surrounding us—it is here discrete, divided, and either subjected or transcendent of the human.

<sup>5</sup> Plowman, 72.

<sup>6</sup> Doughty and Gruber 524.

<sup>7</sup> Prost 6.

<sup>8</sup> Showalter 526.

<sup>9</sup> Adams 62.

<sup>10</sup> Prost 5-6, "Worldwide Deaths." Included in the empire losses calculated here are deaths of regiments from: Australia, Canada, India, Newfoundland, New Zealand, South Africa, and more. The United Kingdom saw 383,600 military deaths, 450,700 including civilians, and hundreds of thousands more if imperial dominions are included, and millions if counting all civilian deaths throughout the empire. See also Trudi Tate 109.

<sup>11</sup> Trudi Tate estimates that approximately "200,000 men were mentally wounded, suffering from war neuroses or shell shock," and thousands more civilians living under the terror of Zeppelin bombings, daily atrocious news and propaganda, or the shock of the loss and wounding of loved ones in battle (109).

<sup>12</sup> Hughes 154.

<sup>13</sup> For more on nineteenth century environments, see: James Winter's *Secure from Rash Assault: Sustaining the Victorian Environment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

[<https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft867nb5pq;query=;brand=ucpress>].

<sup>14</sup> Hughes 133.

<sup>15</sup> Rowley 3.

<sup>16</sup> Hughes 134, Simmons 149.

<sup>17</sup> Hughes 135. In London, for example, these pollutants are carried upriver instead of down twice a day by estuary tides from the North Sea and backing up at outfalls into piles of excrement or "tainted mud" (Hughes 135). This increases the incidence of disease through polluted water leading to "poisoning" (Hughes 135, Simmons 213). Cholera becomes frequent and often epidemic, alongside respiratory illness, the former killing 14,000 in 1849 (Hughes 135).

<sup>18</sup> Simmons 174.

<sup>19</sup> Simmons 151.

<sup>20</sup> Simmons 150, 164-5. Despite saving land from development, even when planners sought to mitigate such effects through the creation of urban parks, these too still sometimes had detrimental effects, such as "when Battersea Park replaced a marsh," decreasing biodiversity with wetland loss (Hughes 136).

<sup>21</sup> In London, naturally occurring fogs around the Thames estuary on which the great metropolis sits trap and mix with anthropogenic air pollution causing long term increases in mortality rates and acute spikes, such as in 1879 when it rose by 220% and in 1952 when the "great smog" killed over 10,000 people in the five days of thermal inversion which trapped its fogs close to the city streets (Hughes 133-4, Oak Taylor 213, 215, Simmons 194).

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<sup>22</sup> Hughes 134.

<sup>23</sup> One of the most noticeable aspects of environmental change in the twentieth century is that it becomes, to the majority of the English population, a largely invisible dynamic attendant by a general flattening of ideas of English nature and landscape, wherein increasingly English landscapes were characterized by a sense of “‘placelessness’ or sameness” as they become more consciously developed (Rowley xiv). As the twentieth century wears on older industrial sites for metal and coal mining become deactivated or imported. Though their remains largely persist as “waste tips and winches,” “plants and debris” are left upon the land, they are increasingly “concealed beneath” the land itself, buried, “levelled, grassed over and generally tidied up” and made invisible to the eye (Rowley 5-6, 249). Where operations continued, they were often occluded by “shelter belts of trees” (Rowley 249).

<sup>24</sup> Like the double edge of London parks, in addition to conservation areas, national land use planning creates developments in the countryside such as mining town habitations, middle class garden cities, and public works projects like roads, electricity pylons, drinking water and agricultural irrigation reservoirs, and military space development which each carry negative environmental impacts (Rowley 293, Simmons 218).

<sup>25</sup> Simmons 157.

<sup>26</sup> Simmons 166.

<sup>27</sup> Simmons 158.

<sup>28</sup> Hughes 133.

<sup>29</sup> Pryor 536-543, Simmons 214. Additionally, manufacturing of goods by coal fueled steam engines (smelting, textiles, shipbuilding, books etc.) (Hughes 134) and energy production (wood, coal, electricity) contributes to environmental degradation in England primarily through effluent—in the air, waterways, and landfills (Simmons 157, 166-7). Large swaths of the countryside saw acidification of soils from the hydrochloric acid resulting from alkalis manufacture (Simmons 150-1). Fishing, farming, and leisure hunting and gardening also contribute to loss of biodiversity and native plants.

<sup>30</sup> Simmons 157, 195, 175, 211. Additionally, metal and arsenic industrial runoff often built up down river causing crop damage elsewhere and also hazardous conditions for humans (Simmons 196, 212). Furthermore, while some extraction operations shrink as the century wears on, stone quarrying only increases in scale, where smaller pits were easily covered back over once disused, the twentieth century sees quarries permanently alter landscapes (Rowley 6).

<sup>31</sup> Already heavily decreased by comparison to other European nations in the nineteenth century from fuel and ship building timber needs, England’s forests suffered severe afforestation throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and consequently, the wildlife whose exclusive habitats they had formed (Hughes 136, Rowley 298). As the turn of the century arrives and ships become more iron than wood, afforestation occurred increasingly for the timber for mining props, under railroad tracks, furniture, (Hughes 136-7) and, during the war, to line the trenches. Plantation forests to replace the old relied on non-native species, whose monocropping increased soil erosion and sylvan disease killing off even more species such as ancient oaks, leaving much land nonarable for its topsoil depletion (Hughes 136, Rowley 298, Simmons 201).

<sup>32</sup> Alteration of moorland for sport hunting through burning and heather planting caused mass “erosion,” “flood[ing],” “fires,” and “raptor” endangerment (Simmons 158-9). Elsewhere this led to the overpopulation of deer who damage ecosystems with overgrazing and are subject to mass die offs in winter (Simmons 160). The increased scale of land-use for industry fells, drains, and plows the forests, fens, and upland moors to near elimination for construction quarrying, housing space, and industrial manufacturing and new large scale farming practices (Rowley 247, Simmons 152-4). Wildlife habitat loss also occurred through the removal of hedgerows to make agricultural work with new, larger coal-run farm equipment more feasible (Hughes 136). Still, arable land is increasingly lost to factories, railroads, housing, and landfills as well as the more profitable grazing as agricultural output drops by over half by the turn of the century (Hughes 137). This itself was preceded by the misuse of arable lands by increasingly industrial farming practices, such as the elimination of fallow (Simmons 154) leading to further soil erosion.

<sup>33</sup> The role of the arts (literary or otherwise) in influencing environmental attitudes and policies is mostly ignored in such studies of the history of environmental thought as: John Sheail’s *Nature In Trust: The History of Nature Conservation in Britain*, London: Blackie and Son Limited, 1976; and David Evan’s *A History of Nature Conservation in Britain*, London: Routledge, 1992.

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<sup>34</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott notes as much, stating “Despite the challenges of modernity, nature has been a persistent, even adaptive, presence in modernism . . . Modernists regularly make reference to nature, or its control, in their writing” (5).

<sup>35</sup> The overlapping and reifying qualities of this conflict which an environmental historiography of World War I bring to light inform my identification of nomansland with an ecotone. An ecotone is an area of overlap and transition between two biological communities or ecosystems. Nomansland is itself both an area of overlap between global territories of the entente and central allied nations—being neither French nor German etc. Nomansland’s manifestation of the overlapping of two landscapes is also reified in the overlap between local and global ecosystems, for example, between England and India, whose environmental impacts converge in the event of World War I.

<sup>36</sup> Keller 3. This dissertation will not address, due to its national focus on England, direct impacts to other Fronts and nations, with which British citizens had less contact: primarily the Eastern Front in Russia and other central European territories, as well as the Alpine Front, as it is sometimes called in the Italian Alps, and the several Colonial Fronts in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and Asia where battles were fought, though in less entrenched ways. For more on these fronts, see: Mustafa Aksakal’s *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Fredrick Dickinson’s *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Stephan Rinke’s *Latin America and the First World War*. Trans. Christopher Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Hew Strachan’s *The First World War in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Guoqi Xu’s *China and the Great War: China’s Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Sanstanu Das’s collection *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Heather Streets-Salter’s *World War One in Southeast Asia: Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism in an Era of Global Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> Keller 2.

<sup>38</sup> The region of France through which most of the Western Front trenches cut underwent the devastation of geographies as diverse as mountains, plateaus, valleys, plains, hills, low-lying farmlands (Hugh Clout 2). “[N]ew technology generated a capacity for destruction that no longer focused just on the killing of individual soldiers; now warfare also included the obliteration of entire landscapes. Heavy artillery and the shrapnel it produced gouged and cratered the earth, destroying soldiers, animals, trees, drainage systems, and communication lines without distinction” in “unprecedented destruction” (Brantz 74).

<sup>39</sup> Dorothee Brantz 77.

<sup>40</sup> Westing 3. For example, having much of its habitat destroyed, like many other indigenous species which maintain a balanced biosphere, wildlife also suffered vigorously, including the near extinction of the European buffalo as a direct result of the war (Westing 56-8). Defining ecology as “the relationships between organisms and their environment,” Tom Hastings claims, “[t]here is always ecological damage from war, even if limited to a transmogrification of green fields to mud fields,” but this war experienced destruction on a higher scale (xx, 45).

<sup>41</sup> Arthur Westing notes that “battle areas and occupied zones of France are estimated to have . . . some 200 thousand hectares” deforested with “an additional 100 thousand hectares of agricultural lands [also] devastated” (52-3). Agriculturally in France, “the most productive départements were to be devastated . . . savagely during the Great War” (Clout xi).

<sup>42</sup> Novel “large scale employment of chemical warfare agents” such as mustard gas, caused human casualties, but also created a lasting toxicity in the land itself as chemicals seep into the soil, atmosphere, and water tables (Westing 17). “Gas was harmful not only to humans; it adversely affected every living creature . . . little birds fell into trenches, cats and dogs . . . lay down at our feet and did not awaken [wrote Le Filou in 1917,] plants were wilted, snails and moles were lying dead [said Ernst Jünger,] Gas represented a new weapons technology that did not kill directly but altered the environment in such a way as it make it uninhabitable” (Brantz 81).

<sup>43</sup> The “hundreds of miles of tunnels, shafts, chambers and galleries running beneath France and Belgium” “do not require unexploded mines to turn them into time bombs” as they are “in too many cases now making their presence felt on the surface” posing a “real threat” where “the ground is opening up and buildings threaten to fall into the voids created by tunnel collapses” or where “a hole also opened up beside the . . . road” (Pollard and Banks xvii).

<sup>44</sup> Hastings 40. See also Paul Fussell 75-6. Though Hastings wrote this in the year 2000, two decades on, it continues to be true. See the following, more recent news articles. John Williams Davies’ “Long After

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Wars Are Settled Land Mines Continue to Take Lives,: *American Magazine*. January 20, 2020, [https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/01/29/long-after-wars-are-settled-land-mines-continue-take-lives]; “The Real ‘No-Go Zone’ of France: A Forbidden No Man’s Land Poisoned by War,” *Messy Nessy: Cabinet of Chic Curiosities*, May 26, 2015, [https://www.messynessychic.com/2015/05/26/the-real-no-go-zone-of-france-a-forbidden-no-mans-land-poisoned-by-war/]; Agence France Presse’s “People Are Still Clearing Out Deadly World War I Mines From Northeastern France 100 Years Later,” *Business Insider*, May 12, 2014, [https://www.businessinsider.com/people-are-still-clearing-out-deadly-world-war-i-mines-from-northeastern-france-2014-5?IR=T]; Stuart Thornton’s “Red Zone,” *National Geographic*, May 1, 2014, [https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/red-zone/].

<sup>45</sup> Pollard and Banks xii. “[T]he battle zone ‘remains a fact in the geography of northern France many decades after the conclusion of the war,’ leaving an indelible imprint on the landscape (Clout 1).

<sup>46</sup> Once the trenches were dug, “the incessant rainfall that transformed the front into a sea of mud” (Brantz 78) resulted from the removal of vegetative ground cover and excavation of topsoil, its muddy mess becoming a metaphor for the larger world also being made unlivable by the alterations wrought by war: “mudscapes represented a whole new world” (Leonard 58). “Landscapes are created through human interaction, and the mudscapes of the Western Front were no different. They were constructed by industrial weaponry mashing together pre-war and prehistoric geographies, time and time again . . . mudscapes represented a whole new world” (Leonard 58). “Mud was ubiquitous and reigned supreme. It was created from the remnants of human beings and of murdered Nature—the by-product of modern industrial warfare on scale never before thought possible. It was not the same mud we know of today” (Leonard 56).

<sup>47</sup> “Combatants drown in mud. More often than not, the victims are wounded soldiers unable to ‘swim’ out of copious amounts of mud or too weak to fight its suctioning effect. Although drowning was not the cause of death for the following statistic, sinking in deep mud might explain why the British could not account for more than fifty thousand British and Commonwealth soldiers who fought in Flanders” (Wood 94). “Type I mud’s inability to support large amounts of weight means that combatants can drown in mud when wounded, when weighed down with excessive amounts of equipment, or simply because the mud is too deep” (Wood 94). “As mud can kill by drowning, it also can kill combatants indirectly when it acts as a vector for such bacteria as tetanus and anthrax, which live in the soil” (Wood 95). “The powerful weapons of World War I “caused deep, jagged wounds, nearly all of which were contaminated” (Wood 96). “World War I highlighted another hazard found in mud: gas gangrene, a condition that has nothing to do with poison gas attacks and “is an entity in itself, different from other kinds of gangrene.” Gas gangrene developed from the heavily cultivated soils of France and Flanders, which contained a bacillus originating from horse manure. The bacillus found its way onto soldiers’ uniforms, and when struck by a bullet or shrapnel, made its way into the body through the impregnated uniform. However, bacteria do not require deep jagged wounds for access into the body. With Type IIB mud’s liquid quality as a means, even scratches provide easy entry for dangerous infections” (Wood 96-7). “Carrying a wounded soldier is hard enough under good field conditions, but in deep mud two men are not enough to act as stretcher bearers” (Wood 108). “Soldiers and horses plying their way through a morass of Type IIB perform extra work causing greater exertion and subsequently immense physical exhaustion” (Wood 116). “Regrettably, death from mud-induced exhaustion happened on more than one occasion” (Wood 119). “They were dead simply because the heart and the vital functions had stopped as a result of compete physiological exhaustion” (Wood 119).

<sup>48</sup> Additionally, “trenchfoot came to the world’s attention during World War I. Although not a mortal injury, trenchfoot not only affects a soldier’s health and morale . . . can result in permanent damage to the peripheral vessels of the lower limbs.’ Geographer John Collins stated that trenchfoot began ‘with numbness, followed by swelling, terrible pain and, in untreated cases, gangrene’” (Wood 102). Lice spread typhus, rats carried other diseases, and the soldier’s confinement made them susceptible to “viral and bacterial infections” which also included trench foot and trench fever, and beginning in 1917, the influenza (Brantz 80). Epidemiologically, the environment of the trenches itself both “spread” and bred (through rapid mutation) “virulent” diseases, the worst of which was the “1918 influenza pandemic” which is now considered “inseparable” from the war (Keller 13).

<sup>49</sup> Rowley 313-5.

<sup>50</sup> “In Britain, long-standing reliance on foreign sources led to a domestic timber crisis during the war, when submarine warfare restricted shipping and cut off imported supplies” (West 271) because of the “high cost and high risk of oceanic shipping” during the war (Tucker 115).



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<sup>51</sup> Keller 11.

<sup>52</sup> Tucker 113, West 274-5, Brantz 74, Simmons 154. For an earlier view with much the same conclusions, see Ridsdale, Percival Sheldon. "War's Destruction of British Forests." *American Forests* 25.305 (May 1919): 1027-1043.

<sup>53</sup> West 271.

<sup>54</sup> Tucker 115.

<sup>55</sup> Tucker 121.

<sup>56</sup> West 275.

<sup>57</sup> West 276.

<sup>58</sup> Rowley 256.

<sup>59</sup> Rowley 273-4, 276.

<sup>60</sup> Rowley 256-7.

<sup>61</sup> "[T]he environmental impacts of warfare are not limited to territories where the military campaigning goes on" (Tucker 111).

<sup>62</sup> Keller 12, 8, 5. Blockade, starvation, import reliance, laborers lost to war decrease domestic production increase import more - "this food system shaped the war, just as the war transformed the global food economy" and "threatened people's basic level of existence" (Keller 8). This "result[s] in the increased vulnerability of entire populations, especially impoverished and marginalized ones in Africa and the Middle East" (Keller 5). After the war such inequities continue, when, for example, "most munitions depend upon minerals . . . [a]fter the war, the uneven geographical distribution of key minerals played a central role in political settlements" (Keller 9).

<sup>63</sup> Simmons 183.

<sup>64</sup> Tucker 113, 117. "World Wa[r] I illustrate[s] the globalization of war's appetite for forest resources, and the extremely complex impacts of th[at] wa[r] on postwar consumption patterns," and the "British Empire . . . led the way" (Tucker 111, 116).

<sup>65</sup> Keller 9, Simmons 212. For example, the beginning of North Sea fisheries collapse due to better technology developed during the war and an excess of decommissioned military vessels for purchase to enable large catch fishing (Keller 11) and other such events shows how World War I creates a military-industrial view of natural resource management and the human-environmental relationship which lasts well beyond the war years. Such advances "provided acceleration in all operations of natural resource extraction" and "catalyzed large-scale postwar reforestation programs which transformed mixed-species forests into timber plantations," introducing one of many destructive monocropping regimes to characterize twentieth century environmental degradation (Tucker 111). "Wartime mobilization demands drove rapid transformations in the arms manufacturing sector, as well as mining, oil drilling, fishing, and logging," this includes the development of chemical weapons (Keller 9). "During World War I, nineteenth-century industrial patterns were reinforced for the simple reason that what was required was greater production from existing plant at any cost" (Simmons 212).

<sup>66</sup> Oil emerges faster than it otherwise would have as the central natural resource to the world economy and to perceptions of national security the world over, replacing "coal [as] the principle source of industrial energy," its increased availability also increases the production of combustion engine machinery, like cars and tractors, (Keller 10) which, as we now know, become major contributors to global warming through emissions.

<sup>67</sup> Tucker 117. "[I]n British Africa, the war left a legacy of expanded logging infrastructure, as well as a taste for the market potential for tropical woods" (Tucker 117).

<sup>68</sup> Russell, 36. Furthermore, during the war "private interests, with millions of dollars invested in [chemical and firearms manufacturing] plants, now have to urge constantly increasing military and naval expenditures so that their profits may continue," from which the public surmises that "a 'war ring' linked the army, navy, and industrial interests," coming to the conclusion that "in the private profits accruing from the great arms factories a powerful hindrance to the abolition of war" existed (Russell 33).

<sup>69</sup> Russell, 22. The development and proliferation of chemical warfare in the theaters of the Western Front contributed to a rhetoric of war which was appropriated by the chemical manufacturing industry to promulgate a war against nature, or that part of nature we call pests (fungi, bugs, weeds, and small animals). Edmund Russell notes that "[t]he scale of killing in Europe supplied a ready-made comparison for the scale of insect threat" producing statements such as a desire for "the outcome of the 'war to the finish' between Man and Arthropod for 'mastery of the planet,'" and "[a]long with conveying the scale of the insect menace, comparisons to the European War expressed the scale on which people might respond.

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Nothing less than extermination of insect enemies . . . would protect humanity” (22). The fact that Russell begins the chronology of his study of “war and nature” with the First World War is illustrative in and of itself, but it is clear that the rhetoric of total war as it is entangled in industrial warfare (including chemical weapons) begins to aggressively repackage the public’s perception of their relationship to nature, not as ecological and connective, but as oppositional and divisive.

<sup>70</sup> Keller 14.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government* (2000), 272.

<sup>72</sup> For more on environment and empire in British history and Europe more generally, with a decided bias towards explorations of the centuries leading up to but not including the twentieth century, see the following: J. R. McNeill’s *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Tom Griffiths’ and Libby Robin’s collection *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997; and Alfred W. Crosby’s *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

<sup>73</sup> Arnold 53.

<sup>74</sup> Keller 6.

<sup>75</sup> Tucker 112.

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Murphy, “Environment and Imperialism” (2009), 8. See also Donald Hughes’s *An Environmental History of the World* (2009), 138.

<sup>77</sup> Drayton 271.

<sup>78</sup> Murphy 7.

<sup>79</sup> Murphy, 8-9. See also Hughes, 138.

<sup>80</sup> Pryor 687, Hughes 137, Simmons 154. “Between 1864 and 1899, timber imports trebled 10 million tons” (Hughes 137). Prices for English crops began falling just before the turn of the century: “agricultural depression of the 1870s and the bulk importation of cheap food” rises as a consequence of imperial markets, the latter creating the conditions, in part, of the former and ensuring the cycle continued (Pryor 687, Hughes 137, Simmons 154). “In the course of the nineteenth century, Britain changed from being self-sufficient in food production, or nearly so, to importing almost half of all foodstuffs consumed” (Hughes 137).

<sup>81</sup> Hughes 137. B.W. Clapp somewhat problematically echoes the imperial sentiment of the era in his analysis that: “[t]he acreage of land lost to houses, factories, schools, roads, and railways has been regained many times over through the use of land overseas that has supplied Britain with food, industrial crops and minerals” (119).

<sup>82</sup> David Arnold 162-3.

<sup>83</sup> Arnold 162-3. David Arnold notes that, “the tropics were also physically transformed under European tutelage . . . they became complementary economies and ecologies, designed to serve the needs and desires that the temperate lands could not satisfy. There were three main ways Europeans strove to incorporate and subjugate the tropics: by controlling natural resources (especially vegetable products), by mobilizing non-white labor and by gaining mastery over ‘tropical diseases.’ Each of these interrelated forms of appropriation and control had important environmental consequences” (Arnold 162-3). India, the focus of Britain’s nineteenth and early twentieth century empire,” provided a source of “indentured labourers [that] replaced African slaves as the primary source of migrant labor in tropical plantations from Fiji to Guyana” (Arnold 171).

<sup>84</sup> Arnold 167, 171, Hughes 139. “The new plantation crops thus established ‘complemented Britain’s home industries to form a comprehensive system of extraction and commodity exchange which for a time, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, made Britain the world’s superpower” whose “three most economically valuable plants involved: rubber, sisal and cinchona” (Arnold 167). India “grew tea and coffee, cotton, rubber and cinchona” (Arnold 171).

<sup>85</sup> “In India, the forest exploitation in the south described in this chapter [Western Ghats] was more than matched by the inexorable march of deforestation into the Himalayas and the northeastern region of Assam. The disappearance of habitat for plants and animals of forest ecosystems was one of the primary causes for the decline of biodiversity, more serious in this period than during any preceding time. Biodiversity is reduced by restriction of the range of species, decline in species populations, and most seriously and finally by extinction of species” (Hughes 157).

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<sup>86</sup> In India cinchona “plantations were established [from Peruvian seeds] to provide a reliable resource of the anti-malarial drug quinine, used to protect European soldiers in India and Africa” allowing for the “colonial penetration of Africa in the late nineteenth century” (Arnold 167).

<sup>87</sup> Arnold 181. “The British also assisted the advance of this ecological frontier through the spread of peasant agriculture into previously uncultivated or thinly populated tracts like lower Burma . . . cutting down the forests was thus a way of advancing the frontier of effective administrative control and minimizing sites of lawlessness and resistance” (Arnold 181).

<sup>88</sup> Arnold 177. “By the 1890s nearly 44,000 miles of main canals and distributaries had been constructed in British India, irrigating more than 13 million acres. Fifty years later, towards the close of the British period, the figure had been increased to 75,000 miles and 33 million acres, a quarter of India’s total cropped area. Many parts of India were physically transformed” (Arnold 177).

<sup>89</sup> Arnold 178.

<sup>90</sup> Beinart and Hughes “argue that irrigation works in India contributed to food insecurity by reorienting domestic agriculture towards overseas markets” (Beinart and Hughes 130-147, cited in Murphy 11).

<sup>91</sup> Arnold 183.

<sup>92</sup> Arnold 179.

<sup>93</sup> Arnold 179.

<sup>94</sup> Arnold 179. “Vast engineering works were needed to span the flood-plains of India’s rivers, to traverse mountainous ghats or climb steep inclines to hill-stations . . . in the process, a great deal of forest and other natural vegetation was cleared and the soil exposed to erosion. For purposes of construction – for bridges and sleepers – and also initially as fuel for the locomotives, vast quantities of timber were felled, transported and consumed. The railways opened up for commercial exploitation hitherto inaccessible forests: an accelerated process of deforestation was one of the principle legacies of the railway age. Like the irrigation canals, railways also had an adverse impact on the disease environment” (Arnold 179).

<sup>95</sup> Murphy 9, Beinart and Hughes 233-250.

<sup>96</sup> Murphy 9-10. The full area of Malaysia is approximately 33 million hectares. See “Forestry Statistics,” *Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia*, Accessed March 21, 2020, [<https://www.forestry.gov.my/en/2016-06-07-02-53-46/2016-06-07-03-12-29>] for more information.

<sup>97</sup> Murphy 10.

<sup>98</sup> Murphy 11. “Throughout the colonies of the various European powers water engineers used dams, ditches and sluices to control the flow of water and claimed that their approach to water management was more rational and efficient than existing indigenous approaches. In practice, however, outcomes were mixed. Beinart and Hughes (2007: 130-147) argue that irrigation works in India contributed to food insecurity by reorienting domestic agriculture towards overseas markets. In Egypt large dams contributed to salination problems and created a dependency on agricultural chemicals because they prevented the Nile’s annual inundation of surrounding land and silt deposition” (Murphy 11).

<sup>99</sup> Murphy 19.

<sup>100</sup> Murphy 19. “[T]he impact of wool production on the indigenous population in Australia was profound as it provided the economic impulse to open up the continent. The environment was transformed at the same time. Twenty fine-wooled merino sheep were introduced in 1797 and by the last decade of the 19th century there were over 100 million. When natural pastures were exhausted efforts were made to intensify production such as fencing and rotation. Sheep were more aggressive grazers than indigenous animals and large numbers compacted and exhausted the soil. Some farmers used fire to burn off grass and trees to encourage new grass but torrential rain brought severe run-off and erosion. Bare soil provided a place for alien species to invade and when rabbits were introduced they thrived on the grass which had been cut short by the sheep” (Murphy 19).

<sup>101</sup> Drayton 272. “From the coffee shops of London rain a trail of misery, torture, and death which penetrated the heart of Africa and the Americas . . . To produce sugar [in the Caribbean], or indeed wine in Madeira, an enormously diverse flora and fauna were destroyed” (Drayton 272).

<sup>102</sup> “There is a grandeur in this view of life and labour serving the pleasure and comfort of Britain, and the improvement of the world” (Drayton 270).

<sup>103</sup> “As imperial power grew, and with it Britain’s sense of racial and technological superiority over India, so the environment was invoked more and more to explain the great gulf that divided them” (Arnold 171) thinking that while in India famine was still possible, for example, due to monsoon failure, “[i]n Britain (with the exception always of Ireland) nature had been tamed” (Arnold 172).

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<sup>104</sup> “It is after his exposure of the politics of succession, holism, and complex organism that Tansley introduces the word *ecosystem*” (Peder Anker 154). “In sum, [A.G.] Tansley’s ecosystem theory was [created] with the issue of management of Africa and the political status of native populations at stake . . . he coined the word as a progressive alternative to the politics of holism advocated by Smuts and Phillips . . . which he further developed into a universal theory about chemical flows of energy in the system of the mind, society, and nature. The aim of /human knowledge (or a ‘system of systems’ as Tansley called it) was to use ecological research to support colonial expansion and management . . . and thus naturalize imperialism” (Anker 155-6).

<sup>105</sup> Peder Anker 155-6.

<sup>106</sup> Anker 166-7. John William Bews synthesized hereditary biology and ecology for a racist ecology of human evolution, an ecological development of races, following Jan Christian Smuts, south Africa, an “ecological division of mankind” by labor and race “humans self-segregate” into “ecological classes” “Control of the environment was the yardstick of these divisions” (Anker 166-7).

<sup>107</sup> Murphy 13. “Initially nature was destroyed or plundered but in many places this gave way to early efforts at environmental protection and management. The story of colonial conservation, however, is not straightforward. Novel policies were a response to emerging environmentalism and the declining legitimacy of rapacious colonialism. At the same time, however, nature conservation gave additional momentum to existing processes, particularly the alienation of land from indigenous people” (Murphy 13).

<sup>108</sup> Murphy 13.

<sup>109</sup> Simmons 183.

<sup>110</sup> Hughes 140.

<sup>111</sup> “Randeria (2007) argues that the idea of ‘the environment’ did not exist in a conceptual sense in most parts of the world before colonialism. It rests on a division between nature and culture which spread with colonial officials and scientists or was / an outcome of interactions between the coloniser, the colonised and nature. Today ‘the environment’ frames the way most interactions between people and nature are understood” (Murphy 23-4).

<sup>112</sup> “matter, n.1.,” accessed March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/115083](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115083); “matter, v.,” accessed March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/115085](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115085).

<sup>113</sup> Catherine Belsey 380.

<sup>114</sup> Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Fredrick Jameson. New York: Verso, 1977.

<sup>115</sup> In more detail: Althusser’s *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970), the subject is figured as always already created and maintained through ideological interpolation. Ideology, he writes, “Interpolates Individuals as Subjects” (1355). This interpolation occurs because, “*ideology has the function . . . of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects*” (1355). It constitutes individual subjects as “the hailed individual will turn around [and by] this . . . physical conversion, he becomes a *subject* [for] he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was *really him* who was hailed’ (and not someone else)” (1356). In short, it is only in behaving as if you can be delimited as an individual that you become one. You not only recognize that another speaks to you, but in recognizing that it is possible to speak to you specifically you create yourself as an individual. Althusser explains that, “where only a single subject . . . is concerned, the existence of [ideology] is material in that *his ideas are his material actions inserted into his material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derived the ideas of that subject*” (1354). The materialization of ideology through the actions of individuals is possible because, “the individual in question behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which ‘depend’ the ideas which he has in all consciousness *freely chosen as a subject*” (italics mine, 1353). Rather than a performance informed by social discourses seeking to delimit the body which enacts its identity, Althusser’s subject is incited to freely choose their own subjugation to ideologies which maintain—through the material results of each individuals choices, taken collectively—both the continuation of those ideologies and the subjective coherence of individuals who are subjects to and of them simultaneously. Althusser’s subjective behavior and ideological interpolation are, therefore, mutually constitutive. Althusser also presents a theory on how literature and culture can be used as both an apparatus for ideological dissemination and exposure. The dissemination function is discussed throughout the book, but the exposure function is not examined, but merely implicit in the text for a hopeful reader. It is through the state institutions, such as schools and churches, that ideology functions as an ideological state apparatus (1341). The less obvious institutions

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of “communications,” which house the “press, radio and television,” and, in particular, “the cultural ISA” comprised mainly of “Literature” and “the Arts,” however, are also instrumental in the ideological interpolation of subjects (1341). It is, he notes, “in words” that “agents of exploitation and repression” reproduce “the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly” to effect a “submission to the ruling ideology for the workers” and a “domination of the ruling class” (1337). The values which are disseminated in any given ideology are “taught,” therefore, “in Good books [and] films” (1347). Because “aesthetic[s],” too, contribute to the “realization of an ideology” we must remember that “ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice or practices,” however seemingly separate from the obvious possessors of the power to subjugate, and because of this “[t]his existence is material” (1352-3). What is and is not valued as “good” art, what is and is not available under the category of “art,” what is and is not valued within “art,” even the value of “art” itself, all affect the practices of the subject, which, having assented to the ideology of “art,” behaves in a way consistent with the maintenance of a given power structure. Pagination refers to the following version: Althusser, Louis. “From Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010. 1335-1360.

<sup>116</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. “Structures and the Habitus.” *The Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge, UP. 1977.

<sup>117</sup> Foucault, Michel. “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Vintage, 2010. 76-100.

<sup>118</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage, 1976.

<sup>119</sup> In more detail: Michel Foucault articulates the regulation of the subject through discourse. What is implicit in Foucault’s understanding of discourse and power is the notion that no a priori subject exists before such discursive intervention. Taking up epistemologies of sexuality a discourse of power which, historically and presently, regulates subjectivity, he explains how disciplinary discourses, such as medicine, psychology, scholastic pedagogy, and criminal justice create “indefinite lines of penetration” all around the subject, seeking not to suppress sexual abnormality, but to classify and reify biology and subjectivity into rigid solidification (47, 44). By defining which sexualities are “licit” and “illicit,” which are morally or mentally perverse, the proliferation of public discourse about sex simultaneously enacts the “incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals” (37, 42). The sexual actions of individuals, no longer disjointed from their actions and appearances, become “consubstantial with [them]” as subjects (43). This means that the discursively regulated individual’s interior subjectivity is defined from without by the public discourse on their actions and thoughts. Furthermore, Foucault stresses the constitutive function of epistemologies of the body for subjects. Throughout modernity, he states, knowledge, rather than an opening up of other subjects to objective apprehension, increasingly became a process whereby knowing equals power-over (71-2). Disciplinary fields, such as medicine, do not follow a transactional process of knowing, but rather, a “conquest” model for epistemology. The object of knowledge is not to be learned *from* but to be possessed *by* the knower. Epistemological discourses approach sexual acts not to “condemn” what “repels” and incites “shame,” but to manage the acting subject, who will, as a result, be “inserted into systems of utility” and “regulated” (1506). This need to repress and control abjected sexualities causes an increase in sexual discourse rather than decrease as the number of identifiable non-normative sexualities proliferates (1502-3). Foucault calls this a “discursive explosion” wherein language is “codified” in areas of “silence” creating a “restrictive economy of sex” (1502). Power, then, becomes synonymous with knowledge, as the state insinuates itself increasingly in a population’s use of their sex, and so a “web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions on sex” emerge (1507-8). Language is most obviously implicated in Foucault’s approach to subjectivity, for discourse is, in many ways, just that: a saying back and forth. It is in this way that sexualities become “labelled,” and in being linguistically marked they are “disentangled” to “exclude them from [normative] reality” (1516). This is why, in our modern age, while liberal discussion of sex has increased, “sexual repression has increased” as has out direct desire to regulate and actively (violently?) demonize it (1521). Because of the status of sex given by its linguistic definition, sexuality has become something which must either be “confessed” or “interrogated” (1511). What is and is not said and in what way, then, in life, literature, on television and in the movies all allow for the control of sex through discourse, and therefore the control of those subjects marked by “peripheral sexualities” (1508) and the empowerment of those talking about or around them. It seems, then, while there is ample potential for the reinforcement of oppressive discursive language, there may also be a small chance that one could disrupt the discourse in some small way, unbinding epistemological power-over sexually peripheral subjects. Pagination refers to the following

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version: Foucault, Michel. "The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.1502-1520.

<sup>120</sup> While a nation can possess an empire and be a state, the nation is never interchangeable with the empire or the state—spatially or imaginatively. Further discussion of the nation's relationship to state and empire will occur later in Chapter 5 with regards to Empire, including the relationship of each to national land and the concept of Nature. Furthermore, because of the British focus of this study, discussions and definitions of nation will focus on its European forms and history. The development of nationhood as a concept emerges differently across the world, especially in those territories which were once colonies of European nations, and whom, in the twentieth century, began founding independent senses of nationhood of their own. Most historians trace the history of nations to the treaty of Westphalia in 1648 whereupon the idea of nation grows more concretely from the city-states of previous centuries as a sovereign entity, with absolute rights and claim to its own territory. England, it must be noted, however, was very much convinced of its own sovereignty before 1648. As a parliamentary monarchy embroiled in its own scramblings to consolidate the British Isles territories (England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland) and end the internal chaos which led to civil war by mid-century, they were less embroiled in continental contests for territory at the time of the treaties in 1648. Nationalism becomes a trend, however, only in the nineteenth century. England, until this time, thought of itself largely as a kingdom more than a nation, though Englishness persists across the two. Despite having an air of permanence to it, the idea of nation is a relatively new one, like many of the nations themselves. We should, however, not confuse this with the existence of the state, for degrees of centralized power held and organized over a given territory which it holds to be sovereign are in no way new. City-states and empires have existed for almost as long as human communities, but at least 5,000 years, likely more, beginning with the Sumerian city states in the Mesopotamian region of what is now the middle east.

Another note: by nature, here, I mean both environment in the ecological sense—a territory's built and natural environs and the ecosystem in which all are embedded, as well as the symbolic idea of Nature which in social imaginaries both refers to such physical surrounds and also more generally to any essential or irreducible state of ontological being. For further discussion and definition of these key terms—nature and environment—and how they interrelate, please refer back to Introduction.

<sup>121</sup> Williams notes that: "[i]n English, 'country' is both a nation and a part of a 'land'; 'the country' can be the whole society or its rural area," whereupon "astonishingly varied, powerful feelings have gathered and have been generalised" (Williams 1).

<sup>122</sup> See: Smith, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986; Greenfeld, Leah. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992; and Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990. See also: Koundoura, Maria. *The Greek Idea: The Formation of National and Transnational Identities*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007; or Hirschi, Caspar. *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Regarding England specifically, see Lavezzo, Kathy. *Imagining A Medieval English Nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. A host of scholars, however, insisted on the modern invention of nation. For examples, please see: Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991; Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983; Breuilly, John. *Nationalism and the State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

<sup>123</sup> See Kedourie, Elie. *Nationalism*. 4th ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993 [Collected lectures from 1950s]. See also: Oakesmith, John. *Race & Nationality: An Inquiry into the Origin and Growth of Patriotism*. London: William Heinemann, 1919. Regarding England specifically, see the following: Chadwick, H. Munro. *The Origin of the English Nation*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1924, and Robertson, Charles Grant, Sir. *The Making of the English Nation (B.C. 55-1135 A.D.)*. C. Scribner's Sons, 1898.

<sup>124</sup> See Kohn, Hans. *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of Its Origins and Background*. New York: Macmillan, 1944, and Renan, Ernest. "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" *Nationalism*. Eds. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>125</sup> See: Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990; Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; Cheah, Pheng. *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of*

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*Liberation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. See also such works as: Gikandi, Simon. *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; Davis, Kathleen. *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017; and Appadurai, Arjun. *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

<sup>126</sup> Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” 204-5

<sup>127</sup> Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” 204-5, italics mine.

<sup>128</sup> Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” 204-5

<sup>129</sup> Kathleen Davis explicitly critiques Anderson’s misuse of the medieval in theorizing the temporality of nation. As Davis notes in her article “National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking About the Nation,” in the Middle Ages themselves, already, writers were attempting to over-write the distinctions between a set of diverse peoples upon the British island, to consolidate a more singular and tangible England. Hence why, despite Anderson’s assumptions that the national temporality made possible by newspapers and novels inaugurated a new process—the imagining of a nation into being, Davis explains that this process is a continuous one, that England was imagining itself as a nation through writing and other cultural entities long before the rise of print culture. Her argument is an extension of Bruno Latour’s own discussion in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991) which reveals a modern/pre-modern break to be a fallacy. Latour argues that rather than an objective anthropological evolution, western culture at the end of the twentieth century is produced through a “[m]odern [c]onstitution” of postmodern identity and critique rest on the unstable and unacknowledged foundations of “nature-culture” (37, 19). The instability of this foundational pair of concepts is rooted in its “paradox[ical]” state whereby nature is both “constructed” by society and therefore “immanent” (pervades society as a rule which then constitutes it and its functioning as such), and *simultaneously* that society is constructed by nature and therefore immanent (pervades nature in the sense that it exists for us only as mediated by society) (32). Both the containment of nature by society and the external guarantee of society by nature are both expressed in essentially spatial terms. Latour feels that the notion of “nature-culture” disrupts the idea that there is a progression away from a state of nature and towards the dominance of culture. Davis applies finds Latour’s ideas to be salient with regard specifically to England’s own fraught history with its so-called medieval self.

<sup>130</sup> Partha Chatterjee, for example, argues in *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993), that if nationalism is only something imagined into existence in the moment one calls one’s self a nation in European terms, then it becomes impossible for postcolonial nationhood to emerge organically in such countries as India and Africa. More than a “political movement,” she argues against Anderson, “the nation is already a sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power,” and does not begin with the “contest for political power,” but instead exists in the ‘inner’ domain,” the “so-called spiritual domain,” the culture in other words, which predates imperial interference, of a people (Chatterjee 6).

<sup>131</sup> Partha Chatterjee notes that it was Europe that “gifted” nationalism to the world, adding that despite much recent critique of emergent nations, the West would do well to remember that before the emergence of nationalism in most postcolonial communities, “Europe’s failure to manage its own ethnic nationalisms” caused two world wars (Chatterjee 4). Such destructive nationalisms, this study will demonstrate as it continues, are precisely related to the entanglement of nation and nature.

<sup>132</sup> Chatterjee 4. See also Benedict Anderson 6-7.

<sup>133</sup> Chatterjee notes that while “nation is an imagined community . . . nations must also take the form of states,” hence to talk about nation, one must create a terminology which allows us to “talk about community and state at the same time” (Chatterjee 11).

<sup>134</sup> Anderson 5, the embedded quote references Gertrude Stein’s line describing California. My Tinkerbell reference here is to J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911) (and also the sociological concept based on the trope now called the “Tinkerbell Effect,” whereby believing in something enough will make it happen). In the novel (and the play), Tinkerbell is saved from death by strong belief accompanied by clapping to show it. Generations of children likely remember helping to save the fairy for decades after the classic 1960 TV movie version aired with Mary Martin as Peter Pan alone on stage with the fairy’s fading light, bringing “Tink” back to life with a direct appeal to the audience at home to help. Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6IKaLF4Fqc>.

<sup>135</sup> Anderson 6, italics in original.

<sup>136</sup> Anderson 6, italics in original. He adds that “it is an imagined *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7).

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<sup>137</sup> Ernst Gellner cited in Anne Helmreich 3.

<sup>138</sup> Kathleen Davis takes up this notion in her discussion of medievalism in the mind of the modern in *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2017). Those who identify themselves as moderns, just as those who identify themselves as English or European through their difference from colonial and postcolonial others such as Indians and Africans, do so through their *creation* of a distinction between modern humanity and medieval peoples. They did (and do) so often on the grounds that the medieval worldview lacked the progressive and civilized or *Enlightened modern* epistemologies that post-medieval peoples possessed. Davis argues, furthermore, that the creation of such medievalisms become a dangerous tool in the relationship between colonizer and colonized, wherein the closeness posited between presently colonized peoples and medieval European ones lent justification to their imperial exploitation. Even in our postcolonial era, Davis explains, media commentators, casual conversants on the street, and those in economic and political power use terms such as medieval to denigrate peoples of the so-called third world, or developing countries—the very ideas of which are themselves resonant of the lie medievalism propagates, and the imbalance of power such rhetorics enable and perpetuate between former imperial and colonial states.

<sup>139</sup> Bhabha, “DissemiNation,” 208-9.

<sup>140</sup> While I look at the environment as that something here, it could (and is) also, the medieval, the colonial, the feminine, and a list of Others longer than this chapter or dissertation has time to address.

<sup>141</sup> Together with the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, this leads to a rise of vernacular language publications. The rise of the middle class as a new, numerous, readership being simultaneous with the expansion of printing to vernacular languages expands the print market further so that each territory now has its own, growing consumer market for print. This profitability, in turn, leads to a proliferation of book and newspaper printing particular to each territory (Anderson 11-12, 22, 34, 38-42, 71, 77).

<sup>142</sup> The new shared vernacular print language created these “print-languages” by merging regional dialects or lending power to some over others and creating “unified fields of exchange and communication” where oral variation used to make it more difficult to understand, for example, one’s fellow “Englishman” (Anderson 44, italics in original).

<sup>143</sup> Anderson notes, “*particular* languages and their association with *particular* territorial units” with “no possibility of humankind’s general linguistic unification” their “mutual incomprehensibility” means each language creates a new market, and so markets proliferate and the pool of readers becomes small enough that they begin to share some things in common (Anderson 43).

<sup>144</sup> Anderson 7, italics in original.

<sup>145</sup> Anderson writes, “It is imagined as *sovereign* because . . . nations dream of being free” (Anderson 7, italics in original). By sovereign, he underscores the sense in which they are under their own authority, rather than a religious or dynastic one, whose authority extended beyond the bounds of the land of one community, now a nation. For example, with the secular Austro-Hungarian Empire, the religious Christendom, or the divinely authorized but worldly monarchies of England.

<sup>146</sup> Paul Readman states that “it was the ‘historical associations’ inscribed in the landscape that had so drawn the attention of English painters and writers. The landscape was storied. Indeed, it might be said that landscape is by definition storied” (Readman 3). Adding, “societies have understood time to confer value on place. European (and non-European) landscapes evocative of past ages, significant events, the great figures of old, have come to be esteemed precisely because of these associations . . . focal points for mobilising a collective consciousness of the past. In large part because of its associations with human history, landscape was thus transformed into heritage . . . The process by which landscape became heritage was inextricably bound up with contemporaneous constructions of collective identity. . . . Over time, however, this heritage was increasingly understood to be national in character, despite the persistence of associations between landscape and locality . . . national communities come to ascribe value to landscapes evocative of the imagined pasts of those communities. On account of its historical associations, landscape became a powerful means by which a people’s sense of self and identity might be maintained and celebrated” (Readman 4).

<sup>147</sup> In the conceptual not scientific sense of genetic, as in, common origins, not genes and sequencing.

<sup>148</sup> Cheah 1.

<sup>149</sup> Cheah 1. Ernest Renan has noted something similar: “to have common glories in the past, a common will in the present . . . is the essential condition of being a nation” (Renan 17).



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<sup>150</sup> “substrate, n.” OED Online. March 2020. Oxford University Press. <https://www-oed-com.uri.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/193100?rskey=SuZMaW&result=1> (accessed April 07, 2020).

<sup>151</sup> The quasi-geologic connotation’s of “enduring substrate” as genetic nativity, moves national ideology, in a sense from a discourse of rootedness (organic, vegetal) to a discourse of groundedness (geologic, base material). This, as will be discussed further on in this Introduction, is increasingly true in the modernist period surrounding World War I, and in particular, for England.

<sup>152</sup> By trans-spatial, I mean the way in which “[i]n the modern conception, state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimeter of a legally demarcated territory” (Anderson 19).

<sup>153</sup> On the simultaneity of the novel, see Anderson 25-26. Newspapers “as a cultural product . . . its profound fictiveness . . . the essential literary convention of the newspaper . . . these events so juxtaposed . . . connects them to each other . . . [which] happen independently . . . the arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition . . . shows that some linkage between them is imagined . . . [their] calendrical coincidence . . . the steady onward clock of homogeneous, empty time . . . The novelistic format of the newspaper assures them that somewhere out there the ‘character’ Mali moves along quietly, awaiting its next reappearance in the plot . . . and the relationship between newspaper, as a form of book, and the market” (Anderson 33).

<sup>154</sup> Generic qualities of the novel also contribute to this effect of national simultaneity, by assuming the reader knows certain things, inviting them into a community or interpolating them as citizens, as is sometimes achieved by direct address, with “unselfconscious” words such as “our hero,” or the subtler addition of minute details, creating an “ironic intimacy,” that are both specific and repeatable, a national type, “a world of plurals” with “careful, *general* detail,” in their descriptive motion through everyday time, and often the “doubleness of our reading about” the characters “reading” (Anderson 32, 27-28, 32, italics his).

<sup>155</sup> See discussion of Althusser’s conception of the interpolation of subjects in “Ideological State Apparatuses” in Introduction.

<sup>156</sup> The newspaper’s “ephemeral popularity” is matched only by its consumption on a “massive scale” (Anderson 34). Everyone reads it at once, the newspaper “creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (‘imagining’) of the newspaper-as-fiction” (Anderson 35). And all are “aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, and yet whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, the ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar . . . at the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life . . . creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations” (Anderson 35-6).

<sup>157</sup> Hence, Anderson writes, “the development of print-as-commodity is the key to the generation of wholly new ideas of simultaneity” (Anderson 37).

<sup>158</sup> Anderson 37, 44.

<sup>159</sup> Anderson 44.

<sup>160</sup> Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

<sup>161</sup> Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 1.

<sup>162</sup> Anderson 45. Anderson further explains, “But once it had occurred, it entered the accumulating memory of print . . . became a ‘thing’ with its own name . . . Like a vast shapeless rock worn to a rounded boulder by countless drops of water, the experience was shaped by millions of printed words into a ‘concept’ on the printed page” (Anderson 80).

<sup>163</sup> Hence, Bonnie Kime Scott claims, “[t]here can be no doubt of nature’s importance in previous phases of English culture” (Kime Scott 125).

<sup>164</sup> English “value literary works with rural settings,” and their writing is through the centuries always “influenced by climate” (Jonathan Bate vii). Bate adds that “[t]he influence of, for instance, climate and soil was taken for granted” (13). See also Jesse Oak Taylor’s *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), which discusses the role of climate in both nineteenth and twentieth century British literature in both its more abstract atmospheric and its material-environmental senses.

<sup>165</sup> Williams 9. The title of the book is *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*.

<sup>166</sup> Williams 9-11.

<sup>167</sup> Williams 12.

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<sup>168</sup> Williams 12.

<sup>169</sup> In the seventeenth century English literature focuses on the settlement of the countryside under the aegis of improvement and centering on the laboring landscapes of the country house (Williams 58, 59).

<sup>170</sup> By the eighteenth century, however, works express a sense of loss over the enclosure of the commons creating a tone of retrospect which idealized “primitive freedom” and the “teaching of nature” associating these with the times before Saxon, Dane, and Norman incursions, when, it is claimed “free Briton[s]” lived in communion with the land (Williams 79, 61, 75, 96). Simultaneously, however, there began, in response to the growth in landless labor due to increased industrialization, a rejection of the pastoral aesthetic which is accompanied by an idealization of the land laborer (Williams 63, 66, 84, 87, 98, 99). Jonathan Bate also writes, “retreat from the town as return to a natural life in which the human spirit is integrated with its environment; the imagining of a lost tribe of humans in the state of nature; a reference to nature’s ‘children’ which implies that in childhood we might approximate to the condition of the lost tribe; critique of the Baconian-Cartesian dream of mastery, together with its politics of oppression (Nature as violated and enslaved female) . . . He is only at home in a land that is lost” (Bate 57).

<sup>171</sup> In the nineteenth century the “Romantic structure of feeling—the assertion of nature against industry . . . isolation of humanity and community” becomes more predominant leading to a sense of “nature separated from the nature of man” that occurs ironically in Romantic tendency towards a “[c]loser description of nature” (Williams 79, 129, 133). In, for example, Wordsworth and Clare, “a separation that is mediated by a projection of personal feeling into a subjectively particularized and objectively generalised Nature” (Williams 134). In such writing “Nature, the past and childhood are . . . fused” as landscape becomes altered by rapid expansion of city inciting characteristic elegiac and nostalgic tones against visions of the city as either a wilderness of chaos or oppressive uniformity, but always rife with feelings of “threat, confusion and loss of identity” (Williams 139, 143, 151, 160, 223-5). The twentieth century continues many of these same themes as urbanization advances and writing about the country increasingly depicts it as “timeless,” steeped in a history which, however, the writer feels separated from effecting a “sense of melancholy of loss and dissolution” (Williams 130). In the late nineteenth century, for authors such as Thomas Hardy the countryside’s “timeless[ness]—in fact the sense of history, of the barrows, the Roman remains” is not located in the landscape itself but “[t]he real perception of tradition is available only to the man who has read about it, though what he then sees through it is his native country, to which he is already deeply bound by memory and experience of another kind: a family and a childhood; an intense association of people and places, which has been his own history” yet the author still “sees as a participant who is also an observer” which effects a “decisive alienation” (Williams 206). The twentieth century is accompanied by a “double movement of loss and liberation” with regards to natural areas (Williams 207). The countryside is increasingly seen as a “place of physical and spiritual regeneration . . . of an isolated nature . . . displacement of sexual feeling” (252). The experience of the city is, comparably associated with the “loss of a credible common world” and a “degree of isolation” (Williams 253). Furthermore, with regard to landscape apprehension, “[t]here is a visible qualitative difference between the results of farming and the results of mining . . . The land, for its fertility or for its ore, is in both cases abstractly seen” and a “change from admiration of cultivated country to intense attachment to ‘unspoiled’ places is a precise record of this persistent process” (Williams 293).

<sup>172</sup> Such idealization is ironic for the countryside is also becoming a space seen as “rural retreat” as a result of the country house landscape’s “‘invention’ of scenery” due to country houses increasing “laying-out of decorative grounds” where the simultaneously mourned pre-enclosure lands once lay (Williams 61, 122).

<sup>173</sup> Lowenthal 221. Lowenthal writes, “the English country house ‘a heart and centre of the national identity’, in Nigel Dennis’s sardonic epitaph: . . . thousands look back to it, and not only grieve for its passing but still depend on it . . . to tell them who they are. Thousands who never knew it are taught . . . to cherish its memory and to believe that without it no man will be able to tell his whereabouts again” (Lowenthal 221).

<sup>174</sup> Williams 108. “[W]here you were looking from. Points of view” during these periods of change mattered—the perspective of the displaced laborer, or the country house owner, and the sympathizers of each (Williams 108).

<sup>175</sup> The changes of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, from settlement, enclosure, country house scenery creation, and industrialization drawing landless labor to factories, all amounts to an “alteration of landscape, by an alteration of seeing,” especially through “[t]he inclusion of work, and so of working men . . . conscious shift of affiliation” (Williams 87). A “working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation”; “changes in English attitudes to landscape, in the

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eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” and “even into our own [twentieth] century” therefore, contain a sense of “an elegy for a lost way of life” (Williams 120).

<sup>176</sup> Williams 120.

<sup>177</sup> Williams 293.

<sup>178</sup> David Matless evokes Bruno Latour’s notion of “quasi-object” in defining landscape, stating: “[i]n Bruno Latour’s terminology, landscape might be regarded as a classic ‘quasi-object’, impossible to place on either side of a dualism of nature and culture, shuttling between fields of reference” (Matless 29).

<sup>179</sup> Barad quoted in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 58.

<sup>180</sup> Scott 4-5. Though he is not describing Modernism in the literary sense, James C. Scott’s anthropology of the modern state names high modernist ideology as one of four key elements which contribute to its history of socioecological failures at the structural and material level (Scott 4). Borrowed from architectural terminology, high modernist statecraft is rooted in “self-confidence about scientific and technological progress,” the “expansion of production,” a “rational design of social order,” and, tellingly, “the mastery of nature” (Scott 4). Each of the other three elements either mobilize or enable this ideology: the “administrative ordering of nature and society,” an “authoritarian state” with the will and ability to enforce it, and “a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans” (Scott 4-5).

<sup>181</sup> Scott 4, 2.

<sup>182</sup> Scott’s formulation pinpoints precisely what it is that most strongly animates the environment’s relationship to Englishness: aesthetics, or, the ability to make and see the nation legible in nature or the land itself. The modern state achieves this legibility through the “simplification” of complex local systems into one “leveled . . . terrain on which to build,” and which becomes “reproducible” and hence homogenizes homeland (Scott 9, 5). This unified aesthetics reduces the bioregional variousness of England into a land whose nature is “organized” by a “abstracting, utilitarian” discourse (Scott 13). Trevor Rowley also notes, “One of the great attractions of the English landscape is its variety, a reflection of the geological kaleidoscope” (8).

<sup>183</sup> Scott 13.

<sup>184</sup> Helmreich 3, Readman 4. In her comprehensive study of late nineteenth and early twentieth century English gardens and national identity, Anne Helmreich writes, national ideology “depends on identification of a shared, distinctive culture and territory” (Helmreich 3).

<sup>185</sup> Mitchell 1-2, italics in original, Readman 2-3. Readman defines “associational value” as “the value placed on those connections and interactions between the environment and human experience that both create landscape qua landscape, and supply the basis for the ascription of meanings to it. Especially important vectors of the spread and valence of associations attaching to landscape have been artistic and literary productions” (Readman 2-3). W.J.T Mitchell sees landscape as more of a verb than a noun in this sense, noting that “landscape *circulates* as a . . . focus for the formation of identity” (Mitchell 1-2). Hence, landscape is “a process by which social and subjective identities are formed . . . not just what landscape ‘is’ or ‘means’ but what it does, how it works as a cultural practice” (Mitchell 1).

<sup>186</sup> Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels claim that it is symbolic in that “a landscape . . . is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring, or symbolizing surroundings” (Cosgrove and Daniels 1). Courtice Rose seizes upon these structural elements of the image in designating landscape as a “codified text” or “textual sign-system subject to complex processes of encoding and decoding” in which it is “encoded by those who act upon it and decoded by those who assess it,” which Graham Huggan explains, means that “[a]s text, landscape is both written and read” (Graham Huggan 21, 25, underlining in original). Carl Sauer delimits the structural nature of landscape without recourse to the symbolic or the textual, however. According to Huggan, “Carl Sauer’s notion of cultural landscape [i]s a structure or structures superimposed on the natural environment,” which determines “Sauer’s distinction between ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ landscapes” (Huggan 21, 22, underlining in original). Sauer himself explained its structuring function in the following terms: “[t]he cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result” (Sauer 343). Whether conceived of as an image, text, or structure, however, “landscape constitutes a discourse,” and Cosgrove claims “this discourse is closely related epistemically and technically to ways of seeing,” specifically, in its derived and projected nature in the triangle between land, viewer, and landscape produced, “landscape [i]s a distanced way of seeing” (Cosgrove xiv, xxiv-xxv).

<sup>187</sup> Cosgrove states, “land, especially cultivated, productive land, is the principle material foundation of the idea of landscape” (Cosgrove xxix).

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<sup>188</sup> Cosgrove describes this intersection of material and aesthetic boundaries as “an interconnected nexus of material (demographic, technological, socio-economic, environmental) and cultural (intellectual, scientific, political, legal, artistic)” (Cosgrove xvi-xvii). Simon Schama explains this nexus of the ontological and phenomenological aspects of landscape in the following terms: “Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product,” hence, we must “acknowledge that it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape” (Schama 9-10).

<sup>189</sup> Cosgrove and Daniels 1.

<sup>190</sup> Graham Huggan 21, Sauer 343.

<sup>191</sup> Tuan 5 quoted in Huggan 22, and Huggan 23.

<sup>192</sup> Courtice Rose paraphrased in Graham Huggan 25.

<sup>193</sup> Cosgrove xiv. This is what Cosgrove means when he claims that “the landscape idea represents a way of seeing” (xiv).

<sup>194</sup> Cosgrove xvi. The word land was italicized in the original.

<sup>195</sup> Cosgrove xvi.

<sup>196</sup> Cosgrove xviii. The word eyes was italicized in the original.

<sup>197</sup> Cosgrove xxvi.

<sup>198</sup> Cosgrove points out the “active role played by imaginative creation of new identities, which often drew on landscape images . . . in shaping territorial and political structures such as the nation state” (Cosgrove xxi).

<sup>199</sup> The term enmeshed is borrowed from Timothy Morton. More on enmeshment can be found by referring back to the Introduction.

<sup>200</sup> Cosgrove xxi. Cosgrove reflects that the limitations of his study are shaped by the largely masculine, white European perspective his study addresses, foreclosing the possibility of exploring the way in which landscape functions as a “personal, unavoidably embodied, experience of the material world,” also “silent on the gendering of the landscape itself as the object of seeing . . . of ‘the gaze’” often “construct[ing] gendered landscapes as the passive, feminised objects of a rapacious and voyeuristic male gaze” as others have done (Cosgrove xviii). My own study will feature similar limitations, only intentionally, for the sort of seeing I hope to trace is the nationalist English one, that, by virtue of the ideology motivating it, is always already male, white, imperialist, and especially during the modernist era, disembodied.

<sup>201</sup> Cosgrove xvii.

<sup>202</sup> Schama 14.

<sup>203</sup> Schama 14.

<sup>204</sup> Cosgrove xxx.

<sup>205</sup> Matless 31. The period in question for Matless, is, specifically 1918 to 1950. It should be noted, however, that unlike Matless, this dissertation does not seek to define the meaning of base matters, like his landscape, to Englishness, but instead to show how within literature base material aesthetics are employed to negotiate national identity in a way that relies on an unacknowledged environmental epistemology which has its effects, after the interwar period and because of World War I’s impact on such literary aesthetics, on environmental attitude and therefore behaviors as well as racial ideologies (also embedded in these aesthetics) that emerge from an imperial national identity. These then becoming the dual legacy of base material aesthetics. Hence, I will not dwell on specific English lands(capes) and their relationship to national identity, nor will my discussion of Matless work dwell on his discussions of these. David Lowenthal agrees, noting: “One icon of heritage has a distinctly English cast. That is the landscape. Nowhere else is landscape so freighted as legacy . . . But the countryside is not British; it is English, ‘such a precious spot of ground’ to the incoming Romans and Saxons, as a seventeenth-century panegyrist put it, ‘that they thought it worthy to be *fenced* in like a *Garden-Plot* with a mighty *Wall* . . . and with a monstrous *Dike*’ to keep out the Scots and the Welsh” (Lowenthal 213).

<sup>206</sup> Bate 9.

<sup>207</sup> Bate 275.

<sup>208</sup> Schama 15.

<sup>209</sup> Schama 15.

<sup>210</sup> Schama 15. Readman adds that as another form of mythos, “History . . . is also deeply inscribed in landscape – indeed, it is intimately connected to the cultural value assigned to landscape, and more specifically to its patriotic significance” (Readman 8).

<sup>211</sup> Matless 31.

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<sup>212</sup> Baucom 4, 7. He notes, in full: “Englishness has consistently been defined through appeals to the identity-endowing properties of place . . . metaphoric understandings have been literalized . . . so that these material places have been understood to literally shape the identities of the subjects inhabiting or passing through them. During this period . . . Englishness has been *generally* understood to reside within some type of imaginary, abstract, or actual locale, and to mark itself upon that locale’s familiars” as a “structure of feeling” (Baucom 4, 7).

<sup>213</sup> Baucom 18, italics in original.

<sup>214</sup> Baucom 18.

<sup>215</sup> Ian Baucom writes that “nine hundred years of precedent . . . recognized a territorial principle as the sole absolute determinant of British identity . . . affirmatively grounded in a law of place” which grew out of the medieval “concept of allegiance,” wherein “any individual born on a lord’s land, or ‘ligeance,’ owed that lord loyalty” constituting the “first principle of what was to become the British law of subjecthood: the *ius soli*. Literally the ‘law of the soil,’ the *ius soli* survived unaltered for the better part of nine centuries and provided” the foundational “rule for the determination of who was and who was not the monarch’s—and later a ‘British’—subject” (Baucom 8).

<sup>216</sup> Baucom 8.

<sup>217</sup> Legal historians Ann Dummett and Andrew Nicol define *ius soli* simply as “a tradition encompassing English and British history and identity,” that being “the tradition of the land” (Dummett and Nicol 244).

<sup>218</sup> Rowley 249. Williams corroborates this inverse relationship, noting, “there was almost an inverse proportion, in the twentieth century, between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas” as “[r]ural Britain was subsidiary” increasingly “from the late nineteenth century” (Williams 248).

<sup>219</sup> Readman discusses this as a use of landscape to embody national continuity with the past. He writes, “discourses of rural Englishness . . . Embodying continuity with the past, these discourses constituted an important means by which a recognisable, historically rooted understanding of national identity was articulated at a time of significant social, economic and technological change” (Readman 14). Though there is “ideological heterogeneity of patriotic concerns with rural landscapes,” therefore, “[m]ore often than not, in fact, the accent was less on fundamental transformation or rupture than on continuous development . . . the idea of continuity between the past, present and future was a prominent element of the British experience of modernity. This rootedness of modernity in the past, in history, was notably evident in cultural engagement with the landscape, particularly the rural landscape—redolent as it was of an older, pre-industrial England . . . powerfully expressive of a desire to maintain a sense of continuity with the national past” (Readman 15).

<sup>220</sup> Olwig xxix.

<sup>221</sup> Bate 6.

<sup>222</sup> Bate 6-7.

<sup>223</sup> Bate 13, Williams 45. Bate explains “Jane Austen was writing about rooted . . . communities during the period when Wordsworth, following in the footsteps of Cowper, was arguing that the increasing accumulation of men in cities was a cause of what we now call the ‘alienation’ of the human spirit. In the next few generations, the Victorians has a proud sense of their own ‘progress’, but they also worried profoundly about their loss of ‘place’. No writer had a deeper sense of that loss than Thomas Hardy” (Bate 13).

<sup>224</sup> Williams 45. David Lowenthal notes evidence for this desire for stability as well, citing “Newby [who] concludes, ‘the countryside reassures us that not everything these days is superficial and transitory, but that some things remain stable, permanent and enduring’ . . . To be rural sanctions stasis” (Lowenthal 218).

<sup>225</sup> Matless explains that “Englishness” is often constructed as a “native product nurtured behind white cliffs . . . produced relationally through contested senses of white, as well as black ethnicity” (Matless 38). He elaborates that “Between 1918 and 1939 open-air leisure in England took on a new scale and scope . . . the vision of a new, ordered Englishness extended to matters of landscape and citizenship . . . For preservationists walking, cycling, camping and map-reading made up an ‘art of right living’ whereby individual and nation might give form to itself environmentally, generating intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual health . . . While a landscaped citizenship is set up as potentially open to all and nationally inclusive, it depends for its self-definition on a vulgar other, an anti-citizen whose conduct . . . makes exclusion necessary” (Matless 94-5).

<sup>226</sup> Matless 148, 150. Matless states that Organicist imagery depicts its movements “key themes” when “laboring hand[s] tak[ing] up ‘English Earth’ . . . [veined appendages, tools] and soil have equal emphasis”:

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“The land is a site to be worked, the soil something to be trod, handled, tested for texture. The visible remains of plants mark the future humus, an organic cycle of fertility. And the cycle of soil, labour and fertility makes sense in national terms. This is not just any earth, but English earth [titled so], held by a strong and healthy arm veined, we are to assume, with English blood. Soil, blood, health, humus, England.” (Matless 148). Adding that “Earth is the key element of organic England. It is striking how little water and air figure in organicist accounts. While industrial and agricultural pollution of water and air is a concern at the time, and while organicists seek holistic, ecological understanding embracing all elements, earth takes priority” (Matless 150).

<sup>227</sup> One might argue as well, as Lowenthal and Brannigan do, that water plays an equally important role in a solid sense of boundedness for the matter of English nationhood. Where Brannigan notes the importance of the oceans and seas to England and Britain’s archipelagic identity, Lowenthal states, “[h]ow apt that Tebbit’s cruder insularity—‘Being British, What It Means to Me’—should be voiced in *The Field*: ‘Our Continental neighbours use ‘insular’ as a term of abuse, but we in Britain have every reason to be thankful for our insularity. Our boundaries (that troublesome one in Ireland apart) are drawn by the sea - some might say by Providence. Unlike those of most other nations they have not been drawn, rubbed out and redrawn time and again . . . The blessing of insularity has long protected us against rabid dogs and dictators alike” (quoted in Lowenthal 214). “How apt that Tebbit’s cruder insularity—‘Being British, What It Means to Me’—should be voiced in *The Field*: ‘Our Continental neighbours use ‘insular’ as a term of abuse, but we in Britain have every reason to be thankful for our insularity. Our boundaries (that troublesome one in Ireland apart) are drawn by the sea - some might say by Providence. Unlike those of most other nations they have not been drawn, rubbed out and redrawn time and again . . . The blessing of insularity has long protected us against rabid dogs and dictators alike” (quoted in Lowenthal 214).

<sup>228</sup> See Anne Raine, “Ecocriticism and Modernism,” 102. See also an extended discussion of the role of biologic and geologic scientific advancements in shaping modernist aesthetics in Chapter 1.

<sup>229</sup> Baucom 35.

<sup>230</sup> Baucom 16.

<sup>231</sup> Williams writes that “the common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future. That leaves, if we isolate them, an undefined present” (Williams 297). Gathorne-Hardy declares that the English landscape is “our shared record of the past. [It] help[s] us root our lives, giving people a strong sense of place and inspiration for the future” (Gathorne-Hardy).

<sup>232</sup> As I will demonstrate, by identifying the national land as one which is the foundation for civilization, but devoid itself of civilizing markers, international spaces with links to England as a nation in the years surrounding World War I, which for various reasons are seen to resemble the uncivilized and depopulated spaces of English national importance at home, are also made available for related, reverse imaginings—as threats to the solid ground of English national permanence at home. I am thinking here especially of war zones and colonial spaces such as no-man’s-land in various war novels, memoirs, and poetry, and of the African environs of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* for example.

<sup>233</sup> Schama 12, italics in original.

<sup>234</sup> More products will be explored in the coming chapters, though all will enact the same process as Old England does upon the land as blank slate for national imaginary, concretizing nation through a genetic orientation towards the land. For details on these chapters’ please see chapter summaries in the Introduction.

<sup>235</sup> Williams 248.

<sup>236</sup> Williams 258.

<sup>237</sup> Williams 258.

<sup>238</sup> Williams 258.

<sup>239</sup> Williams 258.

<sup>240</sup> Williams 258. David Lowenthal also notes the distinction between the real land and people and those idealized by English discourses of nation. The ideal England, while it looks back to a seemingly originary past, is not an idealization of a wild England. Lowenthal writes: “[b]eloved rural England is trebly historical. . . . The past that permeates this landscape is not the primordial wild, but a nearer history infused with memorable human processes. . . . Myth and art add extra auras. Arthurian echoes [etc.] . . . Rural England is historical more in the mode of old men and ancient buildings than of geological strata. . . . The landscape is historical too in being pervasively antiquated. Virtually every familiar feature was created for purposes now outdated . . . The landscape is the prime anachronism of the national heritage — essentially a vast museumised ruin. To be sure, it is used, much of it intensively. But these uses bear ever less on home

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and workplace than on reverence for relics that cradle heritage and proclaim national identity. Nostalgia is history's third imprint. English love of landscape attests the demise of its previous functions. As agriculture ceases to be viable . . . Landscape-as-heritage lends itself to nostalgic myth-making: childhood memories 'of sunlit fields where we could play all day without fear, of picturesque villages unshaken by foreign juggernauts, of peaceful beaches with the English enjoying themselves in their own quiet, time-honoured fashion'. This myth" (Lowenthal 216-17). Rather than natural, wild England, what the English aspire to and valorize is nature ordered by the masterful human hand: "[o]rderly control is the touchstone of the fancied landscape. It is an English creed that all land requires human supervision . . . Here the prospect of unmanaged wasteland is utterly repugnant . . . Most people 'would be appalled', thinks a zoologist, 'by any wholesale reversion to the impenetrable wildwood that, 5000 years ago, swathed our land'. . . . The aristocracy and gentry alone are fit for this nurturing task." (Lowenthal 218-19). Many have argued, Lowenthal notes, even, that not only is ordered, cultivated nature more English, it is simply more desirable as "nature in the raw" is "hideous" and "miserable." Lowenthal explains: "[c]ountryside stewardship tempers rural exploitation with concern for natural harmonies. But not for nature in the raw. 'If you could get through the bogs and jungles and the thickets [that covered] this country one million years ago, you would say, "What a dreadful place this is", a recent Environment Minister admonished Green primitivists. 'The valleys were mosquito-ridden swamps; the mountains were covered in hideous oak thickets and there were just a few shacks, where miserable people attempted to live. Now this is a country full of wonderful landscape, full of beautiful buildings, superb cities and towns, all built by man, [and] we are constantly enhancing it'" (Lowenthal 215). This hideous, miserable *raw* nature, is that which is both coopted to stabilize and emerging to disrupt discourses of Englishness in modernist invocations of base material aesthetics.

<sup>241</sup> As discussed above, English landscape always evokes a simultaneous sense of being already lost and of a self-conscious separation from the land in order to view it fully. "Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister from 1924 to 1929 and 1935 to 1937, and dominant in the National Government from 1931 to 1937, was known for his rural eulogies: 'To me, England is the country, and the country is England. And when I ask myself what I mean by England, . . . England comes to be through my various senses'" (quoted in Matless 52). Bate adds that "[l]andscaping is, then, a symptom of the growing division between the aesthetic and the agricultural sense of the word 'culture'" (Bate 11-12).

<sup>242</sup> Judy Giles and Tim Middleton 73, 12 quoted in Kime Scott 114. Paul Readman terms this phenomena a "reactionary ruralism," explaining: "[r]ooted in the rural, the discourse of Englishness was opposed to modernity and its works, extolling instead a pastoral south country . . . Given the actual lived experience of modern-day Englishmen and women . . . much of this was a mirage[. T]his *reactionary ruralism* . . . [demonstrates what] Peter Mandler has argued[:] that the rural Englishness identified by many scholars was in fact culturally marginal . . . by 1900, England was 'a nation that had come to terms with its urbanity'" (Readman 10, 12, italics mine).

<sup>243</sup> Of the organicist movement, Matless explains, "the bulk of organicist literature was indeed issued in wartime [WWII]" in which some note "War makes agriculturalists of us all," "Investment through state agencies in wartime to safeguard food supplies produced dramatic changes in agricultural prosperity and technique. Organicists opposed both the authority gained by the modern state over the land, and the use of artificial fertilizers to increase yields," while the movement had "a minor impact at the time" they have eventual "popular and political influence" over time (Matless 148).

<sup>244</sup> Matless 31, 93.

<sup>245</sup> Matless 128-9.

<sup>246</sup> Lowenthal 214-15. He writes, "[t]wo special traits link landscape with national ethos and imprint its heritage role. One is insularity; the other artifice. . . . Insularity differentiates Britain from all other European nations save Iceland and Ireland. Atavistic loyalties are insularly voiced: 'on these shores', 'this scept'r'd isle', 'the defence needs of these islands' . . . The sea serves treble duty: it limits size, marks boundaries, and insulates against continental contaminants . . . Like the archetypal sacred garden, the English landscape is not natural but crafted, . . . Other nations extol untouched nature [but] English culture tames and adorns nature; in Emerson's phrase, 'nothing is left as it was made; rivers, hills, valleys, the sea itself, feel the hand of a master'. England's landscape is its consummate artefact—not merely the locus of the heritage but its mainstay. The English identify with this landscape as both admirable and ancestral" (Lowenthal 214-215).

<sup>247</sup> McCarthy 157.

<sup>248</sup> Bate 281. He is here initially discussing the work of Edward Thomas.

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<sup>249</sup> Bate 281, italics mine.

<sup>250</sup> Bate 281, italics mine.

<sup>251</sup> Raine 103.

<sup>252</sup> Raine 105. While Raine presents modernists engaging with the new sciences as potentially envisioning new positive definitions of nature, Paltin explains how this might further the subjective separation from nature: “[e]arly modern science had said the world is nothing beyond what can be observed and measured, but the new physics said nothing could be truthfully measured or observed. The human sensorium is hopelessly limited. Thus for modernity and modernism, a new problem of representation, whether psychologized or couched as artistic, was posited: how plausibly to represent a ‘nature’ that has been exposed finally to human consciousness as supersensible” (Paltin 789).

<sup>253</sup> Raine 105.

<sup>254</sup> McCarthy 19. He quotes Miller, writing: “[f]or J. Hillis Miller ‘the development of fiction from Jane Austen to Conrad and James is a gradual exploration of the fact that for modern man nothing exists except as it is seen by someone viewing the world from his own perspective’ (4). In other words, modernist literature is the full expression of a subjectivist relativism” (19). Alternately, Williams has noted that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries “two ways of seeing, two contrasted viewpoints” emerge “within the same country” of England, which, despite being ways of seeing the countryside, the first offers a “kind of observation” that is still “social, in the widest sense,” (118) “absorbed in a human world” (119), as represented by Cobbett and Austen, while the second offers “a new kind of writing” (118) in which the “mode of attention was outward,” “observing . . . a natural order, in a new sense: a physical world of creatures and conditions,” “nature in a sense that could now be separated from man” as represented by Wordsworth and Clare (Williams 119). Hence, while subjectivism is still the end result, a turn towards landscapes, towards nature, is the very thing which produces this perspective. Furthermore, in the modernist period, “English attitudes to the country, and ideas to rural life, persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban its literature, for a generation, was still predominantly rural; and even in the twentieth century, in an urban and industrial land, forms of the older ideas and experiences still remarkably persist. All this gives the English experience and interpretation of the country and the city a permanent though of course not exclusive importance” (Williams 2). This, then, explains that attention to nature does not preclude subjectivism, and even, that as the latter increases, the former becomes even more solidified as a cultural keystone.

<sup>255</sup> Woolf quoted in Raine 99.

<sup>256</sup> Raine 99. She writes, “[f]or Woolf in ‘Modern Fiction’ (1925), the ‘essential thing’ that ‘refuses to be contained’ in outmoded literary forms is not Nature . . . but a less easily definable entity that Woolf provisionally calls ‘life or spirit, truth or reality’; and the task of the modern novelist is not, as in realist fiction, to depict the external world (whether social or natural) but to convey the interior movement of human consciousness (149-50). . . . Woolf’s subjectivism . . . shares [other modernist’s] suspicion of romantic and realist modes of representing nature” (Raine 99). Some scholars have argued the opposite, that modernist anti-realism embodies a “modernist nature” that “thus generates a productive deception that reworks conventions of nature writing to speak from an antirealist position. The strategic advantages of that position, developed below, are that the anthropocentric and essentialist world hidden in the realist position is discovered and its arrogance countered in a critical refiguring of the relation between human mental perception and a mind-independent externality” (Paltin 779).

<sup>257</sup> Paltin 790.

<sup>258</sup> Kime Scott 14 and Bate 3. Kime Scott adds that “Modernist rejection of nature came in part from the preference of classicism over Romanticism, as well as attraction to new technology and science” (14).

<sup>259</sup> McCarthy 19. He explains in more detail: “Avant-garde modernists in prewar London wrote against nature . . . the English avant-garde defined itself against nature—against the lined popular taste for the beautiful and sentimental—and attempted to redefine the very principles of art by sundering its clichéd connections with nature. The major modernists contribute to this separation after the war too. For instance, Virginia Woolf put material nature at odds with modernism in ‘Modern Fiction’ with claims that the new fiction’s inwardness would be its dominant note. After all, nature’s ‘materialist’ matters were the stuff of dusty Edwardians like Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy” (McCarthy 19).

<sup>260</sup> Kime Scott 14. And, Kime Scott adds, “the experimental satisfaction that comes with imaginative merger of human and nonhuman other” (Kime Scott 14).

<sup>261</sup> Kime Scott 20. In Eliot, for example, these are attached to aesthetically mediated childhood natural locales found throughout his poetry (Kime Scott 20).



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<sup>262</sup> Cantrell 25, 26 quoted in Raine 101.

<sup>263</sup> Raine 101.

<sup>264</sup> Leavis and Thompson “argued it was the mission of a literary education to fill the gap left by that loss,” quoting “a key passage from D.H. Lawrence on the ugliness of the suburbanized environment and the process whereby ‘The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another’ (Bate 21).

<sup>265</sup> Schuster 17. Schuster adds that Pound’s poetry here moves beyond “mimesis or even metaphor” to juxtaposition and collage and is meant, ironically, to achieve the material, bodily goals of “hit[ting] directly on the senses, touch[ing] the nerves, vibrat[ing] the cortex, and giv[ing] the reader a jolt” (16-17).

<sup>266</sup> Paltin 779.

<sup>267</sup> Paltin 783. She adds that “[w]here realism requires stability, consistency, and recognition, the aesthetic here confuses boundaries between nature and artifice, between existing and not-existing” (783).

<sup>268</sup> McCarthy writes that “Modernism is suffused with nature and conflict over nature’s meaning and nature’s use” (McCarthy 7).

<sup>269</sup> Heidi C.M. Scott 14.

<sup>270</sup> Scott 14-15.

<sup>271</sup> McCarthy 18.

<sup>272</sup> Schuster 3. Schuster’s study elucidates how “concepts of modern ecology intertwine with issues of modernist aesthetics” in which “forms and environs co-constitute each other,” (x) in much the same way that ecological methods of “recording affects what one records” framing “the scene of tension between representation and intervention . . . recording [versus] active preservation of a landscape” (ix). Schuster’s study is careful to divorce modernist “representations of environs” from notions of “environmental care,” while still arguing that experimentations with “new ways of representing environs” often allow for “environments [to become] legible in new ways” making such “care” possible (x).

<sup>273</sup> It must be noted that while this dissertation focuses on iterations of nature that correspond to a landed imaginary, English modernist engagement with nature is by no means limited to such forms of environmental representation. For one, Kelly Sultzbach argues that “despite these differences in approach and technique,” a myriad of English “authors sustained attention between representing nature as a chaotic Force scrambling access to meaning and depicting nature as a source of Harmony where truth and meaning ultimately coalesce” (24). For example, “Auden’s work will show, [one] modernist response to the realization that humans are merely one of many bodies making meaning within a larger, animate world” is the tendency to confess to “‘enjoying it’s storminess’” (Sultzbach 16). Other modernists responded to advancements in science by exploring environmental-materialist issues of scale: “forcing the literary imagination to reconsider the oscillating scales of microcosm and macrocosm, from the microbes living in pockets of human skin to the blown-up oil holes humans were putting on the earth’s body” (Sultzbach 6). Furthermore, as a part of this joy and curiosity about new environmental ways of knowing, “[m]odernist works often depict the voice of the nonhuman as having its own source of agency and situated perspective” (Sultzbach 14). Bonnie Kime Scott adds that many authors, such as H.D., Lawrence, and Woolf depicted the “deep, dank, soft feminine areas of nature [which] offer an exploration of primordial origins and dark places of psychology”; works by writers like Stein, H.D., and Mansfield are found to be “connecting human to animal . . . or polymorphous, queer, resilient flower images”; H.D. and Eliot among others demonstrate how “Nature enters the consciousness of modernist authors and their characters as inquiring children, and proximity to the sea furnishes ‘moments of being’ to all ages”; and less prominent figures such as Vita Sackville-West and Edward Thomas are more explicit in their environmental engagements, creating “paean[s] to the agricultural year” and “attend[ing] to the cyclical continuities of the English countryside” (Kime Scott 40-41). Judith Paltin argues that while modernist don’t appear to be conventional nature writers, they participate transversely in this tradition by depicting a “nature [that] contains something uncapturable and uncontrollable, a continued pretense of mimesis reveals itself as ironic theater, and represented nature becomes a carnivalesque excess, a piece of dream-work or a trickster voice” (Paltin 779). McCarthy identifies something he calls “green modernism” [which] has a specific and distinctive meaning embodied by the novels [he has] stud[ied]” by such authors as Conrad, Ford, Butts, and Lawrence, defined by, amongst other things, “writing that foregrounds the material actuality of the natural world” (McCarthy 18). Finally, Joshua Schuster, while he mostly analyzes American works, includes a handful of English transplants in his claim that “representing environmental change became a primary thematic and conceptual concern that had varying effects on environmentalist thought and action during the period” as artists break

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“from earlier narratives of nature . . . that assumed an inexhaustible plenitude on earth, while deeming only certain landscapes aesthetically valuable” (xi), such as H.G. Wells, who writes of bodies which are akin to machines, with proverbial oil fueling the life which animates them as blood (Schuster 165).

<sup>274</sup> Paltin 778.

<sup>275</sup> Raine 99.

<sup>276</sup> Kime Scott 5.

<sup>277</sup> Williams 248.

<sup>278</sup> Williams 248.

<sup>279</sup> Bate 56.

<sup>280</sup> McCarthy 18.

<sup>281</sup> Kime Scott 115. For example, “Woolf could bring Englishness and pastoral tradition into her depiction of characters as they perceive and record landscapes, or slip it into the discourse of her narrators, often to satirical ends” (Kime Scott 115).

<sup>282</sup> Esty 3, 16.

<sup>283</sup> Esty 9, 2, 3. For example, “E.M. Forster[‘s]” early fiction uses a “symbolic geography that reflects the tension between pastoral English values and the sprawling British economy . . . overlapping in space but incommensurate in values . . . condensing [many] social contradictions . . . into his signature trope of a dwindling English essence” (Esty 16). This can be seen, for one, in his *Howard’s End* (1910).

<sup>284</sup> Woolf 379 quoted in Kime Scott 123.

<sup>285</sup> Kime Scott 123.

<sup>286</sup> Woolf 379 quoted in Kime Scott 123.

<sup>287</sup> McCarthy 7-8.

<sup>288</sup> Paltin 785.

<sup>289</sup> Paltin 785.

<sup>290</sup> McCarthy 2, 4, 2, 3.

<sup>291</sup> McCarthy 8.

<sup>292</sup> McCarthy 197-8. McCarthy explains: “the powerful political current that charge the English landscape as a discursive category through which English identities were formulated and advanced . . . In these English fields and old houses, a few English exiles strive with art and nature to imagine a sustainable postwar identity. Instead of the grand cultural solutions of high modernists like Joyce and Eliot proffered in 1922, Ford and Butts call on English nature to found a new identity in small-scale, local practice . . . This version of nature allows *Armed with Madness* to detail fascism’s temptation and then move toward a self-sustaining georgic enclave where the sensitive can survive and perhaps subvert the pressure of modernity. From this perspective *Armed with Madness* embodies green modernist retrenchment that reappraises cosmopolitanism and chooses, instead, a grounded national awareness located in rural England” (McCarthy 197-8).

<sup>293</sup> Cantrell 26 quoted in Raine 107, Raine 107. Another example of this, notes Anne Raine, is found in the “Lawrentian reverence and wonder for ‘life’” and “questioning of boundaries between humans, animals, and machines” expresses a Bergsonian “reconception of life as ‘a “temporary articulation of the body, brain, nervous system and environment’” in which ‘the *integrity* of the self on traditional humanist lines radically undermined’ (6, 111)” (Raine 110).

<sup>294</sup> One such example is hinted at in Cate Mortimer-Sandilands discussion, as paraphrased by Raine in which Hall uses the “sexual and geographical exile from nature” of her protagonist in *Well of Loneliness* to “to resist, or at least to complicate, the heteronormative nature of modern neopastoralism and wilderness appreciation” that represents the normative vision of nature underlying the neopastoral landscape preservation movement that was integral to British modernity” (Cate Mortimer-Sandilands 37, 38 in Raine 110-11). Ironically, the Coda to this dissertation plans to demonstrate a combination of Cantrell’s optimism and Mortimer-Sandilands critique in my own reading of what I call Hall’s hermaphroditic botany. Raine writes, Radclyffe “Hall drew on the scientific discourse of sexology to disrupt the normative vision of nature underlying the neopastoral landscape preservation movement that was integral to British modernity (38) . . . special insight into the natural order because she is exiled from it . . . her sexual and geographical exile from nature gives her a ‘privileged vantage point for reflection on the moral landscape of the English countryside’ (37) . . . Hall finds in sexology an alternative discourse of nature with which to resist, or at least to complicate, the heteronormative nature of modern neopastoralism and wilderness appreciation” (Cate Mortimer-Sandilands 38, 37 in Raine 110-11).

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<sup>295</sup> Within the paradigm created by these base material aesthetics, exploring the “realization that humans are merely one of many bodies making meaning within a larger, animate world” from within “the outer boundaries of our contact . . . with the environment” produces both a “lacunae of fear, dislocation, and loneliness,” as well as a revision of “environment-as-object to acknowledge environment-as-being [whose] conceptualisation of self in world arises from the personal, local embodied experience of rural environment” (Sultzbach 7, 16, 13, 23). In being unable to fully overcome the “unbridgeable boundaries between [one’s]self and alterity” for “nature is not represented; it is experienced, not comprehended,” the desire “to achieve some solid footing on the earth as propaedeutic (and perhaps prophylactic) to the ‘invisible forces’ of the new physics” remains unfulfillable (Paltin 783, 792, 778-9). Hence, “[m]odernist opposition to nature came largely from those who identified with a classicist approach, including the group labeled the ‘men of 1914,’ whose gender-biased version long enjoyed academic prowess. In manifestos and reviews, Wyndham Lewis, T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound conjure up formless, dark, decayed manifestations of nature to condemn what they consider inferior forms of writing; these they associate with decadence and the feminine. . . . they turn toward urban settings. Science and mechanics, including the engines of war, furnish preferred masculine metaphors” (Kime Scott 14). And, “[Giles] wants to retain Englishness, then, and returns to the emblematic countryside from the city for something that he holds central to his identity. In the course of the afternoon, Giles finds other treats to Englishness, besides the Germans. . . . half-breeds . . . From Giles’s perspective, Dodge is only half English by virtue of being homosexual, and homosexuality introduces another, presumably darker, more ‘primitive,’ race or species” (Kime Scott 152).

<sup>296</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 335, 422n15.

<sup>297</sup> Woolf *Diary*, vol. 5: 170 quoted in John Whittier-Ferguson 232.

<sup>298</sup> John Whittier-Ferguson 232.

<sup>299</sup> The one notable exception to this is *The Years* (1937) which, amongst its 50 years addressed devotes a substantial two chapters to WWI’s war-time and contains a curious repetition of the phrase: “cave of mud and dung.”

<sup>300</sup> Woolf 69.

<sup>301</sup> Woolf 69.

<sup>302</sup> Woolf 69-70.

<sup>303</sup> Woolf 70.

<sup>304</sup> Bagley 2.

<sup>305</sup> See also Giles’ violence towards nature: “He reached it in ten. There, couched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow, the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round--a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him. He strode to the Barn, with blood on his shoes” (*Between the Acts* 98-99).

<sup>306</sup> Woolf 81.

<sup>307</sup> Mary Borden, a nurse on the Western Front, will animate it and speak about in her “The Song of the Mud,” discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>308</sup> *Between 219, Dalloway* 81.

<sup>309</sup> Khan 109.

<sup>310</sup> Woolf 43-44.

<sup>311</sup> Woolf 219, italics mine.

<sup>312</sup> Khan 120.

<sup>313</sup> Sparks 21.

<sup>314</sup> Sparks 20.

<sup>315</sup> Woolf 44.

<sup>316</sup> Mud appears also in *Between the Acts* on pages 8, 25, 159, and 203.

<sup>317</sup> Woolf 44.

<sup>318</sup> Woolf 45.

<sup>319</sup> Woolf 45.

<sup>320</sup> Woolf, *Dalloway* 81.

<sup>321</sup> Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 45.

<sup>322</sup> Dickinson 17-18.

<sup>323</sup> Woolf 211.

<sup>324</sup> Woolf 212.

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<sup>325</sup> Woolf 219.

<sup>326</sup> Khan 113, 110.

<sup>327</sup> Beer 142.

<sup>328</sup> Beer 137.

<sup>329</sup> Woolf 8.

<sup>330</sup> Woolf 8.

<sup>331</sup> See Almas Khan's "*Between the Acts: A Modernist Meditation on Language, Origin Narratives, and Art's Efficacy on the Cusp of the Apocalypse*," 115; and Sam See's "The Comedy of Nature: Darwinian Feminism in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," 647.

<sup>332</sup> Woolf 8-9.

<sup>333</sup> Sam See 641.

<sup>334</sup> In Dr. Barbara Corker's report for the Devon County Council, she notes, "Rhododendron is an introduced species [in England]. It is highly invasive. It destroys habitats and thus whole colonies of native plants and animals disappear. Because it is so expensive to control and physically prevents access, land has been abandoned. However such areas can be restored but reinfestation must be prevented" ("Rhododendron: A Killer of the Countryside," <http://www.countrysideinfo.co.uk/rhododen.htm>). This comes from a summary of her more extensive report, "The Woodland Restoration Project" (<http://www.countrysideinfo.co.uk/wood1.htm>).

<sup>335</sup> Woolf, *Between*, 9; *Mrs. Dalloway* 81.

<sup>336</sup> Woolf 9.

<sup>337</sup> For more on coevalness, see discussion of Johannes Fabian's work in Chapter 5.

<sup>338</sup> I use the term humanoid to reference the connection between what Woolf depicts here and Conrad's use of mangrove trees in Chapter 6 as well as the fact that trees are historically evoked as avatars of humans. This becomes more prevalent again in World War I and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>339</sup> The blue china Grace carries being chinoiserie is indicative also of the British colonial mercantilism's reach into East Asia, and the predication of aristocratic domesticity on foreign matters.

<sup>340</sup> Woolf 9.

<sup>341</sup> Woolf 9, italics mine.

<sup>342</sup> In her 1930 essay, "On Being Ill," Woolf writes of a similar community of outsiders to her "society" found in *Three Guineas*, sharing Lucy's "sidelong" perspective, this time, as looking up at the natural phenomena of the sky, and disengaging from imperial engagements with nature where one must "cultivate the desert, educate the native," this perspective which is enabled by the physical removal from society through illness:

Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way. There is a virgin forest, tangled, pathless, in each; a snow field where even the print of birds' feet is unknown. Here we go alone, and like it better so. Always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable. But in health the genial pretence must be kept up and the effort renewed—to *communicate, to civilise, to share, to cultivate the desert, educate the native*, to work by day together and by night to sport. In illness this make-believe ceases. Directly the bed is called for, or, sunk deep among pillows in one chair, we raise our feet even an inch above the ground on another, *we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters*. They march to battle. We float with the sticks on the stream; helter skelter with the dead leaves on the lawn, irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time for years, to look round, to look up—to look, for example, at the sky. The first impression of that extraordinary spectacle is strangely overcoming. Ordinarily to look at the sky for any length of time is impossible (Woolf, "On Being Ill," 12, italics mine)

<sup>343</sup> Foucault 138. In his 1981 interview for *Gai Pied* magazine, Michel Foucault states, "Homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the 'slantwise' position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light" (138).

<sup>344</sup> Though he does not read the connection between "sidelong" and "slantwise" specifically, his reading together of the agonistic perspective theorized by Foucault and the society of outsiders presented in *Three Guineas* is demonstrated in Stephen Barber's "States of Emergency, States of Freedom: Woolf, History, and the Novel." Foucault's word for "truth-telling," borrowed from the ancient Greeks, but more specifically the Cynics and Socrates, is "parrhesia" (*Courage of the Truth* 1). He further explains that "democracy is not the privileged site of parrhesia, but the place in which [it] is most difficult to practice"

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(*Courage* 57). This “crisis of political parrhesia” is met with Foucault’s turn to “a certain form of . . . of truth-telling . . . which finds its instrument, its site, its point of emergence in the very person who must thus manifest or speak the truth in the form of . . . life as a testimony of the truth”; this telling, furthermore, must carry with it a risk also to that life (*Courage* 74, 217). The parrhesiast speaks, according to the Greek tradition from an agonistic position. Hence, those who Woolf called in her *Three Guineas* a “society of outsiders” are outsiders who occupy the inside agonistically, or those who offer what Michel Foucault calls a “critical ontology of ourselves” and a “permanent critique of our historical era” which have together been termed a critical ontology of the present (“What Is Enlightenment?” 50, 42) are still always already inhabiting the power structure they critique and resist. This failure is not a failure in the traditional sense, however, but must be read pedagogically, as a failure in the sense that the work of life, what Foucault calls the “care of self” or “askesis”—that work of the self which, in his Lectures at the College de France 1983-1984, re-envisioned the subject as a becoming, only “to be” when engaged in this work of self-creation, self-critique; the subject of askesis, then, is subjectivity as a way of life rather than a hermetic unit possessing stability or closure (263, 330). It is a failure in the sense of a turning away from a totalizing ontology, so that the possibility opens up to “participate in a historical ontology of ourselves” which “must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical” (“What Is Enlightenment?” 46).

<sup>345</sup> Woolf 217-218.

<sup>346</sup> John Whittier-Ferguson 243.

<sup>347</sup> Woolf 9, 218.

<sup>348</sup> Woolf 3.

<sup>349</sup> Woolf, *Between*, 8.

<sup>350</sup> Woolf, *Between*, 3.

<sup>351</sup> Woolf 3.

<sup>352</sup> Khan 116.

<sup>353</sup> Foucault’s discussion of history in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” explicitly acknowledges the way in which discourses of materiality are crucial to both the resistance by a genealogy and the formation of traditional history, which he embodies in the phrase: “[t]ruth” is an “error” “hardened” by “the long baking process of history” (79).

<sup>354</sup> Woolf, *Three Guineas* 131.

<sup>355</sup> Alt 14.

<sup>356</sup> Woolf, “Air Raid,” 243.

<sup>357</sup> Woolf, “Air Raid,” 243-4.

<sup>358</sup> Woolf, “Air Raid,” 244.

<sup>359</sup> Woolf, “Air Raid,” 242.

<sup>360</sup> Woolf, *Three Guineas* 6.

<sup>361</sup> Woolf 5.

<sup>362</sup> Woolf 5. Though there is not time to address it here, the name Arthur would have significant resonance with King Arthur, that legendary son of England and mythological national hero. It also connects this dynamic backwards to ancient national “origins.”

<sup>363</sup> Woolf 5.

<sup>364</sup> Woolf 5.

<sup>365</sup> See Chapter 1 for further discussion of space within environmental material aesthetics, especially with regard to nationalism.

<sup>366</sup> Woolf 16.

<sup>367</sup> Woolf 16-17.

<sup>368</sup> Woolf 16, italics mine.

<sup>369</sup> Woolf 98-9.

<sup>370</sup> Woolf 98.

<sup>371</sup> Woolf 99.

<sup>372</sup> Woolf’s formulations here bear resemblance to Said’s work on “exile.”

<sup>373</sup> Woolf 99-100.

<sup>374</sup> See Chapter 1 for further discussion of land as rock of nation trope.

<sup>375</sup> Woolf 16.

<sup>376</sup> Woolf 17.

<sup>377</sup> Woolf 20.

<sup>378</sup> Woolf 17.

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<sup>379</sup> Woolf 16.

<sup>380</sup> Woolf 16.

<sup>381</sup> Woolf 16.

<sup>382</sup> McLoughlin 84. Paul Hill and Julie Wileman add that, “[o]nce warfare becomes recognisable in the history of human society, its relationship to landscape and climate becomes equally clear. Decisions about what to protect or attack, and how to go about it, are invariably confined by the dictates of topography and weather. The forms of weapons and armour, types of troops, transport and supply, defences and fortifications, battlegrounds and strategy are all intrinsically linked with practical considerations of geology, vegetation, land use, seasonal change, rainfall and temperature. Equally inseparable are the cognitive elements of landscape recognition—the perceptions of sacredness, ownership and land potential, ancestral roots and meaning, wealth and status exemplified by control or access to specific territories and regions” (Hill and Wileman 14).

<sup>383</sup> Hynes 189, 192.

<sup>384</sup> Hynes 196.

<sup>385</sup> Hynes 196, italics mine.

<sup>386</sup> Anna Stenning & Samantha Walton iii. Hence, Daly, Salvante, & Wilcox note that the material devastation of the cratered, muddied Western Front is often referenced as the “archetypal landscape of war” (Daly, Salvante, & Wilcox 7).

<sup>387</sup> Keller 5.

<sup>388</sup> These terms come from Daniel Pick’s *War Machine*. Further discussion in the pages that follow.

<sup>389</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 116.

<sup>390</sup> This, rather than the creation of new environments or landscapes themselves, e.g. a natural or climatological history.

<sup>391</sup> Daniel Pick 137-8. See also Pick 140. Hence Fussell also notes that the British Great War” is known for the “curiously distinguished writing it generated” (Fussell 362).

<sup>392</sup> Leonard 60.

<sup>393</sup> Hynes 31.

<sup>394</sup> Hynes 31, see also 33.

<sup>395</sup> McLoughlin 84.

<sup>396</sup> Hynes elaborates, “at the Front . . . in a state of initial shock, and groping for metaphors to express his feelings . . . What Owen is describing here—and by implication demanding of war artists—is a radically *defamiliarized* landscape, absolutely unlike England, or any other landscape on earth . . . a new allegory of the evil, the horror, and the ugliness of war . . . to paint pictures that would be entirely strange, and yet would express moral judgements” Hynes 161).

<sup>397</sup> Matthew Leonard describes “Paul Nash’s *We are Making a New World*,” as “show[ing] a landscape so broken that it appears to move in waves: the painting is more seascape than landscape” (Leonard 58).

Hynes adds, “To many an Englishman, post-war England seemed to exist as a sort of negative sum—the sum of all those losses, and of the war’s ruins. Not only the physical ruins of destroyed landscapes, and dead and mutilated men, but the social, intellectual, and moral ruins of the old, pre-war society . . . the mood that we think of as characteristic of ‘the Twenties’” (Hynes 311).

<sup>398</sup> Tate 81.

<sup>399</sup> Tate 79, quoting Kristeva 3. Kristeva also striking states, “How can I be without a border?” (Tate 79).

<sup>400</sup> Tate 80.

<sup>401</sup> Tate is quoting partially from Barbusse here: “the dead threaten the living directly . . . ‘corpses are piled anyhow on the wounded, and press them down, suffocate them, strangle them’ ([Barbusse] 253) . . . inert killing. On top of the dead . . . comrades, trampling ‘soft bodies underfoot, some of which are moving and slowly altering their position; rivulets and cries come from them’ ([Barbusse] 252-3)” (Tate 86).

<sup>402</sup> Fussell 52. Tate corroborates, writing: “the living were surrounded by corpses throughout the trenches and adjacent areas. The dead were underfoot; they were used to reinforce the parapets of the trenches; they were stored in the trenches awaiting burial. Some turned up in bizarre places, such as in the latrine, holding up a fragile doorway, or up a tree” (Tate 77).

<sup>403</sup> Fussell 166.

<sup>404</sup> McLoughlin 90.

<sup>405</sup> McLoughlin 90, Tate 100. Tate elaborates, “the living and the dead brought together in uncomfortable proximity, jumbled together within the earth of the trenches. A strange relationship is established between body and earth. The earth is where the dead are (or will be) buried, but it is also the place where the living

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are located—literally in and under the ground—in trench warfare. The spatial distinctions between the living body and the corpse are broken down, threatening the boundaries of” the body ““The whole zone was a corpse’ [Blunden] (131). Living in the earth is often a claustrophobic experience” in Barbusse “an underground field hospital, the place of refuge is also malign and claustrophobic . . . / Yet the earth is often the only place of safety in trench warfare and is represented as a welcoming, encompassing, safe place. The soldier’s relationship to the land is ambivalent and a sometimes oddly eroticized” (Tate 100-101).

<sup>406</sup> Brantz 75.

<sup>407</sup> Eric Leed 71, Tate 82. Tate gives the example of “the dug-out, for example, is like a human mouth, ‘foul of breath’, [5]” (Tate 82, quoting Barbusse). She adds, on “the one hand, the earth is figured as a maternal body which protects the men but is also subject to attack by them; and on the other, / its stands for the men’s own bodies as targets of extreme violence” (Tate 102-3, she gives examples of the displacement onto land on pp. 102).

<sup>408</sup> Tate 75.

<sup>409</sup> Tate 84-5, referring to Barbusse example 146-7.

<sup>410</sup> Tate 77, 84-5. Tate explains, “Of the nine million people who dies in the Great War, many disappeared completely, leaving no identifiable body behind. This happened to approximately half the British dead . . . The absence of a body to bury and to mourn was a source of profound trauma, both for soldiers and civilians” (Tate 77). She continues, “simultaneously undifferentiated: one cannot tell which corpse is attached to the wrist. A more extreme account of the loss of human shape follows . . . The individual body is described in terms of an absence. Although material enough to be collected as a single entity . . . it has no recognisable shape or coherence” (Tate 84-5, referring to Barbusse example 146-7).

<sup>411</sup> Brantz 84.

<sup>412</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 220-21.

<sup>413</sup> Norris 25.

<sup>414</sup> Norris 15.

<sup>415</sup> Hynes 266. He elaborates, “the past was dead, England was finished, there would have to be a new . . . earth . . . the Armistice was not a significant ending, but the beginning of something else that would probably be worse . . . ‘Even if the fighting should stop, the evil will be worse because the hate will be damned up in men’s hearts and will show itself in all sorts of ways which will be worse than war’” (Hynes 266, contains paraphrases of D.H. Lawrence).

<sup>416</sup> Hynes 200. He explains that with the landscapes of World War I, “its first element *disfigurement*, the gross violation of that natural beauty that had been the first principle of traditional landscape painting; then *danger* and *desolation*, responses to the visual scene that are new and strange . . . and finally *ruin* and *chaos*, two terms that acknowledge a formless, devastated earth . . . unnatural presence of danger and death . . . landscape now seems to suggest the horrors of war by contrast . . . unnatural deadness of a front-line spring . . . abortive . . . felled trees bloom . . . forget-me-nots spring up among the ruins” (Hynes 200).

<sup>417</sup> Norris 30. Norris discusses the assumption that ““what serves the” “monadic death,” the “dying individual can be stretched to accommodate vast numbers, as if numbers did not alter the significance of death,” ““Each I experiences the possibility not only of its own coming to an end but also of human extinction in toto as a result of human acts,” an “ontology” which, marked by the “fear of omnicide” delimits an “apocalyptic subject” (Norris 29-30, quoted sections Wyschogrod 1, 211).

<sup>418</sup> Norris 30.

<sup>419</sup> Hynes 196.

<sup>420</sup> Hynes xiii.

<sup>421</sup> Hynes xiii.

<sup>422</sup> Hynes 164. Hynes adds that to modernists, “the war was simply the final stage in the death of their world” (Hynes 137). They experienced “a violation of meaning and order that is beyond the power of individual human beings to alter” (Hynes 138). This is due to the perceived “betrayal of the high ideals with which [soldier-authors] and [their] fellow-volunteers had set out. That change [one author] called *disenchantment*” (Hynes 308, italics his). But, Hynes notes, “one cannot be disenchanting unless one has been enchanted,” showing us that the “pre-war world had been one of enchantment” (Hynes 309).

<sup>423</sup> Hynes xiii.

<sup>424</sup> Hynes xiii, see also 137.

<sup>425</sup> Hynes xiii, 138.

<sup>426</sup> Hynes 307.

<sup>427</sup> Hynes 307.

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- <sup>428</sup> Hynes 137-8.
- <sup>429</sup> Hynes xiii, see also Trudi Tate 148.
- <sup>430</sup> Hynes xiii, 5-6, 7-10. According to Hynes, as a result of such distortions the “‘Victorian Age’ means not simply the years of Victoria’s reign, but the whole spirit of England-before-the-war” (Hynes 245). Hynes adds such violence is especially present in especially in Futurism and Vorticism.
- <sup>431</sup> Hynes xi.
- <sup>432</sup> Hynes 468.
- <sup>433</sup> It must be noted that while my focus is on how this effect plays out for what he identifies as anti-landscape, the host of gap aesthetics which he discusses is wide and deep with hundreds of pages of examples. All follow the pattern below however, in what their aesthetics seeks to represent.
- <sup>434</sup> Hynes 468.
- <sup>435</sup> Hynes 192.
- <sup>436</sup> Hynes 199, Hynes 193. He elaborates: “War has added an element to the Nature in which larks sing: it has added death . . . that addition disturbs the poem—disturbs both its natural world . . . and its rhetoric, so that what begins as a ‘realistic’ war poem ends in a phantasmagoria in which inherited images . . . are rhetorically tangled and blurred” (Hynes 193).
- <sup>437</sup> Of natural representations, Hynes writes, “such a landscape as a soldier can see is altered by the presence of death in it . . . those qualities of the physical world that the words *landscape* and *nature* once designated have been altered by war; . . . relations between man and the earth implied in those terms have also been changed . . . man is no longer secure and at ease there. Nature remains as an absence—the quality, the value, the experience of human belonging that once existed, and should exist still, but has been displaced by the war . . . Nature appears in poems and in paintings in order to be disfigured, annihilated, made irrelevant to the reality of war. Disfigured Nature was a trench reality that changes war artists’ world” (Hynes 201).
- <sup>438</sup> From the Greek, *oikos*, meaning home, from which the word ecological is derived.
- <sup>439</sup> Hynes 201.
- <sup>440</sup> Hynes 119.
- <sup>441</sup> Hynes xiii and 188.
- <sup>442</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 199.
- <sup>443</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 198-99.
- <sup>444</sup> Which, at the time in question, amounts to about one-third of the globe, and more than that in terms of GDP, or economic and political power wielded by populations under its influence.
- <sup>445</sup> Hynes 191.
- <sup>446</sup> McLoughlin 85. Here she synthesizes the work of J.E. Malpas, Jonathan D. Sime, and Patricia Yaeger on space and place.
- <sup>447</sup> McLoughlin 86. She also references Sara Blair’s “affective terrain,” Edward W. Soja’s “thirdspace,” and the commonplace idea of the “*situation*” as a way to understand this liminal, boundary-crossing instantiation of the war zone as both cognitive and physical space (McLoughlin 86).
- <sup>448</sup> McLoughlin 84, italics in original.
- <sup>449</sup> McLoughlin 99-101, italics in original.
- <sup>450</sup> Lawrence Buell 261 cited in McLoughlin 93.
- <sup>451</sup> Jay Appleton 62 cited in McLoughlin 94.
- <sup>452</sup> Hynes 190.
- <sup>453</sup> Hynes 190.
- <sup>454</sup> McLoughlin 92-93.
- <sup>455</sup> McLoughlin 93.
- <sup>456</sup> Hynes 196, 200.
- <sup>457</sup> Hynes 200.
- <sup>458</sup> Augé 107, 103, 104.
- <sup>459</sup> Other scholars of World War I have also noted the presence of this anti-pastoral style, such as Dawn Bellamy, Santanu Das, Sandra Gilbert, and Andrew Rutherford.
- <sup>460</sup> Leonard 61.
- <sup>461</sup> Brantz 75. Pollard and Banks note in detailing “reactions to the environment of total war” an “example, the Vampir project” which “may provide an opportunity to compare the British experience of being underground to the German experience of the same alien environment” (Pollard and Banks xviii).
- <sup>462</sup> Fussell 43.



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<sup>463</sup> Fussell 41, 54, 45, 69, 70, 74. He describes the soldier's experiences of the trenches as one of simultaneous "concentration and enclosure, inducing claustrophobia even above ground" (Fussell 41). "To be in the trenches was to experience an unreal, unforgettable enclosure and constraint, as well as a sense of being unoriented and lost. One saw two things only: the walls of an unlocalized, undifferentiated earth and the sky above," "imprisoned there" (Fussell 54, 55). What "gives" World War I "a special freight of irony is the ridiculous proximity of the trenches to home. Just seventy miles" away lay "the rich plush of London theater seats" (Fussell 69). He quotes John Brophy as recalling later how "most disquieting . . . is to realize how little space . . . separated the line, the soldier's troglodyte world, the world which might have been another planet, from home, from England, from sanity" (Fussell 70). People in England could "literally hear the war, at least if they lived in Surrey, Sussex, or Kent, where the artillery was . . . quite plainly audible . . . light flashes were visible too" (Fussell 74).

<sup>464</sup> Fussell 44, 45, 46, 83, 84, 147. "[M]ost of the time," he adds, "[t]hey were sitting or lying or squatting in place below ground . . . Sassoon notes, 'the war was mainly a matter of holes and ditches'" (Fussell 44). Trenches "did not run straight," "[e]very few years a good trench zig-zagged . . . Moving along the trench thus involved a great deal of weaving and turning . . . The walls, perpetually crumbling . . . there was of course no looking over the top except through periscopes" or at night (Fussell 45). The "whole system" had "the air of a parody modern city, although one literally 'underground'" (Fussell 46). Fussell adds that "[t]he inferred threatening presence of 'him' across the way is what seems to give significant dimension to modern landscape," "seems to alter the feeling of a landscape," so that "[t]he presence of the enemy off on the boarders of awareness feeds anxiety in the manner of the dropping-off places of medieval maps: 'You unconsciously orient things in reference to it'" (Fussell 83). There was an "ineradicable and paradoxical 'otherness' of enemy terrain: it is 'the 'other' mysterious, vacant yet impenetrable land'" (Fussell 84). There was a sense also that soldiers on the front inhabited an end and edge of the world (Fussell 147).

<sup>465</sup> Fussell 251, 255, 276. This is why Fussell privileges the use of what he calls the "antipastoral" in war writing, noting that "[s]ince the war takes place outdoors and always within nature, its symbolic status is that of the ultimate antipastoral" (Fussell 251). "Recourse to the pastoral," he continues, "is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them . . . invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable; at the same time, it is a comfort in itself" (Fussell 255). Sometimes this took the form of a "pastoral elegy," "observing [the line's] desolated, riven trees, its debris and rubble . . . its overlapping filthy craters extending for scores of miles. 'It was diseased, pocked, rancid'" (Fussell 276).

<sup>466</sup> Margot Norris 19. Norris explains in further detail the "alter[ation] of the locus of agency" occurs because "modern warfare is phenomenologically and ontologically discontinuous with earlier modes of warfare" because "modern weapons technology has fundamentally altered the locus of agency" and therefore also "altered [the] ethical terrain on which modern wars are waged"; "[t]he gun was the first of these democratizing weapons, making it possible to kill with minimized risk to life," and "[t]he agency of killing—always already dispersed among politicians, strategists, and soldiers—becomes . . . dispersed" with the use of bombing technology (Norris 18), the original "moment of rupture" wherein this "changed ethical condition" is "registered" is during "World War I, when the use of chemical weapons scandalized Western civilized pretensions," "recogniz[ing] that an essentially targetless technology—which kills utterly without discrimination because it usurps the human element, the air—destroys the ludic pretense and the fiction that war functions as a rule-governed contest," yet "the introduction of aerial bombing in World War I and its increasing use against civilian populations" exposes the "failure of strategic bombing" less a "scalpel" than a "bludgeon" (Norris 19).

<sup>467</sup> Margot Norris 19.

<sup>468</sup> Norris 19.

<sup>469</sup> Norris 19.

<sup>470</sup> Norris 19.

<sup>471</sup> Eric Leed 163-4.

<sup>472</sup> Simmel quoted in Eric Leed 178-9.

<sup>473</sup> Leed 181.

<sup>474</sup> Fressoz and Bonneuil 66.

<sup>475</sup> Fressoz and Bonneuil 66. Similarly, "*The Earth viewed from nowhere*" represents "[t]he Anthropocene [as it] inherits a second element from the Cold War: a view of the Earth—and of our earthly issues—from above" (Fressoz and Bonneuil 60). Though they discuss the cold war, this seems to echo and be part of the

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legacy of the WWI experience of the trench cutting off the landscape because of the new danger that comes from aerial bombing above, forcing one deeper into the blind position of the earth.

<sup>476</sup> Brantz 74.

<sup>477</sup> Brantz 74.

<sup>478</sup> Brantz 72, italics in original.

<sup>479</sup> Brantz 73.

<sup>480</sup> Fussell 39, 42-3. Trenches are not new to the world of war in the twentieth century. Paul Hill and Julie Wileman explain, “[t]he development of trench warfare in the late nineteenth century can be traced from the American Civil War through the siege of Plevna in the Russo-Turkish war, culminating in the appalling attrition in Europe between 1914-1918” (Hill and Wileman 12). See also Pick 177. However, the “appalling attrition” mentioned makes their use in this war more significant for the experience of a soldier of this first total, global war.

<sup>481</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 125.

<sup>482</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 126.

<sup>483</sup> All this being said, however, it bears noting that *England* of course, is not an island though Britain is. As Britain, the island encloses the union of three nations—Scottish, Welsh, *and* English (and perhaps even Cornish if we want to be nitpicky about it). The English imaginary, is just, as I discuss elsewhere, very rooted in the reification of England as the whole Island. I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>484</sup> For more on islandness in general and not just in the English tradition, see Marc Shell’s *Islandology: Geography, Rhetoric, Politics*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (2014).

<sup>485</sup> Fussell discusses a possible support for this in his widely corroborated assessment that British trenches were inferior to those of the French and certainly the German, out of inexperience (Fussell 48).

<sup>486</sup> Brannigan 16.

<sup>487</sup> Daly, Salvante, & Wilcox 5.

<sup>488</sup> Daly, Salvante, & Wilcox 5.

<sup>489</sup> Bhabha’s “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” 319 quoted in Kime Scott 114-15.

<sup>490</sup> Kime Scott 114-15.

<sup>491</sup> Daly, Salvante, & Wilcox 6.

<sup>492</sup> McCarthy 12, italics in original. Contains quotes from D.H. Lawrence and Quentin Meillassoux. In more detail, McCarthy writes: “Tietjens in a trench under fire . . . Ford’s battle scene is an impressionist example foregrounding the prediscursive presence of the physical world. Yes, the modernist mind is at work here in circles of cognition, but so too is mud and rain and storm. Brute nature is not to be outdone by even the grandest human imaginings or constructions, and when Tietjens goes so far as to doubt lightening he falls on his face into earth. In Lawrence’s terms ‘matter *actually* exists’ and it exists beyond the screen of Ford’s literary impressionist narrative voices. Tietjens’s ‘squashed earth’ is what Meillassoux would call ‘that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is’ (7). But the impressionist mud insists on the simultaneous mental construction and brute reality of the material world. These examples . . . insist that the natural world is a factor in modernism” (McCarthy 12).

<sup>493</sup> McLoughlin 87.

<sup>494</sup> McLoughlin 87. McLoughlin places this in the wider understanding that “[w]ars are almost exclusively fought outdoors and involve a close relationship with the terrain” (87). Brantz also notes war’s special relationship to land, as “[w]ar is an outdoor activity,” so “every war has a distinct spatiality depending on the terrain and climate of the area and the type of warfare conducted. Battlefields are not artificially created places but sites of transformation, where a peaceful landscape is gradually turned into an environment of war,” and “*landscape[s]*” become “*environment[s]*,” formerly “distinguish[ed]” by their being “two different notions of space”: one meant to be “*seen*,” and the other one “*lives in*” as “an environment” wherein “[a]s the original meaning of the Middle English verb *environ*” indicates,” it means “to surround,” now the two become indistinguishable (Brantz 68-9, italics in original).

<sup>495</sup> Schama 11. The use of land to generate patriotic fodder for the war crops up across the scholarship on World War I literature. Rowley notes that “[a]ttractive images of a countryside of apparently timeless appeal and values has been used in recruiting posters as early as the First World War, and in railway and petroleum posters between the wars. Indeed, as rural England gave way to suburban England, nostalgia was built into the new landscape [through] names with ‘olde worlde’ associations” (Rowley 249). Bonnie Kime Scott writes that “Woolf” even “grew skeptical of ‘Englishness’” because the “national identification

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with a place often used to promote patriarchal and national projects, including war” (114). Because the grounded consciousness of foreign battlefields in World War I is always already entangled in national senses of belonging, entrenchment is primed to affect a reorganization of space at home in England afterwards as well. McCarthy writes, that “after the war, *nature* becomes *English nature*” (McCarthy 8, italics in original). In response to the destabilizing experience of nature in war, post-war subjects seek new ground in which to root a separate, untainted, ideal nature within the national imaginary. This both further entwines nation and nature and further deracinates nature it from any literal, material grounds. For example, “the actual impact of the war-time timber crisis on woodland” was less influential “than the public perception of this impact, and what it meant for the country,” so that “between 1916 and 1918 . . . the British came to see the future management of their forests as inextricably linked to the future safety of their nation” (West 276). “[A] sense of Englishness as being essentially rural was the basis for many formulations of national identity in the 1914-1918 war” (Matless 45).

<sup>496</sup> Matless 45. Matless continues, “the message given here is that the patriot and his landscape have been betrayed by vested interest . . . promoted [by] the Council for the Preservation of Rural England,” though “the concern for the English landscape was not new” in the 1920s, but was ongoing from the latter decades of the nineteenth century (Matless 45). As a result, “[d]ynamic green social movements sprang up across England after World War I, and . . . the modernist context was suffused by a green discourse of national critique and national regeneration. Many factions wanted to reinvent England in this period, and one of their primary touchstones was English nature” (McCarthy 6). McCarthy adds, “When Ford Maddox Ford concluded *Parade’s End’s* catalogue of national cataclysms with the hopeful assertion ‘The land had not changed,’ he identified the foundation for a new beginning in nature” (McCarthy 2). Furthermore, because defense of the realm had been so deeply tied to the landscape of England itself, the land took on a new idealized status in the English imaginary. Lowenthal writes: “Archetypal memories of rural England had inspired poets of the Great War; landscapes magnified by previous celebrants were further embellished by an awareness ‘that what men were fighting and dying for was some very green meadow with a stream running through it and willows on its banks’ . . . The now hallowed visual cliché—the patchwork of meadow and pasture, the hedgerows and copses, the immaculate villages nestling among small tilled fields—is in fact quite recent; only after the pre-Raphaelites,” a group of English painters starting in 1848, “did the recognisably ‘English’ landscape become an idealized medieval vision, all fertile, secure, small-scale, seamed with associations” (Lowenthal 213). This can be seen in Edward Thomas’s phrasing that soldiers went to war “Quite literally for this” scooping up a handful of English soil (McCarthy 21). A deeper attachment to rural England is therefore catalyzed by the war experience, despite England’s population living increasingly in urban areas. McCarthy explains that “the cultural power of a rural self that British readers wanted more than ever after the war,” offering as evidence the fact that in 1922 *A Shropshire Lad* sold more copies than Joyce’s *Ulysses*, hence, while it is true that “the war produced a reading public for *The Waste Land*, we need to see that war-time experience deepened the culture’s attachment to a rural vision of England . . . the war enfranchised a broad cultural adoption of a rural identity . . . British war-time propaganda enforced a version of Britain as rural and southern . . . This way of seeing thrived despite the fact that 80 percent of English soldiers were from big towns and cities” (McCarthy 21). Creating such effects as increases in preservation movements, a mummification of sorts of England as frozen in (a lost) past emerges, rather than a connected, living apprehension of English environs. After “the First World War,” Readman states, “organisations devoted to the preservation of rural landscapes and culture” begin “approaching mass memberships” (Readman 12).

<sup>497</sup> Pick 194, 196, 204, 155, 14, 178, 193. He writes, the “notion of the First World War as absolute historical schism was a powerful structuring assumption of war-time propaganda” (Pick 155). Pick explains how the “relationship between language and military deeds” is important for “[w]ords, ideas, images constitute the discursive support for military conflict” (Pick 14). “Popular invasion stories swapped one enemy for another, drawing on an extensive repertoire of hostile images and stereotypes” (Pick 114), such as with Germany (Pick 116, 128, 157) and France (Pick 117). Furthermore, “representation after 1914, including the representation of the First World War as utterly novel, drew on earlier preconceptions and anticipations of the ‘modern’ war. There were many continuities between the pre- and post-1914 representation of war. Neither trenches nor shellshock, for example, were simply ‘invented’ in 1914” (Pick 178). Though it feels to those who lived through it like the “outbreak of war in 1914 utterly extinguishes the old world . . . it is the retrospective knowledge of the immanence of the catastrophe in the pre-war era which is unbearable. War offers a retrospective knowledge of the latent forces shaping, but repressed from, the consciousness of pre-war culture” (Pick 193). Additionally, tanks, invented during this war, much

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talked up that they would help the allies break through the German line and the stalemate when introduced in 1916, but in reality, not very effective and more likely to get stuck in the mud and cause the soldiers inside to die horribly trapped inside rather than stay protected by its impervious layers, see Trudi Tate's chapter "The tank and the manufacture of consent" (pp. 133-159) where she also talks about their comparison to bodies, gendered and other things, and its appearance in literature. Hence, in addition to schism and latency, Tate remarks on a backwards and forwards motion of contemporary primitivism brought about by the war. She writes, "Almost all early tank writings compare the machine to some kind of dinosaur emerging out of the primeval mud. As Gertrude Stein remarks, 'war makes things go backward as well as forward'; the most advanced weapon of 1916 takes civilisation into a new phase of modern technology at the same time as plunging it back into prehistory . . . It is sometimes argued that the Great War damaged belief in evolution . . . evolution runs backwards and forwards, simultaneously—a vertiginous motion which informs a number of modernist writings" (Tate 138).

<sup>498</sup> Fussell 25, 123, 347; 63, 115. He writes that "The image of strict division clearly dominates the Great War conception of Time Before and Time After" (Fussell 87). "For the modern imagination that summer has assumed the status of a permanent symbol for anything innocently but irrecoverably lost . . . the irony . . . pastoral to anti-pastoral . . . ' . . . summer of 1914 . . . Like those . . . generations who were given to witness the guillotining of a world, we never expected it. And like that of our counterparts, our world seemed most beautiful just before it disappeared" (Fussell 25, containing David Lowe, "Bourbon Country," *Prose VI* [Spring 1973]: 155). Hence, he cites the general sentiment that those who emerged from the trenches of World War I were, in the words of Henry Williamson, "not broken, but reborn" (Fussell 123). The generation is reborn in this way as those for whom "the parapets of the Great War . . . mar[k] a total line of division between protection ('home') and death" (Fussell 347). Fussell adds, "[i]n a world where myth is of no avail and where traditional significance has long ago been given up for lost," they had also "lost literary resources," and yet, "[o]n the other hand, traditional ritual meaning is what the poems of the Great War are at pains to reawaken" (Fussell 63). Fussell diagnoses this effect in the works of many interwar writers, looking to the likes of Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility" and Mauberley's "consciousness disjunct," as "a special sensitivity to 'division'" gains "post-war popularity," and sheds new meaning on the shaping magnitude of Forster's opening salvo to *Howard's End*: "Only connect," seeing also this "adversary habit" in the word of Pound and Lewis, among others (Fussell 115).

<sup>499</sup> Pick 193.

<sup>500</sup> Pick 191. He continues, also, that "[t]he war involves the reconceptualising of time, the recognition of ruptures and subtle retracing of the immanence of the future in the past. For against the image of 1914 as impermeable prison wall there is the image of 1914 as a kind of porous membrane through which something tricks back" (Pick 191).

<sup>501</sup> McLoughlin 85-6.

<sup>502</sup> Edith Wyschogrod 15.

See Phillip W. Deans' "Total War," *The First World War: A to Z, From Assassins to Zeppelin—Everything You Need to Know*, Ed. Mark Hawkins-Dady, London: Imperial War Museums, 2014: 146-7.

<sup>503</sup> Norris 6, partial quoting of Wyschogrod 15.

<sup>504</sup> Wyschogrod 15.

<sup>505</sup> Wyschogrod 15.

<sup>506</sup> Tate 43, see also 49.

<sup>507</sup> Tate 25, see also Gillian Beer's "The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf." *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996.

<sup>508</sup> Tate 35-6.

<sup>509</sup> Keller 12.

<sup>510</sup> Kime Scott 41, here describing the poetry of Edward Thomas.

<sup>511</sup> Kime Scott 112. See also Norris 32.

<sup>512</sup> Tate 28, italics in original.

<sup>513</sup> Hynes explains that "English poetry of the First World War list over 3,000 works by 2,225 poets; of these poets, less than a quarter were in uniform. Another quarter were women. So more than half must have been male civilians" (Hynes 29).

<sup>514</sup> Tate 19.

<sup>515</sup> Tate 19.

<sup>516</sup> Tate 28.

<sup>517</sup> Tate 29.

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<sup>518</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 129.

<sup>519</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 129 n. 24.

<sup>520</sup> Norris 12.

<sup>521</sup> Tate 12.

<sup>522</sup> Hynes 164. Hynes also notes that, “This conflation of decadent art with sexual and moral issues affected the situation of modern art in England generally. For it spread a blurry discredit over any new work that departed from the traditional English main stream, and made all Modernism seem not only *un-English* but *anti-English*” (Hynes 230). He continues, “Edwardian England was infected with a European disease, and had become degenerate, slothful, soft, corrupt. The name of this disease you might say was *Modernism*; . . . went back to . . . in England . . . Wilde, Futurism, Cubism, Decadence . . . all present in England before the war . . . But once war had been declared, critics began to shuffle such works into one pile . . . constituting a single common enemy that threatened the moral foundations of the nation. To be Modern, they saw, was to be German . . . right and patriotic that English critics should declare war on Modernism . . . This war against the Modern was fought by critics, journalists, and politicians, in the newspapers and periodicals, in the House of Commons debates, and in the law courts; it went on as long as the war did” (Hynes 58-9) and “its current names” were “Post-Impressionism, Imagism, Futurism, Vorticism” (Hynes 62).

<sup>523</sup> Tate 12. Moreover, for the first time in English history, due to the fact that the “government depended for its continuance on the support of a more literate portion of the population than ever before . . . there were more voters in England to be persuaded of the rightness of the nation’s cause,” and so war-time even saw the “enlistment of the literary establishment” as a “mode of warfare.” (Hynes 28). For more on the rise of literacy leading up to the twentieth century in England, see Richard Altick’s *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*. Ohio State University Press, 2018 [1957]: 7, 3. See also Rose, Eliot, Brantlinger, and Ferris.

<sup>524</sup> Sherry 11. See also Sherry 9. One example Sherry gives is of political writer, Charles Hayward, who phrases like “we must get our heaviest foot on the neck of Prussian militarism so firmly and solidly that we can safely lift the other foot high enough to effectively stamp upon any attempt to supplant it with any brand of militarism either in England or any other country” (quoted in Sherry 11). Hayward is clearly suggesting England use extreme violence suggestive itself of militarism, in order to stop militarism, an inherent paradox.

<sup>525</sup> Sherry 62. Its previous by-line having been that reasonability and rationality was, above all, the root of public good, reasonability and rationality, “the ‘reason’ through which its causes were spoken ceased to mean anything recognizable” (Sherry 9, 26. See also Sherry 10).

<sup>526</sup> Sherry 30.

<sup>527</sup> Sherry 21, 11; Sherry 89, 91. He gives on pg. 11 an example from Woolf, whom, in her *A Voyage Out* before the war years “relies on the observance of correct logical process” for her plot and character development, and “Grammatically, the usage conforms to the normative standards of reasonable speech,” whereas, in the years following the war, her *Jacob’s Room* is characterized by the starting of the novel “with a gesture of conclusion, which is narratively unearned”: a “conjunctive ‘So’,” followed by a conclusive “of course,” “[y]et the course of linear thinking recedes into the anterior time of the novel’s plot, an unknown zone” (Sherry 11-12). See also Sherry 13.

<sup>528</sup> Sherry 12-13. He speaks of Woolf’s post-war work here.

<sup>529</sup> Sherry 13, 165. He is discussing Eliot here.

<sup>530</sup> Sherry 106.

<sup>531</sup> Sherry 263-4.

<sup>532</sup> Sherry 75.

<sup>533</sup> Sherry 71. See also Sherry 119.

<sup>534</sup> Hynes 241.

<sup>535</sup> Hynes 469.

<sup>536</sup> Hynes xiii.

<sup>537</sup> Fussell 38, 338-9. Interestingly, in its “late phase” the “modern,” “ironic mode” “returns to myth,” “seizes upon ‘demonic’ imagery regardless of the ‘world’ it observes,” such as the “demonic vegetable world [which] closely resembles what was seen from the trenches and what memory has decided to preserve as significant from that perspective. It features the sinister forest (we will think of Trones or Mametz Wood), wilderness, or waste land. The tree of death is there . . . in the mineral world the demonic aspect shows us the whole apparatus of ‘perverted work’ . . . in the trenches . . . unnatural as well as inhuman,” like mangled iron and wire as well as the “image of lost direction,’ like the trench system . . .

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found in memories of the Great War” (Fussell 338-9, citing heavily from Northrop Frye). See also Pick’s critique of Fussell, Pick 200.

<sup>538</sup> Fussell 80, 81, 206, 344. Fussell explains that “[t]he idea of endless war as an inevitable condition of modern life would seem to have become seriously available to the imagination around 1916,” requiring later generations to “abandon hope that the war had really put an end to something” by the Second World War (Fussell 80). “Thus,” he writes, “the drift of modern history domesticates the fantastic and normalizes the unspeakable. And the catastrophe that begins it is the Great War” (81). Hence, “[t]he phrase, No Man’s Land has haunted the imagination for” the century which has passed between the war and now, “although its original associations with fixed positions and static warfare are erod[ed]” (Fussell 206, original quote cites “eroding” at 60 years in 1975). Additionally, in light of World War II, one may think of “a single continuing Great War running through the whole middle of the twentieth century,” “conceiv[ing] of events running from 1914 to 1945 as another Thirty Years’ War and the two world wars as virtually a single historical episode” (Fussell 344).

<sup>539</sup> Fussell 348, 362. The “war detaches itself from its normal location in chronology . . . to become Great in another sense—all-encompassing, all-pervading, both internal and externally at once, the essential condition of consciousness in the twentieth century” (Fussell 348). Modern consciousness, while being ultimately entrenched in the ironic, is the also, reflective of the underground nature of the trenches, is “our own buried life” (Fussell 362).

<sup>540</sup> For more on the latency of the war, see Chapter 3—in particular my discussion of Daniel Pick.

<sup>541</sup> Leed 191.

<sup>542</sup> Kermode 25.

<sup>543</sup> Christopher Lane 89.

<sup>544</sup> Sassoon 69.

<sup>545</sup> Lane 89.

<sup>546</sup> Sassoon 222.

<sup>547</sup> Sassoon 435. Further discussion of this quote appears in the coming pages.

<sup>548</sup> Andrews 104.

<sup>549</sup> Andrews 104, 103.

<sup>550</sup> Andrews 111.

<sup>551</sup> Andrews 107-8.

<sup>552</sup> Nils Clausson 168.

<sup>553</sup> Sassoon 265.

<sup>554</sup> Clausson 169-70.

<sup>555</sup> Sassoon 348.

<sup>556</sup> Sassoon 432.

<sup>557</sup> Roderick Nash 1-6.

<sup>558</sup> Sassoon 323.

<sup>559</sup> Though it will not be possible to discuss every mention of mud within this chapter, it should be noted that its ubiquity is real, appearing as it does across the trilogy, on the following pages: 30, 35-6, 91, 108, 115-16, 134-5, 155, 163, 179, 183, 197, 214, 248-9, 277, 280-1, 305, 308, 310, 325, 339, 342, 345, 394-5, 410, 425, 427, 434-5, 441, 448, 534, 539-40, 555, and 603.

<sup>560</sup> Sassoon 435.

<sup>561</sup> Sassoon 557.

<sup>562</sup> Andrews 112-13.

<sup>563</sup> Sassoon 555.

<sup>564</sup> Sassoon 313.

<sup>565</sup> Leed 188-9.

<sup>566</sup> Sassoon 489.

<sup>567</sup> Sassoon 525.

<sup>568</sup> Sassoon 607, italics mine.

<sup>569</sup> Andrews 116.

<sup>570</sup> Fussell, “Modernism, Adversary Culture, and Edmund Blunden,” 589.

<sup>571</sup> Fussell, “Modernism, Adversary Culture, and Edmund Blunden,” 590-91.

<sup>572</sup> Fussell, “Modernism, Adversary Culture, and Edmund Blunden,” 591, 596-8.

<sup>573</sup> Thomas G. Bowie, Jr. 10.

<sup>574</sup> Blunden 40.

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<sup>575</sup> Blunden 40.  
<sup>576</sup> Blunden 43.  
<sup>577</sup> Blunden 83.  
<sup>578</sup> Fussell, “Modernism, Adversary Culture, and Edmund Blunden,” 589.  
<sup>579</sup> Blunden 46.  
<sup>580</sup> Blunden 56. His direct reference here is to the profusion of land mines in the trench systems of that sector.  
<sup>581</sup> Blunden 80.  
<sup>582</sup> Blunden 64.  
<sup>583</sup> Blunden 98.  
<sup>584</sup> Blunden 131.  
<sup>585</sup> Blunden 98.  
<sup>586</sup> Blunden 108.  
<sup>587</sup> Blunden 132.  
<sup>588</sup> Blunden 156.  
<sup>589</sup> Blunden 12, italics mine.  
<sup>590</sup> Blunden 12.  
<sup>591</sup> It must be noted, however, that the solid matters of “brick and cement” are themselves made from the more shifting particles of clay and sand.  
<sup>592</sup> Elsewhere, he marks “the enemy’s concern with some *ancient* gunpits there” (Blunden 152, italics mine).  
<sup>593</sup> Blunden 13.  
<sup>594</sup> He says elsewhere: “[i]n ancient days, perhaps 1914” (Blunden 17) rewriting “ancient” history—usually placed at least 1000 years in the past—as two years prior.  
<sup>595</sup> Blunden 60.  
<sup>596</sup> Blunden 20-21.  
<sup>597</sup> Blunden 21.  
<sup>598</sup> Blunden 21.  
<sup>599</sup> War, then behaves much as Wyndham Lewis will suggest a Vorticist England should in Chapter 7 in his “Manifesto”—itself published amidst the war, and according to many, inspired by it.  
<sup>600</sup> Blunden 21.  
<sup>601</sup> Fussell, “Modernism, Adversary Culture, and Edmund Blunden,” 589.  
<sup>602</sup> Blunden 21.  
<sup>603</sup> Blunden 84.  
<sup>604</sup> Blunden 84.  
<sup>605</sup> Blunden 84.  
<sup>606</sup> Blunden 161.  
<sup>607</sup> Blunden 158.  
<sup>608</sup> Blunden 85.  
<sup>609</sup> Blunden 190.  
<sup>610</sup> Blunden 190.  
<sup>611</sup> Thomas G. Bowie, Jr. 7.  
<sup>612</sup> Written over a decade after his return to England from the war (though he absents himself from his homeland with long periods of residence in Japan), Blunden evinces the merging of war-time French spaces with England itself through his demarcation of the land as nominally, geographically, geologically, and sentimentally, English. The land of the war is compared to England itself, islands, country houses, home, and many places within England. In “Cover Trench” he describes “Islands” where “grass was thicker and taller, the ground easy and dry” just as England would be in comparison to the French trenches (Blunden 51). He makes “resolved” efforts to “see whether these islands could be reached” from the trench at great risk to his life “in daylight” suggesting the desperate desire for England’s stable ground and seemingly more natural landscapes. Just as with England’s true geography so too for these “islands”: “beyond the Islands, No Man’s Land was cut up with abandoned diggings,” creating a spatial analogy wherein nomansland is to the islands as France and the war zone are to England (Blunden 51). These small islands come to represent little symbolic Englands, scattered among the Western Front. Furthermore, Blunden’s journey to the islands and “beyond” mirrors a country-side hunt in England like those Sassoon indulges in in *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man* during the pre-war idyllic England phase of his *Complete*

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*Memoirs*: “lugging back old rifles, helmets, and, in the bliss of ignorance, unexploded German bombs with ‘fins’. Our Colonel . . . looked at my collection, and asked, ‘Been big-game hunting?’ . . . Daytime was play in the Islands that summer” (Blunden 51). The last portion of these lines could quite literally be something out of a country house novel. Blunden takes this trope further, noting further, of the Colonel’s activities on the line: “[t]he Colonel who was showing Harrison the lie of the land *betrayed no such apprehension*. He walked about, with indicatory stick, *speaking calmly* of the night’s shelling, the hard work necessary to keep trenches open, and the enemy’s advantage of observation, *much as if he was showing off his rockery at home*,” I know not “[w]hat my Colonel felt, who knew the battle history of this place . . . As we went along the slippery chalk cuttings and past large but thin-roofed and mouldy dugouts” (Blunden 65, italics mine).

The country-house aesthetic continues elsewhere, as “[w]e immediately passed the bodies of two men just killed, the sweat on their faces, and with shouts of uncontrol we ran for life through the shelling and the swamps. These were called Dombarton Lakes. The screech and smashing filled a square of the old pleasure-garden” (Blunden 171). The reference to Dombarton Lakes conjures landscaped British estates back home. Such references continue throughout the memoir—to Shankill Terrance, Summer House, Golder’s Green, St. Martin’s, Hyde Park, Stirling Castle and more. The “pleasure-garden” contained within this faux Dombarton Lakes characterizes it as like a country-house estate, though parodically. Marked as they are by “shelling,” “screech,” and “smashing” as men “ran for life,” the terming of such lands as “pleasure-gardens” of “Dombarton” serves to underscore the absence of arcadian spaces, and the threat that the “swamps” of war-time France pose to their counterparts—the English countryside back home. Furthermore, the terming of pockets of muddy water within a sector of the line as so many “ornamental lakes,” underscores the way in which the war has landscaped the French countryside from one resembling England, to one that is “now a swamp with a dry crust of a surface, and tree-stubs here and there offering substantial foothold,” providentially warning that England’s countryside could also be transformed thusly (Blunden 171).

Earlier, Blunden navigates the “marches of the Ancre” towards another rural English-like locale: “a machine-gun post called Summer House” in “No Man’s Land” just beyond a “front line” named “Shankill Terrace” (Blunden 71). Though he inhabits the heart of the war zone (“No Man’s Land”) in France, the Germans runs towards England (“Summer House”). “Shankill’,” furthermore, recalls another native colony of the British Isles: Northern Ireland. Shankill is an area of Belfast which is known as the borderland between republican and loyalist populations—Shankill housing those loyal to England. This brings home the fighting of the English in France to a geographic proximity to the Island which is much more native. Such references continue. Blunden notes that “Cheshire Colonel’s exemplary underground headquarters in Pottage Trench, a clean and quiet little alley near some pretty villas which might have been Golder’s Green, under the whispering shadow of aspen trees in a row” (Blunden 65). Golder’s Green is an area of London, known for its historic situation next to a medieval common pasture with a rich and variable history that could be said to be representative of England’s always already layered historical spaces by Blunden’s time.

Elsewhere on the front, “[b]eyond the area called Thiepval on the map a trench called St. Martin’s lane led forward; unhappy he who got into it! It was blasted out by intense bombardment into a broad shapeless gorge, and pools of mortar-like mud filled most of it” (Blunden 98). St. Martin’s lane could refer a few things of British significance: St. Martin of Tours, St. Martin’s an Isle of Scilly, and lastly, St. Martin-in-the-fields. St. Martin of Tours is a French saint who had a popular resurgence during the war as French republican patron saint and the armistice was signed on his saint-day: November 11, 2018. He was originally a soldier in the Roman army stationed in France. He therefore symbolizes both the end of England’s being at war and having to reside in France, and also England’s own Roman military origins. This next is a remote island off of the coast of Cornwall, England – itself a geographically and culturally remote site within the land. St. Martin-in-the-fields is a London church of long and storied history, itself symbolic of England’s roman lineage as well as the conversion of green spaces to urban ones. Though more tenuous, once can also read in the location of St. Martins a reference to aboriginal English culture and the folklore of such entities as the “Green Children of Woolpit” who dwell underground, as the men do in the trenches. Blunden’s London references does not end there, as he also states that “The misty trees might have been Hyde Park” (Blunden 105). Hyde Park has a long place in English history—from medieval days as a mostly unaltered landscape into a royal hunting ground, and now a public park. It too is part of the list of sites whose place names in the trenches root that land with little linguistic pins to the geography of English lands.



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Later still we turn again to Scottish reference as Blunden writes, “we chose a point looking towards Stirling Castle” (Blunden 138). Stirling Castle is of extreme importance to the history of England and Britain more generally, one time home to Mary Queen of Scots, built in the 14th century but likely the site was occupied since pre-Roman days, where after the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 Robert the Bruce destroyed Stirling Castle to stop it falling into English hands, and is geologically embedded in the site, and was sometimes called “Snowdown,” linking it to the highest peak in the British Isles—the Welsh mountain Snowdon.

<sup>613</sup> Blunden 174.

<sup>614</sup> Blunden 174.

<sup>615</sup> Bowie 10.

<sup>616</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 116-17, Bonnie Kime Scott 137. Scott notes for example, that “[i]n 1908 the first oil well was drilled in Iran by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company—an antecedent of BP, the company now infamous for the disastrous spill from its deep-water well in the Gulf of Mexico” (Kime Scott 137).

<sup>617</sup> Brannigan 17. Brannigan expands: “names we use to describe this ‘unnamable constellation of islands on the Eastern Atlantic coast’ belong to another age. We do not yet have the vocabulary to describe . . . political identities in the archipelago, since all existing terms have been bound to the legacies of imperialism, nationalism, and unionism . . . the United Kingdom maps on to no consensual union of interests, alliances, or aspirations” (Brannigan 7). But, “‘British Isles’ . . . marked a symbolic shift towards taking seriously an idea which was ‘intended to modify—and possibly even to succeed—the United Kingdom’” (Brannigan 6).

<sup>618</sup> Brannigan 8.

<sup>619</sup> Anne Helmreich writes, “the eighteenth century provided the ideal breeding ground for English nationalism, given the existing bonds of people to the / land . . . the existence of a threatening enemy, the desire for order in a period of extreme change, and fear of imminent decline. Yet some of these same factors . . . Britain (. . . formed by the union of England and Scotland in 1707), created a sense of Britishness” (Helmreich 5).

<sup>620</sup> Helmreich explains that “[t]hroughout the history of the United Kingdom, created in 1801 by the forced joining of Ireland to Britain, what Hugh Kearney has described as ‘ethnic politics’ has been at work” (Helmreich 5). And “Tom Nairn puts it succinctly in *After Britain*: ‘Assimilation or subordination of the non-English periphery was a necessary condition of Britain’s great-power phase and imperial ambitions’” (Brannigan 5).

<sup>621</sup> Brannigan writes, “relations between the Irish and British archipelago, specifically of those social, political, and cultural relations which have been defined by Anglocentric identities so powerful that they have frequently been equated with the whole of the archipelago” (Brannigan 4).

<sup>622</sup> For a discussion of England’s islandness, or lack thereof, see pp. 271-2 of Gillian Beer’s “The Island and the Aeroplane,” *Nation and Narration*, 265-290, Ed. Bhabha, Homi K. (London: Routledge, 1990). Brannigan adds that “[t]o use the word ‘archipelago’ to talk about the relations between the constituent parts of the British and Irish Isles implies a plural and connective vision quite at odds with the cultural and political homogenization which lay at the heart of the Unionist project. It is also at odds with the nationalist project which, largely in reaction to Unionism, cherished exceptionalism and insularity” (Brannigan 6)

<sup>623</sup> Baucom 7.

<sup>624</sup> Baucom 10.

<sup>625</sup> Arjun Appadurai 48.

<sup>626</sup> Baucom 12.

<sup>627</sup> Baucom 6.

<sup>628</sup> Though it is not true that “Englishness [i]s insular or unitary,” and “[n]ational identity is [in fact] regarded as a relative concept . . . always subject to internal differentiation” creating many “variations on Englishness,” being variously aligned with “Britishness,” David Matless notes that “abroad, Englishness and Britishness become almost interchangeable, especially when the subject is the Empire. England is assumed to be the heart and head of the British Empire” (Matless 35, 38). Hence, Brannigan notes that “the very idea of England has been used to accommodate a vastly differing scale of territorial entities, from a very local vision of the rural south-east of England, to the British Isles as a whole, to the Empire, and arguably to a still powerful global constituency of ‘English-speaking peoples’” (Brannigan 6). More than just colloquially, “John Pocock” notes that “‘British History’ [is] rarely if ever used accurately, and usually meant English when it should have been used ‘to denote the plural history of a group of cultures situated along an Anglo-Celtic frontier and marked by an increasing English political and cultural domination’”

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(Brannigan 7). Hence, “[t]he British past is seen as monolithic and uniform. In Norman Tebbit's notorious cricket test, true patriots must cheer their adoptive home team. Widespread consensus is not only mandatory; it is taken for granted. Britons are felt to share views on most of the national past. And they admire one another for doing so. These views, not simply names and dates, are the ‘facts’ of history Tories applaud—and help explain the new history curriculum's huge emphasis on the *national* past” (Lowenthal 207). Lowenthal continues, “[t]he past that Britons acclaim and protect is above all the *national* past . . . . But centrist emphasis cloaks serious doubts about regional disparities . . . English vs. British . . . . This centrist bias ignores or belittles outlying regions: ‘national’ is normatively English. ‘An Englishman has but one patriotism, because England and the United Kingdom are to him practically the same thing’, explained Bryce a century ago; ‘a Scotchman has two.’ . . . British history was English history” (Lowenthal 209, italics his).

<sup>629</sup> Brannigan 8.

<sup>630</sup> Brannigan 9.

<sup>631</sup> Brannigan 6, citing Vernon Bogdanor.

<sup>632</sup> This negative materiality of base matters is itself linked to base matters’ manifestation as the debasement of matter in the environments of World War I.

<sup>633</sup> Arnold 54.

<sup>634</sup> Simmons 180, italics mine.

<sup>635</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 237. They explain that “[t]he second half of the nineteenth century saw the development of two closely linked phenomena: on the one hand, the infrastructures of economic globalization were established, while on the other hand, massive economic gaps appeared between Europe and North America on one side, and Asia on the other. The world-system then centered on Great Britain was based on an unequal world-ecology: by dramatically increasing the economic metabolism of the industrial countries, coal correspondingly amplified the demand for organic materials from the tropical world . . . the technologies that lay at the root of their prosperity depended on certain key products drawn from the peripheral countries: ores such as tin from Malaysia for the processed-food industry, as well as mineral oil; copper from the Andes and the Congo for electrification; gutta-percha for the telegraph network; rubber for mechanical industries (transmission belts, sealants for steam engines, etc.) and then for automobiles. In the same way, maintaining soil fertility in Europe and America depended on the extraction of guano from Peru, Bolivia and Chile . . . as well as phosphates from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. . . . The *ghost hectares* that fed the British population were as large as the country’s agricultural surface.”(Bonneuil and Fressoz 235-7, italics mine).

<sup>636</sup> Moore 246, 266, 241.

<sup>637</sup> Vandertop 682.

<sup>638</sup> *OED* quoted in Miller 401.

<sup>639</sup> Vandertop paraphrasing Conrad’s paean to imperialism, *Heart of Darkness*, 686.

<sup>640</sup> Chakrabarty 221. Chakrabarty adds that inherited historiographic tradition is also an obstacle: “[f]or Croce, then, all material objects were subsumed into human thought. No rocks, for example, existed in themselves. Croce’s idealism, Roberts explains, ‘does not mean that rocks, for example, “don’t exist” without human beings to think them. Apart from human concern and language, they neither exist nor do not exist, since “exist” is a human concept that has meaning only within a context of human concerns and purposes’” (Chakrabarty 203).

<sup>641</sup> Gikandi 184.

<sup>642</sup> Gikandi 183.

<sup>643</sup> Gikandi 183.

<sup>644</sup> Gikandi 173.

<sup>645</sup> Gikandi 171.

<sup>646</sup> Miller 402.

<sup>647</sup> Miller 402.

<sup>648</sup> Murphy writes, “[t]he European colonial project was . . . an ‘imaginative hegemony’ of nature. Today one of the most important epistemological legacies of the colonial era might be the idea of ‘environment’ itself, as a realm external to people and society which requires institutions and policies to manage it” (Murphy 17). Yet, while imperialism created the environment, “[t]he Anthropocene, as the reunion of human (historical) time and Earth (geological) time, between human agency and non-human agency, gives the lie to this—temporal, ontological, epistemological and institutional—great divide between nature and society that widened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Bonneuil and Fressoz 32).

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- <sup>649</sup> Arnold concludes that “[b]y the close of the nineteenth century, environmentalist ideas were being refashioned to meet the ideological imperatives of a new imperial age” (Arnold 29).
- <sup>650</sup> Nixon 2.
- <sup>651</sup> Morris 64 quoted in Miller 401.
- <sup>652</sup> Nixon 3.
- <sup>653</sup> John Bellamy Foster 370, 385.
- <sup>654</sup> Foster 383.
- <sup>655</sup> Foster 380.
- <sup>656</sup> Foster 380, for more on the importation of fertilizer to England see Foster 375-6.
- <sup>657</sup> Foster 378.
- <sup>658</sup> Foster 384, italics in original.
- <sup>659</sup> Baucom 4.
- <sup>660</sup> Jameson 48. Hence he notes that “during this period the word ‘imperialism’ designates, not the relationship of metropolis to colony, but rather the rivalry of the various imperial and metropolitan nation-states among themselves” (Jameson 47).
- <sup>661</sup> Jameson 49-50.
- <sup>662</sup> Jameson 50.
- <sup>663</sup> Jameson 50.
- <sup>664</sup> Jameson 50.
- <sup>665</sup> Jameson 50.
- <sup>666</sup> Jameson 50.
- <sup>667</sup> Jameson 50-51.
- <sup>668</sup> Jameson 54, 50-51.
- <sup>669</sup> Jameson 51-3.
- <sup>670</sup> Jameson 58.
- <sup>671</sup> Gikandi x.
- <sup>672</sup> Gikandi xviii.
- <sup>673</sup> Gikandi 2.
- <sup>674</sup> Gikandi 3.
- <sup>675</sup> Grove 15.
- <sup>676</sup> Furthermore, knowledge of the earth, in the development of several scientific disciplines, was explicitly and implicitly used in support of colonialism. Bonneuil and Fressoz write, “knowledge of the global environment has thus for a very long time been part of imperial cosmographies” (48). Bate adds, “knowledge of the earth is also a means to conquest on behalf of [the] nation . . . in the hope of facilitating British colonization and trade” (49). And Drayton explains, “knowledge of nature, applied to navigation and war, enabled conquest. As it enabled mining, forestry, and plantation agriculture, it made such acquisitions profitable” (229-30).
- <sup>677</sup> Murphy 14.
- <sup>678</sup> Murphy 14.
- <sup>679</sup> Matless 160.
- <sup>680</sup> Matless 160. He quotes from Lymington’s 1938 book *Famine in England* as well as from the writings of Jacks and Whyte.
- <sup>681</sup> Arnold 175.
- <sup>682</sup> Murphy 23.
- <sup>683</sup> Gikandi 162.
- <sup>684</sup> Sultzbach 13. Sultzbach elaborates, stating that “Forster, Woolf, and Auden often use the animate environment to critique cultural assumptions about scientific hierarchies, political power, and traditional forms of knowledge, associating formal Innovation and natural imagery with an effort to express a larger consciousness of a diverse World - at times simply reinscribing anthropocentrism, but in other works provocatively superseding human solipsism” (Sultzbach 8).
- <sup>685</sup> Young 168.
- <sup>686</sup> Young 168.
- <sup>687</sup> Miller 397.
- <sup>688</sup> Miller 397 quoting Naomi Klein 169.
- <sup>689</sup> Miller 397.
- <sup>690</sup> Miller 396.

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<sup>691</sup> Miller 398. However, in recent as yet unpublished work Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has explained that while extraction does tend towards exhaustion in reality, in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century English imaginary, it is depicted in both literary and economic works as being part of a horizontal aesthetics, wherein rather than going deeper into the earth and eventually exhausting what resources lie there, English writers and publics imagined natural resources as extending along an endless horizon allowing for a similarly endless growth and extractivism to continue. This theory was put forth at her talks at the Victorian Literature and Culture Seminar at Harvard University's Mahindra Humanities Center in 2018 and developed further at the Biannual Conference for the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment at UC Davis in 2019 as part of her forthcoming book *Extraction Ecologies and the Literature of the Long Exhaustion, 1830s-1930s* [<https://www.gf.org/fellows/all-fellows/elizabeth-carolyn-miller/>].

<sup>692</sup> Miller 400.

<sup>693</sup> Stepan 11.

<sup>694</sup> Stepan 11.

<sup>695</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz note that “in the age of empires, an ‘environmental orientalism’ reserved the ‘external’ influences of the environment on human history to discourses on ‘less advanced’ societies, as a counterpoise to an industrial society moved above all by an ‘internal’ logic of progress” (Bonneuil and Fressoz 31-2). Their evocation of the word orientalism borrows from Edward Said’s idea which names in *Orientalism* (1978) the construction of the east and west, racial and ethnic other as well as only being comprehensible in definition against each other, and so have no essential substance. What he will call “Orientalism” *creates* textually and materially the conditions of our world. He says, “I have begun with the assumption that the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely *there*, just as the Occident itself is not just *there* either” (1869). What Said means by “the assumption that the Orient is not an inert fact of nature” is that the Orient is not an essential entity, but a constructed one, whose author is multiple and without direct intent. Said further explains, “it would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was *essentially* an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality . . . There were—and are—cultures and nations whose location is East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West” (1869). Hence the place Western discourse gestures towards with Orientalism is not the “real” place or peoples “in the East.” While this does not mean these people and places do not exist, it does mean that the ideas of the Orient propagated by Western culture have no essential connection to the real peoples and places they describe. The discursive entity of “the Orient” is *constructed* in the sense that it is a European “invention” (1866) which “refers mainly to that created consistency, that regular constellation of ideas as the pre-eminent thing about the Orient, and not to its mere being” (1869). The reason this “constellation of ideas” is not reflective of a “real” Orient, but of a Western construction, is that “within a culture what is commonly circulated [as truth] is not ‘truth’ but representations” (1882). Said asks us here to begin to look at “representations *as representations*, not as “natural” depictions of the Orient” (1882). Orientalism is a discourse populated by a group of texts and maintained by the ways in which we study, talk about, and read them. Although the Orient is not “real,” it has material effects on the real lives of Eastern peoples. This is the main thesis of Said’s book, and it is informed by the distinction he draws between representation and truth, as well as the one he attempts to soften between true and political knowledge. This constructed representation of the Orient is multiple and lacks intent because—as opposed to intentionally repressive or dominating “state institutions” (1870) such as the army and police—within a culture the “influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony*” (1871). “It is hegemony,” he writes, “or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism its durability and strength” (1871), making it seem to be an “inert fact of nature,” just “merely *there*.” All cultural productions in the West are not *trying* to cultivate a dominating discourse of Orientalism with their texts and practices. But, by belonging to “a power with definite interests in the Orient” or having a “history of involvement” with it (1874) as European nations and peoples have, however, they none-the-less create this discourse. He sees the discursive power of Orientalism as functioning through a “*distribution of geopolitical awareness*” into all texts, “an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographic distinction,” but of an epistemological endeavor within Western civilization which “creates but also maintains [Orientalism], it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand . . . control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different . . . world” (1875).

<sup>696</sup> Stepan 11.

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<sup>697</sup> Stepan 17-18. Arnold corroborates this, writing: “one of the principle manifestations of environmental otherness in European thought since the fifteenth century has been in terms of a developing distinction between temperate and tropical lands, and that complex of ideas and attitudes that we will here call ‘tropicality’ . . . To begin to understand this kind of otherness we need to understand the tropics as a conceptual, and not just physical, space . . . Calling a part of the globe ‘the tropics’ . . . became, over the centuries, a Western way of defining something culturally alien, as well as environmentally distinctive, from Europe (especially northern Europe) . . . The tropics existed only in mental juxtaposition to something else—the perceived normality of the temperate lands. Tropicality was the experience of northern whites moving into an alien world—alien in climate, vegetation, people and disease” (Arnold 142-3).

<sup>698</sup> Stepan 17-18.

<sup>699</sup> Drayton 233, quoting in part from Benjamin Kidd’s *The Control of the Tropics* (1898).

<sup>700</sup> Arnold 158.

<sup>701</sup> Baucom 84.

<sup>702</sup> Baucom 84.

<sup>703</sup> Jameson 49-50.

<sup>704</sup> Jameson 50, 58. Jameson explains that “daily life and existential experience in the metropolis—which is necessarily the very content of the national literature itself, can now no longer be grasped immanently; it no longer has its meaning, its deeper reason for being, within itself. As artistic content it will now henceforth always have something missing about it . . . an outside . . . which it constitutively lacks . . . This new and historically original problem . . . modernism seeks to solve . . . it is only that new kind of art which reflexively perceives this problem and lives this formal dilemma that can be called modernism in the first place” (Jameson 51).

<sup>705</sup> Jameson 50, Gikandi 165, 161, 167.

<sup>706</sup> Gikandi 161.

<sup>707</sup> Gikandi 161.

<sup>708</sup> Esty 5.

<sup>709</sup> Esty 5-6.

<sup>710</sup> Esty 7-9. For example, Helen Southward writes that “Virginia Woolf’s last novel *Between the Acts* (1941) in its capacity as an autoethnographic, autocratic portrait of England. Faced in the 1930s with a fascist nationalism that would challenge the logic of her fierce attachment to home and nation, Woolf found in the anglocentric” vein “made possible a reinvention of the idea of home and ‘the heart of England’ in a space not delimited by mainstream nationalist topography, ‘a national space outside the culture of colonialism’ (Gikandi 194) . . . Woolf as she sought to build a tribute to her native land that was free of the jingoism and the suffocating nostalgia that such an enterprise risked” (Southward 196).

<sup>711</sup> Southward 197.

<sup>712</sup> McCarthy 15.

<sup>713</sup> McCarthy 16 quoting Stephen Slemon 1.

<sup>714</sup> Bell 45.

<sup>715</sup> Bell 7.

<sup>716</sup> Bell 7-8.

<sup>717</sup> Bell 9.

<sup>718</sup> Bell 32.

<sup>719</sup> Bell 34.

<sup>720</sup> Torgovnick 8.

<sup>721</sup> Torgovnick 21, 8. She notes that “its strength as a metaphor for our time” lies in how “[o]ur sense of the primitive impinges on our sense of our selves—it is bound up with . . . Freud’s map of the psyche [which] placed the ego (the *Ich*, the I) at a point that mediates between the civilizing super-ego and the ‘primitive’ libido (or id)” (Torgovnick 17).

<sup>722</sup> Gikandi 5, paraphrasing Said in *Culture and Imperialism*. He adds, “[t]he desire for a former colonial power such as Britain to represent its national history as immanent, and its geography as essentially insular, was matched by the drive, in the decolonized polis, to promote nationalism as the radical alternative to imperialism,” and so “that the imperial map of the world was to thread its way into the cultural products of the West and become a vital part of its ‘texture of linguistic and cultural practice’” (Gikandi 5).

<sup>723</sup> Torgovnick 20.

<sup>724</sup> Torgovnick 18. The etymology of the primitive underscores such dynamics as well. Barkan and Bush write, “Previously, when art historians spoke of the ‘primitive,’ they usually had in mind the ‘naïve’ style

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of Pre-Raphaelite and Colonial American painting—that is, artifacts of the West’s own childhood” (Barkan and Bush 2). Before the late eighteenth century, adds Torgovnick, the primitive “referred to ‘the first, earliest age, period, or stage,’ . . . always imply[ing] ‘original,’ ‘pure,’ ‘simple,’” as the turn of the nineteenth century approaches, it begins to reference, instead “‘aboriginals,’ ‘inhabitants of prehistoric times,’ ‘natives’ in non-European lands” (Torgovnick 19). Barkan and Bush continue that “[i]n the late nineteenth century, however, primitive painting came increasingly to connote the geographically exotic ‘savage’—the violence and energy of the barbaric” (Barkan and Bush 2).

<sup>725</sup> Torgovnick 19.

<sup>726</sup> Torgovnick 8, 14, 22. Such depictions “take the West as norm and define the rest as inferior, different, deviant, subordinate, and subordinatable,” wherein they “exist at the ‘lowest cultural levels,’” whereas “we occupy the ‘highest’” (Torgovnick 21, 8).

<sup>727</sup> Torgovnick 8. On the other hand, within Modernism, there was also a manifestation “[d]uring the twenties and thirties,” where “ideals derived from images of primitive life were used by the Right—in fascist slogans of ‘folk’ and ‘blood’ and ‘fertility’” (Torgovnick 9).

<sup>728</sup> Torgovnick 11, 10.

<sup>729</sup> Barkan and Bush 1, Torgovnick 14.

<sup>730</sup> Barkan and Bush 13. They add that “[a]ppropriating the non-Western in a Western context always underlines the subjective agency of the West and the unequal passivity of the Other” (Barkan and Bush 13).

<sup>731</sup> Lemke 101. Lemke adds, “contact with African masks and sculptures—works that did not attempt to represent ‘accurately’ the social world or the portrayed object—helped European artists to modify their style of representation and experiment with a nonrepresentational aesthetic” that Lemke calls “primitivist modernism,” denoting the “exchange” wherein “‘marginal’ black cultures have shaped the center, and how the center has shaped those cultures in return,” arguing, “[i]t is this injection of blackness that caused modernism to assume the precise form it took” (Lemke 7, 4). And Torgovnick therefore notes that “authors” such as “Conrad and Eliot,” “Lawrence and Woolf,” “[a]ll . . . brought us, in their different ways, versions of the primitive” (Torgovnick 12).

<sup>732</sup> Gikandi 187, 178-9, italics mine. Simon Gikandi has much to say about the centrality of Africa to English imperial identification via the discourse of primitivism and colonial othering and its merging of ancient English states of nativity with contemporary modernist African ones. He notes, “modern writers’ entry into the body of the other—represented ‘a distrust of any future based on what we are’” (Gikandi 182, quoting Greene 20). Instead of “cutting us off from comprehension, the journey back in time is a journey of discovery, one that yields useful clues to self-understanding; instead of confronting us with the innate emptiness at the center of our being, the encounter with Africa affords us a mirror in which we can discover and gaze at our hidden selves . . . the continent is conceived as the heterotopic space in which the European subject comes to terms with its repressed self . . . to travel to a place that is no longer defined by inherited cultural norms” (Gikandi 180). If, for example, “temporality is the enabling condition of epistemology and consciousness in the Western tradition, then we can read Conrad’s narration of time as the undoing of knowledge and consciousness and thus their condition of possibility” (Gikandi 176). This is why the “image of Africa is sometimes underwritten by an admixture of revulsion and attraction . . . Africa enters the cognitive structures of modernism” as an object that “attracts us both because of its radical alterity and its sense of danger” (Gikandi 163).

<sup>733</sup> Gikandi 179.

<sup>734</sup> Gikandi 186.

<sup>735</sup> Fabian 26, 16.

<sup>736</sup> Fabian 16, 15.

<sup>737</sup> Fabian 16 quoting Darwin 110, 15.

<sup>738</sup> Fabian 14.

<sup>739</sup> Fabian 17.

<sup>740</sup> Fabian 31, last two quotations are fully italicized in his original text.

<sup>741</sup> Fabian 30, 26.

<sup>742</sup> Torgovnick 8.

<sup>743</sup> Bate 35.

<sup>744</sup> Torgovnick 20.

<sup>745</sup> Torgovnick 22.

<sup>746</sup> Torgovnick 18.

<sup>747</sup> McClintock 9-10.

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<sup>748</sup> McClintock 30.

<sup>749</sup> McClintock 30. McClintock continues: “according to this trope, colonized people—like women and the working class in the metropolis—do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency—the living embodiment of the archaic ‘primitive.’” (McClintock 30).

<sup>750</sup> McClintock 30.

<sup>751</sup> McClintock 36, 37.

<sup>752</sup> McClintock 37.

<sup>753</sup> McClintock 40-1.

<sup>754</sup> McKibben 60, italics mine.

<sup>755</sup> My reading of Conrad will be, in many ways, a retroactive reading. More than simply a predecessor, the base matters of *Heart of Darkness*'s imperial imaginary only become legible as such in the moment they are re-evoked by writers responding to the war, like a Benjaminian constellation of moments as viewed from the Now of this dissertation's reading. Adam J. Engel, for example, uses “the image of Kurtz's burial pit as a forerunner of the [WWI] trenches,” for “Kurtz typifies the problem of expression following violence” that consumes both material and subjective instantiations of the individual and national self (Engel 43 n. 3). While Conrad makes certain tropes available to war-time writers, as they take up these Conradian aesthetics they inaugurate World War I as part of a longer lineage of imperial aesthetics characterized by this particular environmental topology, something is, in turn, simultaneously made newly legible in Conrad's aesthetics as well. I refer specifically here to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad did, however, continue writing through the war. For a discussion of Conrad's work composed during and after the First World War, see John G. Peters, “Conrad's Literary Response to the First World War.”

<sup>756</sup> McCarthy 642.

<sup>757</sup> Weilin 159.

<sup>758</sup> Vandertop 688.

<sup>759</sup> Originally published in the preceding years as a serialized piece in the preeminent English literary magazine *Blackwood's*. While many choose to term Conrad's text a novella, owing to its short length, this chapter will refer to it as a novel owing to my desire to emphasize its formal engagement in the narrative features which link it to the novel that, this essay assumes, are not dependent on length. It should be noted that tropical and isolated both refer to the narrative's suppositions, not any real quality of the nineteenth century Africa that Conrad fictionalizes.

<sup>760</sup> For more on the legacy of King Leopold II and its connections to *Heart of Darkness*, see: Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

<sup>761</sup> Following Harry White and Irving L. Finston's reevaluation of the potential geographic echoes in Conrad's tale of real Africa and his own personal history, I will be terming the upriver journey portion of the narrative as taking place on the Kasai rather than the Congo river. The Kasai was, in the 1890s, a much less explored, and more remote, tributary river to the Congo. I do so as it disrupts the unilateral and abstract collapsing of all of Africa into a singular vagueness. It also allows for a distinction between the two parts of the tale, one in a more realist and the other in a more impressionistic style—though there is, of course, overlap. It must be kept in mind, however, that, as stated elsewhere, neither the country nor the river is ever given a name in the novel itself. White and Finston state: “Conrad did not imagine Marlow journeying up the Congo” (3), “but one of its tributaries” (4). They explain that all descriptions in the novel—including Marlow's steamship river journey past the Central Station as well as of Kurtz's Inner station, the width and breadth of the river (5, 11, 13), its isolation from European settlement (6, 12, 11, 16), its wealth of ivory (10), and the appearance of the African natives (16-17)—suggest that “the challenging and uncertain journey on the Kasai that Conrad hoped for [during his own time in the Congo] was assimilated into his writing from the moment he has Marlow take his steamboat upriver to find Kurtz” (White & Finston 9).

<sup>762</sup> Conrad 27.

<sup>763</sup> Conrad 27.

<sup>764</sup> Myer 100.

<sup>765</sup> Mayer 179.

<sup>766</sup> Conrad 28.

<sup>767</sup> Conrad 28.

<sup>768</sup> J. Hillis Miller 233.

<sup>769</sup> Conrad 29.

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<sup>770</sup> Conrad 28.

<sup>771</sup> Myer 100.

<sup>772</sup> Conrad 31.

<sup>773</sup> Conrad 31.

<sup>774</sup> Conrad 31-32.

<sup>775</sup> de la Rochère 186.

<sup>776</sup> Conrad 31.

<sup>777</sup> McCarthy 642. McCarthy adds that “This horror is too much for Marlow to recount because the Intended represents the idealizing impetus that makes existence bearable amidst these hard facts” (McCarthy 643).

<sup>778</sup> Conrad 22.

<sup>779</sup> For more on the theorization of wonder, see: Mary-Jane Rubenstein’s *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010; Sarah Tindal Kareem’s *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park’s *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998; Robert C. Fuller’s *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006; and Baruch Spinoza’s *Ethics* in *The Collected Works of Spinoza* vol. 1, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985.

<sup>780</sup> Conrad 41.

<sup>781</sup> Apophasis is defined as writing which struggles with the limits or failure of language to say “what is unsaid or unsayable because it cannot be expressed at all,” the very manifestation of which gestures to the ineffable (Skinner 94). For further discussion of apophatic language in Conrad, see: Stephen Skinner’s “Obscurity, Apophasis, and Critical Imagination,” J. Hillis Miller’s *Topographies* (1995), Richard Pedot’s “Encountering the Unmappable: The Landscape in *Heart of Darkness* (Joseph Conrad),” and Stephen Ross’s *Conrad and Empire* (2004).

<sup>782</sup> Skinner 94, 103.

<sup>783</sup> Conrad 41.

<sup>784</sup> Mayer 183.

<sup>785</sup> McCarthy 630.

<sup>786</sup> McCarthy explains, “[t]here is an English tradition of natural description that expects nature to please, a tradition that lives in the word ‘landscape’ and its associations with painting and the picturesque. Marlow delivers a very different vision of landscape, and in it expresses deep anxiety about the land’s status in relation to human beings . . . this is a realm beyond the aesthetic traditions of landscape appreciation, where land is both resistant to human penetration and strangely dangerous to human connection. *Heart of Darkness* defines itself against the familiar nature writing of the nineteenth century. The dominant nineteenth-century cultural abstractions for approaching nature—the sentimental, the sublime, the picturesque, and the pastoral—are undone by ‘slime’ and contortions and ‘hidden evil.’ [That former] beneficent nature . . . represented nature in established patterns that elicited customary emotional responses to the point of sentimentality. In such writing the countryside cued feelings of relief, freedom, and rejuvenation . . . But *Heart of Darkness* does something different: it challenges the familiar representations of nature with a natural world that is anything but comforting[. Even] exoticized foreign landscapes [were often depicted] as a refuge where trees and vines protect good characters and punish malefactor [here] Marlow heads for respite only to find a horrific anti pastoral of despair . . . pastoral’s sardonic echo” (McCarthy 624-6).

<sup>787</sup> Vandertop 694.

<sup>788</sup> Conrad 41.

<sup>789</sup> Vandertop 694.

<sup>790</sup> Myer 98, 100.

<sup>791</sup> Brown 353.

<sup>792</sup> Brown 353.

<sup>793</sup> Conrad 82.

<sup>794</sup> Watt 109, 108. Like Watt, McCarthy also notes the impact of advances in geology—specifically the ascension of Charles Lyell’s non-linear “theory of geological time” over Linnaeus’ “nature [which] expresses a kindly God’s graceful arrangements for all beings on this Earth” (McCarthy 628). “In contrast, Lyell’s geological work,” termed “uniformitarianism,” “insisted time was uniform, revolving in one big cycle or great year,” “remov[ing] humanity from any confident ascent” (McCarthy 631).



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<sup>795</sup> McCarthy 629. He writes, “evolution placed people not outside, but rather inside the mechanism [and] *Heart of Darkness* follows evolution's implications away from European exceptionalism and toward the radical position of human identification with nature” (629). While I disagree with McCarthy that the text depicts an “identification” with nature, I do believe a revelation of the imperial subject’s relationship to colonial environments threatens foundational notions of English national identity. This is because, as I argue in Chapter 1, English national identity already performs an “identification” with nature, of sorts. The distinction which McCarthy elides is that which I promulgate across this dissertation—between native and colonial lands—base and debased or othered matters. What the English then realize is that as imperial subjects they have identified with colonial environments without knowing it, for colonial environments have long undergirded English lands. In such dramatizations of dark environmental matters on the colonial frontier, then, the imperial English subject comes to fear its own foundations, and actualize a distance between subject and land that already existed in the literary constitution of England on imaginary rather than real land.

<sup>796</sup> White & Finston 18. These stereotypes, they write, are “culled from the literature of exploration and anthropology which are full of “familiar myths and stereotypes”: “various unrealistic prejudices, biases, and superstitions about Africa and its people” (White & Finston 17).

<sup>797</sup> Elbarbary 113. He explains that “the discourse of primitivism and degeneracy reverses the idea of evolution; it deconstructs the ethos of the improving spirit of the times” (Elbarbary 113).

<sup>798</sup> Elbarbary 124, 122, 126. Examples of such conceptions of primitivism in the late nineteenth-century include: Edward Burnett Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1871) and Grant Allen’s *The British Barbarians* (New York: Arno, 1975) and his “Who Was Primitive Man?” in the *Fortnightly Review* (vol. 38, 1882: 308-22).

<sup>799</sup> McCarthy 631-2, 628.

<sup>800</sup> Conrad 18.

<sup>801</sup> Mayer 183.

<sup>802</sup> Conrad 20.

<sup>803</sup> Conrad 19.

<sup>804</sup> McCarthy 630.

<sup>805</sup> Conrad 48-49.

<sup>806</sup> Conrad writes:

The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marsh was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men (18).

<sup>807</sup> McCarthy 631-2.

<sup>808</sup> Conrad 20, 20-21.

<sup>809</sup> Conrad 20.

<sup>810</sup> Conrad writes:

They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before (21)

<sup>811</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty xix.

<sup>812</sup> Vital materiality is Jane Bennett’s term. See her *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* for a greater elaboration of her reading of matter’s agency in our quotidian and political everyday, from earth worms to electricity, pesticides to poop.

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<sup>813</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 1.

<sup>814</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 2.

<sup>815</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 3.

<sup>816</sup> Dana Phillips 19-20.

<sup>817</sup> Phillips 20.

<sup>818</sup> Others have suggested the need for ecocritical modernist scholarship to move beyond the overly simplistic model of redemptive presence versus condemnatory absence (as well as modernist studies' need to pay more attention to environmental issues more generally). Anne Raine notes that despite modernist rejection of "romantic naturalism" and "reductive realism," recent scholarship is right to point out that while modernists "may not speak very directly to the concerns of nature-endorsing ecocritics, these texts . . . used innovative formal strategies to disrupt, defamiliarize, distance themselves from, or imagine alternatives to conventional constructions of nature and human nature," both "participat[ing] in emerging discourses of nature," and also "resist[ing] assimilation into those [popular, scientific, and political] discourses" (Raine 99, 103). Raine offers a new pairing of terms to understand ecocritical modernism along these lines: an "ecopoetics of redemption" and an "ecopoetics of negativity" (Raine 106; ecopoetics of negativity, and the notion of redemption are transposed from Kate Rigby's study of ecocritical texts in the romantic period, into Raine's own examination of Modernism. See Rigby's *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004): 12, 125). Works engaging nature through an ecopoetics of redemption "ai[m] not to depict nature's outward forms but to restore a sense of wonder at the 'enduring strangeness' of things and thereby 'call us into a respectful relationship with an ultimately ungraspable earth'" (Rigby 116-18 quoted in Raine 106. Raine gives the example of the work of Wallace Stevens—especially as read by Jonathan Bate and Gyorgyi Voros. To this I would add the work of Virginia Woolf, J.R.R. Tolkien, and D.H. Lawrence). An ecopoetics of negativity, however, sees such redemptive language as still "risk[ing] overestimating the capacity of poetic language to 'give voice to the song of the earth'" (Rigby 122-3 quoted in Raine 106); instead it creates a "narrative that foregrounds its own artificiality and inability to represent the nonhuman and thereby 'protects the otherness of the earth' from realism's claim to capture it in words" (Rigby 119 quoted in Raine 106. Raine gives the example of Samuel Beckett—especially as read by Paul Saunders. To this I would add Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, and David Jones. It should be said, however, that no one author's oeuvre is likely to neatly fit into either camp). In one we have an emphasis on the "ungraspable earth," in the other an unrepresentable earth—the mimetic assumptions of each differing widely. The latter "acknowledge[s] that even if it were possible to invent a language that could 'let [nature-being] itself speak,' its efficacy would be limited, since it would be unrecognizable in scientific or common-sense terms and unable to 'spell out manifestos or engage in environmental politics' without recourse to the realist discourse it repudiates," disrupting the presence or absence of nature as keystone to a productive ecocritical appraisal of modernist texts (Raine 106 paraphrasing 68, 73 of Saunders).

<sup>819</sup> I borrow the idea of enmeshment from Timothy Morton, who writes that "[t]he ecological thought imagines interconnectedness, which I call *the mesh* . . . The mesh of interconnected things is vast, perhaps immeasurably so. Each entity in the mesh looks strange. Nothing exists all by itself, and so nothing is fully 'itself'" (Morton, *Ecological Thought* 15). He elaborates: "[t]he ecological view to come isn't a picture of some bounded object or 'restrictive economy,' a closed system. It is a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite center or edge. It is radical intimacy, coexistence with other beings, sentient and otherwise" (Morton, *Ecological Thought* 8). On his choice of the term for this interconnectedness, he adds: "[t]he weather withers because of our increasing awareness of the mesh. Most words I considered to describe interdependence were compromised by references to the Internet—like 'network.' Either that, or they were compromised by vitalism, the belief in a living substance. 'Web' is a little bit too vitalist and a little bit Internet-ish for my taste, so it loses on both counts. 'Mesh' is short, shorter in particular than 'the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things'" (Morton, *Ecological Thought* 28).

<sup>820</sup> For other terminology which has taken considerations of the global to heart within the New Modernist Studies, see Rebecca Walsh's *The Geopoetics of Modernism*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015; and Susan Stanford Friedman's *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

<sup>821</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz note, "the industrial development model and its metabolism in terms of matter and energy, which altered the geological trajectory of our Earth, is inseparable from the history of . . . colonialism and imperialism" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 228). For an expanded discussion in the relationship

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between Britain and the Anthropocene see Chris Otter et al.'s "Roundtable: The Anthropocene in British History." *Journal of British Studies* 57.3 (2018): 568-596.

<sup>822</sup> Chakrabarty writes, "all the anthropogenic factors contributing to global warming—the burning of fossil fuel, industrialization of animal stock, the clearing of tropical and other forests, and so on—are after all part of a larger story: the unfolding of capitalism in the West and the imperial or quasi-imperial domination by the West of the rest of the world. . . . If this is broadly true, then does not the talk of species or mankind simply serve to hide the reality of capitalist production and the logic of imperial—formal, informal, or machinic in a Deleuzian sense—domination that it fosters? Why should one include the poor of the world—whose carbon footprint is small anyway—by use of such all inclusive terms as species or mankind when the blame for the current crisis should be squarely laid at the door of the rich nations in the first place and of the richer classes in the poorer ones?" (Chakrabarty 216).

<sup>823</sup> Crutzen & Stoermer 17-18. They note that "[t]he expansion of mankind, both in numbers and per capita exploitation of Earth's resources has been astounding" (Crutzen & Stoermer 17). And Chakrabarty adds: "[i]n unwittingly destroying the artificial but time-honored distinction between natural and human histories, climate scientists posit that the human being has become something much larger than the simple biological agent that he or she always has been. Humans now wield a geological force. As Oreskes puts it: 'To deny that global warming is real is precisely to deny that humans have become geological agents, changing the most basic physical processes of the earth' . . . To call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human. Humans are biological agents, both collectively and as individuals . . . But we can become geological agents only historically and collectively, that is, when we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself. . . . Humans began to acquire this agency only since the Industrial Revolution, but the process really picked up in the second half of the twentieth century. Humans have become geological agents very recently in human history. In that sense, we can say that it is only very recently that the distinction between human and natural histories" (Chakrabarty 206-7).

<sup>824</sup> Chakrabarty 206-7, 213-14. It must be noted that the term "human species" is not to be collapsed together with other essentializing efforts at human nature etc., and their deleterious effects on oppressed and minoritized peoples. Chakrabarty explains, "This humanity . . . is not one. It does not . . . 'form a single homogenous civilization,'" despite "dangerous historical examples of the political use of biology . . . species cannot be thought of in essentialist terms: 'Species, according to Darwin, are not fixed entities with natural essences imbued in them by the Creator . . . the search for a normal . . . is futile'" (Chakrabarty 214). Furthermore, Chakrabarty states: "[i]f the industrial way of life was what got us into this crisis . . . the crisis of climate change has been necessitated by the high-energy consuming models of society that capitalist industrialization has created and promoted" (Chakrabarty 217). This is why "we have now ourselves become a geological agent disturbing these parametric conditions needed for our own existence" (Chakrabarty 218).

<sup>825</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 40.

<sup>826</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 196. They identify such forms of reflexivity, or awareness of the impacts of their actions, as "'Circumfusa, climate, metabolism, economy of nature, thermodynamics, exhaustion: these six grammars of environmental reflexivity'" (196). Adding, "[t]he historical problem, therefore, is not the emergence of an 'environmental awareness' but rather the reverse: to understand the schizophrenic nature of modernity, which continued to view humans as the products of their environment at the same time as it let them damage and destroy it" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 197).

<sup>827</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 1, italics in original. He states elsewhere, "only sees pieces of a hyperobject at any one moment" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 4).

<sup>828</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 4.

<sup>829</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 5.

<sup>830</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 24. Morton adds, "indeed the fate of the concept world that is at issue. For what comes into view for humans at this moment is precisely the end of the world, brought about by the encroachment of hyperobjects, one of which is assuredly Earth itself, and its geological cycles" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 7). He continues that in reality, though, "[t]he end of the world has already occurred" first in "April 1784" with the dawning of the industrial revolution through Watt's invention of the steam engine, and "[s]ince for something to happen it often needs to happen twice, the world also ended in 1945" with the testing then dropping of the atomic bomb (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 7). "The end of the world is correlated with the Anthropocene, its global warming and subsequent drastic climate change" (Morton, *Hyperobjects*

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7). Hence, “hyperobjects seem to force something on us, something that affects some core ideas of what it means to exist, what Earth is, what society is.” (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 15).

<sup>831</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 22.

<sup>832</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 12.

<sup>833</sup> Morton adds, “[b]ecause they so massively outscale us, hyperobjects have magnified this weirdness of things for our inspection: things are themselves, but we can’t point to them directly” (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 12).

<sup>834</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 21.

<sup>835</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 21.

<sup>836</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 21.

<sup>837</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 16, italics in original.

<sup>838</sup> Morton, *Dark Ecology* 59. Morton’s concept of “agrilogistics” takes these ideas even further in his most recent book, *Dark Ecology*. There, he argues that Nature as a concept separate from world emerges because of agrilogistics. He goes so far as to write that “*Nature=agrilogistics*” (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 55). He goes on to clarify that “Agrilogistics spawns the concept of Nature definitively outside the human” (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 56), adding that “Nature depends on specifying the unnatural” (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 57). Agrilogistic aesthetics “carves out such a view and literally ploughs ahead with it. It presupposes the ‘viewfinder’ that produces the ‘worldview,’ static and picturesque, out of stockpiles of stuff in fields”; because of this we can see how, “writing and the origins of agriculture are deeply intertwined” (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 82). One feature of agrilogistics which can be seen in such views of nature, is a “think[ing] that existence means solid, constant, present existence. This belief is based on the fantasy that all the parts of me are me” (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 105). This is part of agrilogistics attempt to straighten the loop of dark ecology, where in reality presence is always incomplete, absent and present at once. This amounts to an epistemic crisis surrounding “what counts as real,” and typically agrilogistic thinking wins out, reinforcing the “gap between the (human) subject and everything else” (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 27). This “elemental anxiety” occurs because “what is threatening is *nowhere* . . . cannot come any closer from a definite direction within nearness, it is already ‘there’—and yet nowhere” (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 78).

<sup>839</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects* 18.

<sup>840</sup> Chakrabarty 219.

<sup>841</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz 78-9.

<sup>842</sup> Bonneuil and Fressoz xiii.

<sup>843</sup> Diane Coole and Samantha Frost 1.

<sup>844</sup> Diane Coole and Samantha Frost 1-2. They add that Distinct from “once popular materialist approaches, such as existential phenomenology or structural Marxism” yet speaking back against the “radical constructivism” which has emerged since the 1970s that “privileges language, discourse, culture, and values” (Coole and Frost 3)

What such poststructuralist departures have brought about, however, is a “problematiz[ation of] any straightforward overture toward matter or material experience as naively representational or naturalistic,” revealing “the way power is present in any attempt to represent material reality” (Coole and Frost 3).

<sup>845</sup> Coole and Frost 3.

<sup>846</sup> Coole and Frost 4.

<sup>847</sup> Coole and Frost 6.

<sup>848</sup> Bill Brown 4, italics original.

<sup>849</sup> Jane Bennett viii. Instead of focusing on subjects, Bennett’s materialism asks us to focus on “the active powers issuing from nonsubjects” (Jane Bennett viii).

<sup>850</sup> Jane Bennett viii.

<sup>851</sup> Jane Bennett viii.

<sup>852</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* 3.

<sup>853</sup> Barad quoted in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 58.

<sup>854</sup> Opperman and Iovino 1.

<sup>855</sup> Opperman and Iovino 1. They explain, “[a]ll matter, in other words, is a material ‘mesh’ of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces” (Opperman and Iovino 1-2). A material ecocriticism, then, “explores such a dimension in literary texts as well as in the forms this materiality assumes in the ‘material-semiotic’ world . . . material ecocriticism examines matter both in texts and as a text, trying to shed light on the way bodily

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natures and discursive forces express their interaction whether in representations or in their concrete reality” (Opperman and Iovino 2).

<sup>856</sup> Opperman and Iovino 3.

<sup>857</sup> Lewis 34.

<sup>858</sup> Lewis 34.

<sup>859</sup> Lewis 35-6.

<sup>860</sup> Lewis 36.

<sup>861</sup> Gaudier-Brzeska 33, underlining in original.

<sup>862</sup> Lewis 36.

<sup>863</sup> Lewis 39.

<sup>864</sup> Lewis 39.

<sup>865</sup> Lewis 40.

<sup>866</sup> Lewis 38, 37, 39.

<sup>867</sup> West 4-5.

<sup>868</sup> West 5.

<sup>869</sup> See the following news pieces from the *Times*: "Turkish Mobilization In Syria." *Times*, 1 Sept. 1914, p. 7. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99M9a3>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019; "The War Day by Day." *Times*, 10 Feb. 1915, p. 6. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MA29>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019; "New Egyptian Campaign." *Times*, 24 Sept. 1915, p. 8. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MAN3>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019.; "The Main Lines Of Turkish Communications In Asia." *Times*, 17 Mar. 1916, p. 7. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MAi8>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019; "Famine And Misrule In Syria." *Times*, 5 Apr. 1916, p. 7. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MB48>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019; "The Arab Rising." *Times*, 28 June 1916, p. 9. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MBf0>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019; "Imperial And Foreign News Items." *Times*, 24 July 1916, p. 7. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MBo1>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019; "Two Years With The Enemy." *Times*, 15 Sept. 1916, p. 5. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MCD6>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019; "No Annexation." *Times*, 17 May 1917, p. 10. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MCn6>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019; "Beirut Occupied By French." *Times*, 9 Oct. 1918, p. 6. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/99MDL6>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019.

<sup>870</sup> West 5.

<sup>871</sup> "affront, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/3539](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3539). Accessed 18 February 2019.

<sup>872</sup> "affront, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/3539](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3539). Accessed 18 February 2019.

<sup>873</sup> "affront, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/3539](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3539). Accessed 18 February 2019.

<sup>874</sup> West 3.

<sup>875</sup> West 5.

<sup>876</sup> West 4.

<sup>877</sup> West 5.

<sup>878</sup> West 5.

<sup>879</sup> West 5, 3.

<sup>880</sup> West 5.

<sup>881</sup> West 6.

<sup>882</sup> West 7, 5, 7.

<sup>883</sup> West 7, 5, 7.

<sup>884</sup> West 5.

<sup>885</sup> West 7.

<sup>886</sup> West 71.

<sup>887</sup> West 66.

<sup>888</sup> West 67, 66.

<sup>889</sup> West 5.

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<sup>890</sup> West 3.

<sup>891</sup> West 66.

<sup>892</sup> See Nicole Rizzuto, "Towards and Ethics of Witnessing: Traumatic Testimony in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*," *College Literature* 39.4 (2012): 7-30.

<sup>893</sup> West 71, 5.

<sup>894</sup> West 66.

<sup>895</sup> West 66.

<sup>896</sup> West 66.

<sup>897</sup> West 66.

<sup>898</sup> West 66.

<sup>899</sup> West 66.

<sup>900</sup> West 66.

<sup>901</sup> West 66.

<sup>902</sup> West 66-7.

<sup>903</sup> Hershfield 373.

<sup>904</sup> West 67.

<sup>905</sup> Schweizer 34.

<sup>906</sup> Bonikowski 514.

<sup>907</sup> Cathy Caruth 6-7.

<sup>908</sup> West 70.

<sup>909</sup> West 66.

<sup>910</sup> Though there is no room to discuss it here, absence marks interior places at Baldry Court as well as external ones. The story opens on a scene which manifests the presence of absence in the form of the living space of a dead child. West writes, "[w]e were sitting in the nursery. I had not meant to enter it again after the child's death, but I had come suddenly on Kitty as she slipped the key into the lock and had lingered to look in at the high room, so full of whiteness and clear colors, so unendurably gay and familiar, which is kept in all respects as though there were still a child in the house . . . Everything was there, except Oliver." (West 3-4). The absent child's room is given meaning based on a lack of his presence. The way it looks, in this regard, mirrors absence, even though it "is kept in all respects as through there were still a child in the house." This absence is mirrored by language such as a "high room" which implies vaulted, cathedral like ceilings that give the sense of a large cavernous space, unfilled. It is also "full of whiteness," which, though it is technically speaking, the presence of all colors, is in the terminology of a painter, which dominates the novel and especially these opening pages, evocative of a blank canvas – absent of color. Ironically, the room is "full" of absence, just as it seems haunted by the lost child. The colors of the room, which continue to be marked by white, though they also include dominant blues and a few others, are described as "clear colors," which, though it can imply a clarity to the colors before one, amidst the other images of the room, suggests instead an absence of color again, as in a "clear" substance like glass, that one sees through but does not see for itself. Just as the landscape of Baldry Court will soon be described as "beauty" which is an "affront" (West 5) to her, Jenny finds the "gay and familiar" room to be "unendurably" so, creating an inherent tension between the meaning of these signifies of happy hominess, as what should be welcomed becomes a vision one cannot endure. What makes it unpalatable, of course, is the absence of the source of their gayness and familiarity – the child that once resided there. West closes this passage stating, "Everything was there, except Oliver," highlighting that the unignorable valence of absence running throughout the passage was the dead child itself. This "except[ing]" of an absent thing which nonetheless constitutes the surfaces of a place mirror's structurally the relationship between Baldry Court and its other palpable absent matters: colonial (or neocolonial) sites, war zones, and working class spaces. The passage indeed goes on to evoke images of animals which belong to exotic quarters ("strange beasts," "snarling tiger," "Bear," and "chimpanzee" [West 3]) and are in no way native to English environs.

<sup>911</sup> West 30.

<sup>912</sup> "Crocus." *Lebanon Flora*. Accessed July 19, 2020. [[http://www.lebanon-flora.org/species\\_genus\\_family.php?bp\\_fam=61&bp\\_gen=Crocus](http://www.lebanon-flora.org/species_genus_family.php?bp_fam=61&bp_gen=Crocus)].

<sup>913</sup> West 30.

<sup>914</sup> West 30.

<sup>915</sup> West 58.

<sup>916</sup> West 58.

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- <sup>917</sup> "draggled, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/57418](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57418). Accessed 15 March 2019.
- <sup>918</sup> "mire, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/119076](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/119076). Accessed 15 March 2019.
- <sup>919</sup> West 58.
- <sup>920</sup> West 58-59.
- <sup>921</sup> West 30, 58, 30.
- <sup>922</sup> West 44, 45.
- <sup>923</sup> West 55.
- <sup>924</sup> West 55.
- <sup>925</sup> "Brambles and other woody weeds." Accessed July 19, 2020. [<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=256>]
- <sup>926</sup> "Ferns." *The Woodland Trust*. Accessed July 19, 2020. [<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/trees-woods-and-wildlife/plants-and-fungi/ferns/1>]
- <sup>927</sup> West 56.
- <sup>928</sup> West 55.
- <sup>929</sup> West 56.
- <sup>930</sup> West 56.
- <sup>931</sup> West 56.
- <sup>932</sup> "magnificence, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/112325](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112325). Accessed 17 March 2019.
- <sup>933</sup> Raymond Williams discusses a similar erasure of the laboring body from England's older pastoral landscapes in his *The Country and the City* (1973), and Edward Said explicates the absence of those colonial places from the estate presented in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).
- <sup>934</sup> West 53.
- <sup>935</sup> West 44.
- <sup>936</sup> West 9.
- <sup>937</sup> West 16.
- <sup>938</sup> In Dr. Barbara Corker's report for the Devon County Council, she notes, "Rhododendron is an introduced species [in England]. It is highly invasive. It destroys habitats and thus whole colonies of native plants and animals disappear. Because it is so expensive to control and physically prevents access, land has been abandoned. However such areas can be restored but reinfestation must be prevented" ("Rhododendron: A Killer of the Countryside," <http://www.countrysideinfo.co.uk/rhododen.htm>). This comes from a summary of her more extensive report, "The Woodland Restoration Project" (<http://www.countrysideinfo.co.uk/wood1.htm>).
- <sup>939</sup> West 9-10.
- <sup>940</sup> Though I subvert class to concerns of environmental mattering in the imperial national imaginary confronting World War I here, others have addressed social class in the novel more directly. See, for example: Mara Scanlon's "Gender Identity and Promiscuous Identification: Reading (in) Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 40.3 (2017): 66-83.
- <sup>941</sup> West 10.
- <sup>942</sup> West 10.
- <sup>943</sup> West 10.
- <sup>944</sup> West 44.
- <sup>945</sup> West 9.
- <sup>946</sup> West 16.
- <sup>947</sup> West 14.
- <sup>948</sup> West 16, italics mine.
- <sup>949</sup> West 11.
- <sup>950</sup> West 43.
- <sup>951</sup> West 44.
- <sup>952</sup> West 44.
- <sup>953</sup> "debouch, v." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/47919](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47919). Accessed 21 March 2019.

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- <sup>954</sup> "debauched, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/47856](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47856). Accessed 21 March 2019.
- <sup>955</sup> West 44, 16.
- <sup>956</sup> West 52.
- <sup>957</sup> West 52-3.
- <sup>958</sup> Nicole Rizzuto 24-26.
- <sup>959</sup> West 68.
- <sup>960</sup> West 61.
- <sup>961</sup> Cunard, "Forward," iii.
- <sup>962</sup> See Marcus, Jane. *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Empire*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004..
- <sup>963</sup> See Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*.
- <sup>964</sup> See Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*.
- <sup>965</sup> See Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*.
- <sup>966</sup> Cunard, "Forward," iii.
- <sup>967</sup> Cunard, "Forward," iv.
- <sup>968</sup> Cunard, "Forward," iii.
- <sup>969</sup> Cunard, "Forward," iii.
- <sup>970</sup> Cunard, "Forward," iv.
- <sup>971</sup> Cunard, "Colour Bar," 552.
- <sup>972</sup> Cunard, "Race Prejudice in England," 554-5.
- <sup>973</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 437.
- <sup>974</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 442.
- <sup>975</sup> Cunard, "Colour Bar," 552.
- <sup>976</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446.
- <sup>977</sup> "geography, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/77757](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77757). Accessed 30 July 2019. [ definition 2a.]
- <sup>978</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446.
- <sup>979</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446.
- <sup>980</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446.
- <sup>981</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446.
- <sup>982</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446.
- <sup>983</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446.
- <sup>984</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446.
- <sup>985</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 446-7 .
- <sup>986</sup> Cunard, "Jamaica," 450.
- <sup>987</sup> Brigid Peppin, Jane Beckett, and Deborah Cherry all read the poem as being actually setting a female speaker in a mud bath.
- <sup>988</sup> Saunders ll. 1-6.
- <sup>989</sup> Saunders 1, 3, 5, 6, italics mine.
- <sup>990</sup> Saunders 6-7.
- <sup>991</sup> Saunders ll. 1.
- <sup>992</sup> Saunders ll. 9.
- <sup>993</sup> Saunders 4, 6.
- <sup>994</sup> Saunders 4.
- <sup>995</sup> Saunders 6-7.
- <sup>996</sup> Saunders ll. 4-5.
- <sup>997</sup> Saunders ll. 6.
- <sup>998</sup> Saunders ll. 7.
- <sup>999</sup> Saunders ll. 3.
- <sup>1000</sup> Saunders ll. 3.
- <sup>1001</sup> Saunders ll. 4.
- <sup>1002</sup> Saunders ll. 4-5.
- <sup>1003</sup> Saunders ll. 5.
- <sup>1004</sup> Saunders ll. 4-5.
- <sup>1005</sup> Saunders ll. 21, 24.



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- 1006 Saunders ll. 21, 24.  
1007 Saunders ll. 21.  
1008 Saunders ll. 24.  
1009 Saunders ll. 24, italics mine.  
1010 Peppin agrees that Saunders uses “images relating to front line battle” (15).  
1011 Peppin notes that this was a “gentleman’s agreement” between herself and Lewis out of respect for her “conventional family background” (12).  
1012 Saunders ll. 15-31.  
1013 Saunders ll. 17..  
1014 Saunders ll. 18-19.  
1015 Saunders ll. 18.  
1016 Saunders ll. 19.  
1017 Saunders ll. 20.  
1018 Saunders ll. 20.  
1019 Saunders ll. 20.  
1020 Saunders ll. 20.  
1021 Saunders ll. 18.  
1022 Kate McLoughlin 228-9.  
1023 Saunders ll. 22-3.  
1024 Saunders ll. 22.  
1025 Saunders ll. 22.  
1026 Saunders ll. 22. Typically leveled at those of Chinese descent, the term is sometimes extended to other east Asian populations as well. See: "Chink, n.5." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/31779](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31779). Accessed 11 December 2018.  
1027 Saunders ll. 22.  
1028 Saunders ll. 22-3.  
1029 Saunders ll. 23.  
1030 Saunders ll. 24.  
1031 Saunders ll. 25.  
1032 Saunders ll. 25..  
1033 Saunders ll. 19-20.).  
1034 Saunders ll. 26.  
1035 Saunders ll. 26.  
1036 Saunders ll. 28.  
1037 Saunders ll. 28.  
1038 Saunders ll. 28.  
1039 Saunders ll. 29.  
1040 Saunders ll. 2.  
1041 Saunders ll. 6.  
1042 Saunders ll. 29.  
1043 Saunders ll. 25, 26, 43.  
1044 Saunders ll. 29.  
1045 Saunders ll. 30.  
1046 Saunders ll. 29.  
1047 Saunders ll. 30-31.  
1048 Saunders ll. 30.  
1049 Saunders ll. 31.  
1050 Saunders ll. 31.  
1051 Saunders ll. 31.  
1052 Saunders ll. 31.  
1053 Saunders ll. 35-7.  
1054 Saunders ll. 26.  
1055 Saunders ll. 35-44.  
1056 Saunders ll. 38, 45, 47.  
1057 Saunders ll. 39-44, 46, 48-51..  
1058 Saunders ll. 37.

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- <sup>1059</sup> Saunders ll. 36.  
<sup>1060</sup> Saunders ll. 35.  
<sup>1061</sup> Saunders ll. 36.  
<sup>1062</sup> Saunders ll. 4.  
<sup>1063</sup> Saunders ll. 6.  
<sup>1064</sup> Saunders ll. 6.  
<sup>1065</sup> Saunders ll. 18, 19, 20, 22.  
<sup>1066</sup> Saunders ll. 23, 29, 30.  
<sup>1067</sup> Saunders ll. 35, 36.  
<sup>1068</sup> Saunders ll. 39, 38.  
<sup>1069</sup> Saunders ll. 39.  
<sup>1070</sup> Saunders ll. 39, 38..  
<sup>1071</sup> Saunders ll. 39, 40.  
<sup>1072</sup> Saunders ll. 40.  
<sup>1073</sup> Saunders ll. 40.  
<sup>1074</sup> Saunders ll. 41.  
<sup>1075</sup> Saunders ll. 41.  
<sup>1076</sup> Saunders ll. 41.  
<sup>1077</sup> See Elizabeth Outka's *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.  
<sup>1078</sup> "1918 Pandemic (H1N1 Virus)." *Centers for Disease Control*. Accessed July 19, 2020.  
[<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>].  
<sup>1079</sup> "COVID-19 Map." *Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center*. Accessed August 12, 2020.  
[<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>].  
<sup>1080</sup> Others have begun to discuss such connections between the pandemic and climate change as well. For example, see: Marina Koren's "The Pandemic is Turning the Natural World Upside Down," *The Atlantic*, April 2, 2020. [<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2020/04/coronavirus-pandemic-earth-pollution-noise/609316/>]; Ibrahim Al Hussein's "Climate Change is Only Going to Make Health Crises Like Coronavirus More Frequent and Worse," *Business Insider*, April 5, 2020, [<https://www.businessinsider.com/climate-change-making-health-crises-like-coronavirus-frequent-worse-2020-4>]; Reynard Loki's "Saving People From Coronavirus Can Teach Us How To Do the Same for Climate Change," *Common Dreams*, April 6, 2020, [<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2020/04/06/saving-people-coronavirus-can-teach-us-how-do-same-climate-change>]; and Megan Crist's "What the Pandemic Means for Climate Change," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2020, [<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/opinion/sunday/coronavirus-climate-change.html>].  
<sup>1081</sup> Zylinska, Joanna. *Exit Man*. 2017. [<https://vimeo.com/203887003>]; Zylinska, Joanna. *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.  
<sup>1082</sup> Zylinska, *Exit Man*, minute 1:08.  
<sup>1083</sup> Quoted in Trudi Tate 12.  
<sup>1084</sup> Fressoz and Bonneuil 79.