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Performing to Reclaim: War Trauma and Female Non-Combatant Recovery in Sylvia Townsend Warner, Virginia Woolf, and H.D.

Rita Allison Kondrath

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PERFORMING TO RECLAIM:
WAR TRAUMA AND FEMALE NON-COMBATANT RECOVERY IN
SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER, VIRGINIA WOOLF, AND H.D.

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and
Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Rita Allison Kondrath

May 2010

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ABSTRACT

PERFORMING TO RECLAIM:
WAR TRAUMA AND FEMALE NON-COMBATANT RECOVERY IN
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By

Rita Allison Kondrath

May 2010

Dissertation supervised by Laura Callanan, Ph.D.

This dissertation examines narrative representations of female non-combatant identity authored by Sylvia Townsend Warner, Virginia Woolf, and H.D. between 1916 and 1955, a historical moment consonant with World War I, the interwar era, World War II, and its aftermath. Their depictions of the material reality of war and its devastating impact on selfhood span the genres of the diary, essay, long poem, and novel. I argue that each text forwards a specifically feminist approach to recovery, which manifests in three ways. First, as experimental texts, these works embrace (and mirror) the shattering effects of trauma and loss sustained by non-combatant women, and thereby portray female identity as narrative. Recovery thus entails that the non-combatant acknowledge and integrate the experience of war and identity trauma into her narrative, and redefine self in a way that does not merely replicate her prewar identity. Second, such self-

(re)definition occurs through the performative exercise of multiple subjectivity. Put differently, non-combatant women remake self by entering into postwar roles rooted in the intellect, political involvement, artistry, or multiple sexualities. Finally, narrative recovery is emblematic of the authors' collective aim to renounce the restrictive influence of patriarchal ideology upon womanhood. By exercising autonomy, woman equips herself to withstand future disruptions to her reemerging narrative.

With the exception of the chapter on Woolf—which approaches *Between the Acts* (1941) as a return to the exploration of female recovery in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)—this dissertation examines non-canonical texts, tracing shifts in representations of female non-combatant subjectivity throughout the career of each writer. My discussion of Warner includes an essay detailing her employment in a munitions factory (1916); *Opus 7* (1927), a long poem featuring a protagonist whose attempts at recovery are tragically flawed; and *Summer Will Show* (1936), a novel that attributes female autonomy to political involvement and alternative sexuality. Finally, my work on H.D. considers the development of an increasingly transparent autobiographical subject in *Within the Walls* (1941), *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (1946-47), and her unpublished diary-memoir, *Compassionate Friendship* (1955), in which H.D. reflects upon her own experiences of war, writing, illness, and loss.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Fred and Martina Allison, to whom, and for whom, I will always be grateful.

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This project originated in Spring 2003, when my then would-be Dissertation Director, Laura Callanan, first described her work in trauma studies to a group of graduate students, of which I was a part. I have her to thank not only for the invaluable insight, guidance, and enthusiasm that has fueled the composition and completion of my dissertation, but for introducing me in the first place to the vibrant and emerging fields of trauma and recovery, and encouraging me to find my niche in them—even if that didn't turn out to be a Victorian one!

Along with Laura, my readers, Linda Kinnahan, Judy Suh, and Laura Engel, empowered me to independently define the literary and theoretical roots of this project, from the exam process, to the delineation of my topic, and through the stages of research, writing, and especially revision. The impeccably precise feedback I have received from my committee has been tremendously helpful in clarifying my ideas about the writers I study, and the evolving concepts of female non-combatant identity and recovery. In distinct ways, each member of my committee is to me an exemplar of scholarship and teaching. Their passion for their work has and continues to inspire my own.

I have also to thank the Department of English and its faculty for their support during my tenure as a graduate student. I am grateful to the Department for awarding me a Dissertation Fellowship, during which time I wrote the Warner chapter, and did a great deal of reading about H.D. and Woolf that refined my focus. Dr. Magali Michael, Chair, and Dr. Greg Barnhisel, Director of First Year Writing, have been steadfast purveyors of support and advice pertaining to teaching and the profession. I am especially indebted to

Dr. Michael for offering me an opportunity to temporarily join the faculty as a Lecturer. Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Dan Watkins, whose confidence in me influenced my decision to apply to graduate programs in English.

I have had the privilege to teach and study alongside many gifted, driven, and thoughtful graduate students at Duquesne. They made working in the Graduate Office a delight, and each has shaped my scholarship and teaching. Some of them are: Julie Kloo, Jenny Bangsund, Jessica Jost-Costanzo, Rich Clark, Tim Ruppert, Claire Barbetti, Erin Rentschler, and Justin Kishbaugh. I treasure my friendships with Kristianne Vaccaro, Heather Cianciola, and Amy Phillips. I marvel at the graceful way that they each balance life and work. Finally, my dear friend, Amanda Johnson, helped me to find hilarity in the mundane, made the tough parts bearable, and the rest So Much Fun. Our mantras are words I live by.

I am fortunate as well to come from a family that prides itself on a strong work ethic, and they inspired my ability to complete this dissertation. My younger sister, Laura Allison, is a perfect blend of forthrightness and dependability: she tells me how it is and how it's going to be, and never lets me down. I am in awe of the selfless service to the United States Air Force and Army, given by my brother, Patrick Allison, and my cousin, Tom Hammond, respectively. My interest in female non-combatant subjectivity is in part an attempt to understand the true challenge of their work and depth of their sacrifice.

To this list I must also add those who have always shown an interest in my pursuits, and never questioned my ability to finish this project. They have kept me grounded, and I have been blessed by their faith in me. Many thanks go to: Melissa

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Introduction

Narrating Trauma, Performing Selves

So cruel. I don't know what's going to happen now, I really don't. It seems all up. You don't know what to do for the best. I don't know whether to send my children away, or not. I'll never see them again if I send them abroad. I don't know whether to apply for a shelter or not. I think perhaps I ought to join the ARP [Air Raid Precautions]; then I think I've got my duty to the home first. Oh dear, I wish there was somebody who would come round to all the houses and discuss our problems with us. I wish I had someone to discuss it with.

--A housewife, aged 50¹

Recorded in 1940, and commensurate with the escalation of the Second World War, this statement registers the overwhelming anxiety and uncertainty that comes to define female non-combatant experience in the twentieth century. Its most disturbing element, however, transcends its repeated emphasis upon the disabling uncertainty that plagues this woman. For what she identifies as “cruel” is not merely her inability to know what the future holds, or how best to respond—but her belief that she has no one to turn to, no one to listen to her concerns, or to validate her fears. Most of all, the profound responsibility she feels for her children, evident in her tacit privileging of their safety before her own, registers her despair as a hallmark of non-combatant identity.

¹ Priscilla Feare, “M-O Report No. 520: Women and Morale, December 1940,” in *Wartime Women: An Anthology of Women's Wartime Writing for Mass-Observation 1937-45*, ed. Dorothy Sheridan. (London: Mandarin, 1991. 117).

Such despair—its roots, manifestations, and effects—is an issue that pervades the work of Modernist women writing on either side of the Atlantic. This dissertation examines depictions of female non-combatant subjectivity throughout the works of Sylvia Townsend Warner, Virginia Woolf, and H.D., and elucidates the ways that each wrestles with war, and particularly the ensuing upheaval of selfhood brought about by World Wars I and II, in her writing. Collectively, the hybrid literary texts each authors from 1916 to 1955 artfully blend the conventions of the novel and long poem, as well as the diary and memoir, and exhibit a shared endeavor to textually represent the intensifying impact of world war upon female identity. In so doing, I illustrate how these texts enact the therapeutic capacity of writing, as they engender a specifically feminist approach to non-combatant recovery. Julia Kristeva affirms this transformative capacity: “Literary representation is not only an elaboration; rather it possesses a real and imaginary effectiveness that comes closer to catharsis than to elaboration—it is the therapeutic device used in all societies throughout the ages” (Kristeva 24). By considering an array of texts composed throughout each author’s respective career, I posit that their textual portrayals of the shifting category of non-combatant subjectivity—often, but not exclusively fictional—testify to woman’s traumatic experience of war and its repercussions. More importantly, however, these testimonies are emblematic of the authors’ collective aim to employ narrative as a mode to facilitate individual and cultural catharsis from the traumas of war in the twentieth-century.

As the discussion that follows will explain, the decidedly feminist approach to recovery forwarded throughout the literary oeuvres of Warner, Woolf, and H.D. materializes in several ways, the amalgamation of which becomes the theoretical

apparatus for this project. My opening claim is that varied representations of womanhood throughout the works examined posit individual identity as a narrative—disrupted, and in some cases shattered by, trauma—but one that can be remade through performance. To expound this claim, I suggest that these performances enact a multiple subjectivity ascribed to the non-combatant, which compels her to acknowledge her individuality as comprised of a complex set of roles. These roles traverse the following categories: from the domestic and maternal, to the professional and political, as well as the areas of religion, sexuality, and artistry. This study ultimately contends that these performances facilitate the non-combatant's remaking of self, and in this way mirror the clinical approach to recovery that deems it an ongoing process. Principally, I argue that the link between performance and recovery developed throughout the works of Warner, Woolf, and H.D. evinces individual as well as political aims, insofar as their textual representations of individual recovery implicitly remake the cultural category of womanhood as well, distancing it from patriarchal ideals that occlude female autonomy, and render women dangerously susceptible to the psychological turmoil of war, and its traumatic aftermath.

Thus, my dissertation regards narrative as an artistic, performative practice, whose creation constitutes a viable form and strategy by which non-combatant women reclaim autonomy, and empower themselves to continually reconceptualize and reinvent self. Rather than attempting to reconcile the aforementioned facets of individuality into a single, unified narrative, Warner, Woolf, and H.D. alternatively represent female non-combatant recovery as a process that responds to the shattering effects of war by portraying womanhood as a rich multiplicity. In these ways, their works give voice to

heretofore culturally-silenced narratives of women's wartime experiences, which itself magnifies the call for increased cultural discourse concerning non-combatant trauma.

I. Women's Twentieth-Century Wartime Experiences

Because women did not actively participate in combat during World Wars I and II, and despite the noteworthy contributions they made to the war effort—as evinced by Warner's work in a munitions factory, and her subsequent tenure as an ambulance driver—the trauma that women endured as a result of war in the twentieth century necessitates a consideration altogether distinct from that sustained by their male counterparts on the front lines. Given that it inflicts “wounds” that are largely psychological and emotional in nature, non-combatant trauma remains invisible, and is therefore overlooked in social and clinical discourses pertaining to war and recovery. Its cataclysmic impact continues throughout both wars. To illustrate, Georgina Taylor catalogues a disturbing series of nervous breakdowns sustained by Modernist women writers alone: “Elizabeth Bishop suffered serious depression in 1931; In 1931 and 1933 Louise Bogan had a serious breakdown...Sara Teasdale committed suicide in 1933; Woolf committed suicide in 1941; Millay had a breakdown at the end of the war; Anna Wickham committed suicide in 1947. H.D. also had a major breakdown in 1934...” (Taylor 158). By including American as well as British writers in this list, Taylor illustrates the crippling effect that the consciousness of war can have upon non-combatants. Given the subjective underpinnings of traumatic experience, however, not all of these women would have experienced war in the same way; and, living on opposite sides of the Atlantic, certainly not to the same degree. Still, with respect to this study, it bears noting that both H.D. and Woolf resided in London during the Second World War;

and therefore, each endured continuous bombings and air-raids, and witnessed first-hand the colossal destruction left in the wake of war.

Rather than attempting, in a clinical sense, to name any particular type of trauma, this dissertation regards war as a catalyst that incites latent *identity traumas*. These identity traumas punctuate the respective biographies of the authors examined, such as Woolf's well-documented experiences of childhood sexual abuse, and H.D.'s stillbirth and abortion. Both also suffered a series of nervous breakdowns.² Common to the work of all three writers is the textual negotiation of traumatic loss, and the attempt to bear witness to the atrocity of war. H.D.'s vivid accounts of life in London during World War II attest as well to the depth of psychological and physical terror sustained by non-combatant women. Eclipsing the casualties of war, and the horror of living through it, identity trauma also ensues more generally at wartime with regard to the disruption of roles, duties, and rituals familiar to non-combatant women, even if they emanate from a cultural narrative that sabotages her individuality. Thus, what I term, "identity trauma," constitutes a set of emotionally destabilizing experiences that mark non-combatant trauma as an intensely personal, subjective experience,³ although one endured by many women at this historical moment.

² These breakdowns, coupled with the catalogue quoted from Georgina Taylor, allude quite specifically to the clinical evolution of hysteria in the 19th century. "Thought to be a disease proper to women and originating in the uterus," hysteria was first studied in France in the 1870s by Jean Martin-Charcot, and by the mid 1890s, Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet had taken a vested interest in the condition. Referring to all three men, however, Judith Herman remarks, "While these men of science saw themselves as benevolent rescuers, uplifting women from their degraded condition, they never for a moment envisioned a condition of social equality between women and men. Women were to be the objects of study and humane care, not subjects in their own right" (Herman 10,16). For more on hysteria as a precursor to twentieth-century discourse pertaining to women and trauma, consult Chapter 1 of Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*. For a comprehensive history, consult *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, edited by Mark Micale and Paul Lerner (2001).

³ Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler legitimize this notion as a cornerstone of trauma itself: "Just as the experience of physical pain may manifest differently in different subjects, the pathogenic traumatic experience of one person is an interpretive construct that may not be shared by another, even in identical

As such, the approaches to representation put forward by Warner, Woolf, and H.D. are distinct from those applicable to the context of veteran trauma; and this distinction intensifies the feminist underpinnings of their writing about war. As Margaret Higonnet explains, however, governing hegemonic structures silence these perspectives, in favor of giving voice, and credibility, to male accounts:

By the end of the war [WWI], therefore, trauma had joined brotherhood and disillusionment as hallmarks of the war experience and of the war narrative. In spite of underlying ambiguities, the gendering of war entailed a gendering of trauma, and trauma became a privileged, masculine form of testimony about the complex meaning of war, a status it retains among historians and critics today. (Higonnet 94)

In light of these separate, gendered connotations, traumatic experience as articulated by the Modernist women writers surveyed here does not constitute a rite of passage, but, to the contrary, registers “the force of an experience not fully owned” (Caruth 151). Thus, beyond war trauma, throughout the mid-twentieth century, women also found themselves at the junction between what Sharon Ouditt has termed, “...the allure of a fixed, feminine identity” and “...the necessity of social change” (Ouditt 2). Given that first wave feminism had been well underway prior to the start of the First World War, it is important to note that the war was not the sole catalyst to the cultural destabilization of womanhood; however, the scale and intensity of World War I certainly fuel “the necessity of social change,” which subsequently repositions woman outside the home.

Experimental in form, the novels, poem, and diary-memoirs I examine proffer a discursive model to acknowledge and mitigate this opposition. As Warner’s essay about her experiences as a munitions laborer details, the dire necessity of their contribution

situations” (Douglass and Vogler 10). Insofar as traumatic experience constitutes an “interpretive construct,” together, the literary texts examined here enact interpretive strategies that stress the therapeutic capacity of writing, and attest to cultural silencing as a perpetuation, not an antidote, to non-combatant war and identity traumas.

afforded women little preparation for their increasingly public roles. As such, they lacked a useful interpretive frame through which to reconcile their former, domestic roles with their complicity in death and destruction. Warner's account thus conflates wartime labor with domestic responsibility in more than one instance: "most women have known days when the sewing-machine was in a nasty temper," and later notes, "The work of a shell-machinist has an obliterating effect on one's sense of individuality" ("Behind" 193, 96). Both of these remarks call attention to the nuances of the erosion of "a fixed, feminine identity," particularly as delineated by domesticity and motherhood. Surviving war on the home front meant that women had to find practical ways of re-conceptualizing their identities in light of these unprecedented roles. Ouditt traces several key social and political origins of this paradox:

One [role] involved helping to win the war and implied a radical but temporary release from normal activity; another involved seeking equality with men, which meant rejecting essentialist definitions of womanhood or women's sphere; another involved the rejection of war as a means of conflict resolution and saw it as a symptom of a degraded social system that relied on the structural subordination of women, the working classes and small nations. The drama of permanence versus change, [is] implicit in all these positions... (Ouditt 5-6)

Given that patriarchal domination underlies many, if not all, of the tensions Ouditt articulates, my methodology departs from formulaic and impersonal approaches to addressing war trauma that erroneously seek to restore woman to her pre-trauma self. In their refusal to equate recovery with repair, Warner, Woolf, and H.D. disarticulate patriarchal structures of thought, and instead posit recovery as a process that not only assuages the damaging psychological effects of war, but also enables the female non-combatant to forge a meaningful and sustainable postwar identity.

II. Narrative Self-Representation

In order to emphasize process as central to this feminist revisioning of recovery, I approach each text not as a trauma narrative, but as a narrative of a reemerging self in the aftermath of war. As Susan Brison explains, “By constructing and telling a narrative of the trauma endured, and with the help of understanding listeners, the survivor begins not only to integrate the traumatic episode into a life with a before and an after, but also to gain control over the occurrence of intrusive memories” (Brison 53-4). Consistent with Elin Diamond’s definition of performance as, “a doing and a thing done” (Diamond 1), this claim denotes narrative as a performative act, for it is a story to be told (or textually re-enacted) time and again, whose telling implicitly acknowledges the “before” and “after” to which Brison refers. While I will expound upon the connections between narrative performance and recovery in the section that follows, this discussion establishes narrative representation as a strategy that effectively facilitates individual self-redefinition.

In the context of the gender politics of the Modernist era, the concept of the non-combatant’s “narrative of self” becomes a moniker of her many facets of being, a testimony to the fact that she does not exist simply in the service of a single role, which as patriarchal ideology would have it, circumscribes her identity (and self-worth) within the frameworks of childbearing, childrearing, and homemaking. I argue instead that Warner, Woolf, and H.D. map female identity as comprised of disparate, competing strands, that more fully encompass the entirety of her inherited narratives—such as ethnicity, and perhaps religion; alongside those that attest to her individuality, particularly concerning the assertion of self through her profession, political ideals, and

artistry. Remaking self in the wake of war entails that the non-combatant acknowledge and exact these components of identity in order to cultivate a viable and sustainable narrative.

Yet as “the force of an experience not yet known,” the shattering psychological effects of trauma jeopardize, if they do not altogether compromise, woman’s ability to recognize these nuances of her identity. Therefore, much of what we understand as a “narrative representation of trauma” in fact consists on one hand of an attempt to give voice to an experience that seems to resist articulation, and on the other to understand self, in and apart from trauma, through the disrupted temporalities of past, present, and future. Ann Banfield posits the act of externalizing the experience as one that enacts subjectivity:

...to narrate in speech is to tell someone something which happened; to represent subjectivity is to express it—subjectivity is ‘pressed out,’ betrayed, made public, i.e., conveyed to another...Just as it is narration which knows what happened, so it is the language of represented consciousness which knows as its subject knows. Event and subjectivity become reified as narration or history and represented consciousness. (Banfield 528)

Through this “represented consciousness”—made possible through performative utterances in speech, text, or otherwise—the individual transcends her traumatic past and lays claim to a future that exceeds it. Dominick La Capra writes, “Narrative at best helps one not to change the past through a dubious rewriting of history, but to work through post-traumatic symptoms in the present in a manner that opens possible futures” (LaCapra *History* 121-22). Thus, through the act of narrative (or textual) representation, Warner, Woolf, and H.D. represent war through the lens of female non-combatant subjectivity, as well as the selves that reemerge in its aftermath.

Yet that they do so primarily through fiction—or in other genres, through a fictional speaker—forges a notable distance between the speaking “I” of the account, and the author herself. This distance is vital to the act of externalizing traumatic experience, for allows the consciousness of the speaking subject to materialize, often as a fictional embodiment; and at the same time, its necessity attests to the manifold (psychological, emotional) resonance of the experience itself. LaCapra asserts:

Fiction, if it makes historical truth claims at all, does so in a more indirect but still possibly informative, thought-provoking, at times disconcerting manner with respect to the understanding of ‘reading’ of events, experience, and memory. Especially in the recent past, fiction may well explore the traumatic, including the fragmentation, emptiness, or evacuation of experience, and may raise the question of other possible forms of experience. It may also explore in a particularly telling and unsettling way the affective or emotional dimensions of experience and understanding. (LaCapra *History* 132)

Beyond giving credence to fiction as a useful and compelling mode of representing trauma, LaCapra expounds its capacity to delve well beyond the ephemeral level of fact or content, to explore the psychological and emotional depth of trauma, which the victim is most likely to repress. Moreover, his suggestion that fiction may give rise to “the affective and emotional dimensions of experience” alludes as well to the likelihood that the account narrated as fiction will resonate with the reader or audience, somewhat ironically eliciting the very validation and empathy that fact-based accounts seek at their fore.

The interrelationship of narrative, subjectivity, and trauma, as articulated by Banfield and LaCapra, coupled with the fact that war itself largely remains an absent subject of the literary accounts authored by Warner, Woolf, and H.D., distinguishes their approach to representing war and its aftermath from that of historical record, as well as

male-authored war narratives. For the woman-authored accounts examined here become acts of non-combatant identity reconstruction in the wake of war, whereas their masculine, historical counterparts tend to recount battle and survival as visceral experiences, catalogue staggering casualty rates, and detail the destruction of land, property, and economic vitality. Given this distinction, representations of female non-combatant subjectivity throughout the works of Warner, Woolf, and H.D. portray identity as a narrative, whose remaking becomes an individual, artistic endeavor.

My project accordingly conceptualizes this reemerging narrative as a figurative body, continually subject to and influenced by forces beyond its boundaries, and endlessly revisable. Therefore, while this study accepts LaCapra's assertion that once trauma occurs, it cannot be changed or healed (LaCapra *History* 119), it redirects it by considering the works of Warner, Woolf, and H.D. as explorations of ways in which the *self* can be healed. Their works enact healing through a layered, or nuanced depiction of the traumatic event that emphasizes its profound resonance. I articulate these nuances as bodies, for neither the memory of trauma, nor its influence on selfhood remains static. Therefore, these bodies—the textual, physical, and psychological—exhibit the seen and unseen dimensions of non-combatant trauma; and, as an organic metaphor, “body” promotes the remaking of selfhood in the aftermath of trauma.

In effect, the narrative of self that the non-combatant claims in and through recovery is informed and perpetuated by the narrative interplay of the three bodies or layers of self-representation. As the site and the mode of recovery, narrative invests the female non-combatant with the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, and is consistent with the authors' shared insistence that womanhood no longer be

circumscribed by the framework of marriage, domesticity, and motherhood. Distinct, yet overlapping, the textual, physical, and psychological bodies enact “the other forms of experience” that LaCapra cites in his earlier-quoted discussion of the correlation between fiction and testimony. Accordingly, only the textual body is tangible; the physical and psychological bodies are necessarily mediated through language.

The first of these layers is the actual, textual body, which exists as a material representation of the author’s artistic mapping of what remains of the self in the wake of trauma. The textual body is a tangible, aesthetic manifestation of a shattered psyche and the attempt to render such fragmentation in a linear, cohesive fashion. Reinforcing the need to re-conceptualize self as multiple subjectivity, textual depictions of non-combatants are often fraught with shifting subject positions, themselves embodiments of the traumatic imprint of latent instability and mounting uncertainty. The narrative silences that occur throughout the textual body bespeak the challenges and limitations of using conventional narrative form to order and externalize trauma. The textual body is the sole mode of access to, and thus the site of the physical and psychological bodies.

The physical body that has endured war trauma comprises the second layer in this paradigm. The physical body magnifies war as a literal experience, and belies the insecurity and vulnerability inherent to non-combatant identity. To illustrate, several of the fictional female figures examined in this study engage in moments of physical self-examination, in mirror scenes and otherwise. These pivotal textual moments manifest notably in the works of Woolf and H.D., for both lived in London during the Second World War, and endured the ongoing threat of bombings and air raids. These mirror scenes mark the collusion of the three bodies by reinforcing the physical as well as the

psychological dimensions of trauma. Beyond self-examination, Brison highlights two additional, common manifestations of this collusion: "...body and mind had become nearly indistinguishable. My mental state (typically, depression) felt physiological, like lead in my veins, while my physical state (frequently, incapacitation by fear and anxiety) was the incarnation of a cognitive and emotional paralysis resulting from shattered assumptions about my safety in the world" (Brison 44). She concedes as well that such intermingling also manifests through traumatic memory, as when one has a physiological response to a psychological memory (44-5). As exhibited by the Modernist narratives examined here, recovery seeks not to undo this collusion, but to externalize it through textual testimony.

Finally, like the physical body, the psychological body is also mediated through language, but is the most abstract of the three, because it is a representation of an intangible entity. Thus, the psychological body exists as an embodiment of the *invisibility* of trauma, and is the site at which the healing achieved through narrative resides. It encapsulates both the newfound sense of self that one claims through recovery, and the self that has been irrevocably altered by the trauma it has endured. The psychological self collapses the temporal boundaries of past and present, former self and new self, and memory and reality, into a narrative identity that exists and functions in the here and now. As the least accessible and most subjective of the three bodies, its survival or perpetuation depends most upon process. Thus, in its abstractness, the psychological body allows for the inevitable shifts associated with self-(re)definition, and enables recovery to continue as an ongoing process.

Together, the three overlapping bodies exhibit the profound impact of war upon the female non-combatant; and, negotiating the traumatic aftermath of war and loss through them marks them as the site at which narrative recovery is initiated and sustained. The notion that bodies are both organic and evolving substantiates prevailing clinical approaches to recovery that insist it continue without end.⁴ Situating the following hypothesis within the discourse of psychoanalysis, Phelan analogously contends, “The legacy of psychoanalysis allows us to see that bodies can be endlessly remade, re-choreographed, outside the traditional architectonics of human reproduction. Psychic health is in part contingent upon the body finding its rhythm in words and time” (Phelan *Mourning* 66). By “endlessly remak[ing]” itself, the narrative body embraces as it facilitates the self-(re)production that is the essence of recovery.

At the same time, that such traumatic effects—which, by definition, resist representation—manifest through the physical, textual, and especially psychological bodies, implicitly attests to the multiple, flexible subjectivity that Warner, Woolf, and H.D. deem crucial to woman’s ability to recreate self in the aftermath of war. Kristeva accounts for the ways in which the body facilitates representation of an ambiguous, albeit emerging self: “Thus the continuum of the body, which is in the process of becoming ‘one’s own and proper body,’ is articulated as an organized discontinuity, exercising a precocious and powerful mastery, flexible yet powerful...” (Kristeva 62). Embracing this ‘organized discontinuity’ in form and content alike, the tri-body metaphor accordingly takes on a slightly different balance in the oeuvre of each writer. Still, that

⁴ Herman explains: “Resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete. The impact of a traumatic event continues to reverberate throughout the survivor’s lifecycle. Issues that were sufficiently resolved at one stage of recovery may be reawakened as the survivor reaches new milestones in her development... Though resolution is never complete, it is often sufficient for the survivor to turn her attention from the tasks of recovery to the tasks of ordinary life” (Herman 211-12).

the surviving self continues to perform physically, textually, and psychologically, and in some cases exceeds these parameters, attests to its viability in the postwar moment.

Finally, without explicitly interpreting each text through a biographical lens, this project locates the literary, textual bodies authored by Warner, Woolf, and H.D. as affirmations of their identity as women, as writers, and as survivors.

III. Performing Multiple Subjectivity

In order to link the tri-body paradigm, which enumerates the complexity of non-combatant trauma, to the rich multiplicity that becomes central to her self-(re)definition, my dissertation cites performance as the mode through which non-combatant figures in the works of Warner, Woolf, and H.D. assert and reclaim a sustainable narrative of self. My methodology therefore posits performance as a gateway to accessing and enacting the myriad components of that narrative identity, and regards them as antidotes to the threats that trauma and patriarchal ideology pose to its survival. The theoretical overview provided here positions the process of female non-combatant recovery as imagined by these Modernist women writers, at the intersection of narrative, performance, and subjectivity.

To begin, Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson approach the individual as a “performing body” to emphasize the extent to which performance fuels and strengthens the viability of the self that gradually reemerges throughout recovery. They argue, “The body, (as a corporeal enactment of the subject) is known and experienced through its representational performances” (Jones and Stephenson 8). Through the three bodies detailed above, my project broadens “body” from the physical (as they articulate it here) to position the psyche and the text as bodies similarly capable of experiencing and

mitigating trauma. In essence, all three bodies—physical, textual, and psychological--constitute representative “enactments of the subject.” As separate, yet related sites of enactment, the bodies likewise facilitate the multiple subjectivity that is the cornerstone of the non-combatant’s recovered narrative.

Thus, as discussed in the previous section, at the core of my argument lays the notion that narrative itself constitutes a performative practice, a premise well documented in the work of Elin Diamond. In addition to defining performance as “always a doing and a thing done,” Diamond stresses that it is interminably unfolding, for, “To study performance is not to focus on completed forms, but to become aware of performance itself as a contested space, where meanings and desires are generated, occluded, and of course multiply interpreted” (Diamond 1, 4). In light of these working definitions, performances are thus not only necessarily incomplete, but harbor an implicit therapeutic capacity, for their viability need not rest upon singular meaning. With respect to the texts examined here, performance affords the non-combatant the versatility to enact a shattered narrative, and gradually enables her to see herself as more resilient and less vulnerable, which in turn facilitates her ability to revise and strengthen her sense of self in the postwar moment.

Moreover, as a theoretical frame, performance reinforces the notion that “enactments of the subject” are, fundamentally, acts of externalization: and therefore, performance becomes a vehicle through which the female non-combatant makes known the fragmenting impact of war and identity trauma. To this end, Geoffrey Hartman has written, “Literary verbalization, [of trauma] however, still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible” (Hartman 259). Yet because *women’s*

traumatic experiences of war are imminently susceptible to cultural-silencing, the presence of a witness, or an (unnamed) audience, listener, or reader, proves crucial to the production and preservation of that narrative.

As experimental writers, Warner, Woolf, and H.D. craft witnesses in varied, and sometimes elusive ways throughout their work. For example, my discussions of Warner and Woolf respectively cite diary entries as textual spaces in which each posits her self as audience, effectively collapsing victim and witness into a single subjectivity. Yet their fictional works, and Warner's long poem, regard the reader (and in some sense the protagonists' encounters with other fictional characters) as witnesses to the multitudinous impact of war upon an array of non-combatant subjectivities. Finally, H.D.'s work in the novel as well as her diary-memoir, colludes self with its fictional embodiment as a mode of externalizing the traumatic aftermath of war. Thus, as Holocaust survivor and psychoanalyst Dori Laub asserts, testifying to a witness—regardless of whether that testimony occurs in verbal or written form (or otherwise)—functions as a dynamic, and ultimately performative act. He writes:

In my experience, repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which one has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation. The event must be reclaimed because even if successfully repressed, it nevertheless invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one's life. (Laub 70)

This approach to testimony effectively bridges the concepts of performance, narrative, and recovery in several ways. First, through terminology that conveys progression, such as, "action," "change," "pass through," and "continue," Laub not only positions narrative representation (of the traumatic event *and* of the reemerging self) as the lifeblood of recovery, but echoes the essence of Diamond's definition of performance as "always a

doing and a thing done.” As Laub figures it, witnessing is thus not merely a performative act, but also a transformative one, that enables the victim to resituate her sense of self beyond the present. Through the act of bearing witness, the non-combatant can performatively re-script her identity as a narrative, whose ending has yet to be written or realized. By continually working to script and re-script her narrative of self through the textual, physical, and psychological bodies, the traumatized non-combatant initiates and sustains her recovery.

IV. Multiple Subjectivity as Feminist Recovery

As established to this point, one of the central claims of this project is that multiple subjectivity, achieved through narrative, and sustained through performance, characterizes literary representations of female non-combatant identity authored by Warner, Woolf, and H.D alike. However, elaboration of the ways in which such multiplicity, ascribed to the non-combatant, enables a specifically feminist approach to recovery is warranted. This section accordingly draws upon the theoretical discourses of literature and performance, as well the clinical discourse of trauma and recovery, to explicate the gendered components of the approaches to remaking selfhood proffered by Warner, Woolf, and H.D.

To begin, the concept of the “auto-reproductive body,” articulated by performance theorist, Peggy Phelan, clarifies how the bodies described earlier—textual, physical, and psychological—not only materialize in narrative form, but themselves evince multiple subjectivity. Phelan denotes the exercise of multiple subjectivity as an inherently performative endeavor, asserting that “the cumulative weight of these performances” allows the victim to mark her body as auto-reproductive (Phelan 63). This notion of

reproduction evokes the exclusively feminist underpinnings of Phelan's hypothesis. She argues that as an inherently feminine construct, the auto-reproductive body exists "outside the discursive frame of the always already 'masculine'" mode of representation (64). In destabilizing the cultural ideals that implicitly and exclusively link masculinity with action, the auto-reproductive body carves out a space for woman's assertion of self. To this end, that woman "marks" her body as auto-reproductive, enacts the kind of empowering autonomy that Herman considers crucial to sustaining recovery. She writes, "The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery" (Herman 133).

Moreover, that these auto-reproductive bodies materialize overtly (and almost exclusively) through characters designated as fictional, reinforces narrative as a useful forum through which these women writers stage female postwar autonomy and assign autonomy to the fictional non-combatant women through whom they conceptualize feminist recovery. Although critic Helene Moglen's work speaks to fiction as a genre, her claim that, "Fictions *perform* their experiences of multiplicity, ambiguity, and contradiction in ways that enable identification" (Moglen 146), nonetheless implies that fictional characters—in this case, created by Warner, Woolf, and H.D. across genres—become enactments of the kind of elusive, flexible subjectivity that these writers deemed essential to non-combatant recovery in the postwar moment.

In this vein, literary and clinical discourses alike have questioned the viability of this multiple subjectivity, specifically considering the extent to which such a diverse concept of self prepares or precludes the individual from responding effectively to further disruptions to her narrative identity. Interestingly, both concede to its positive outcomes.

For example, critic Victoria Stewart appropriates subjectivity itself as “a series of improvisations in the face of changing circumstances” (Stewart 169), reminding us that change itself (here, necessitated by two world wars) is the catalyst that necessitates such multiplicity in the first place. Janice Haaken situates this issue within the victim’s ongoing task of representing (traumatic) memory, and argues that such recounting authorizes, as it relies upon, the exercise of multiplicity. She writes, “The truth of memory may thus lie less in its factual content than in its narrative structure of shifting plots and subplots and of changing subject positions that emerge out of the landscape of memory” (Haaken 16). Through the metaphor of a “shifting...landscape,” Haaken highlights the notion that as it progresses, recovery becomes less about representing or working through the traumatic event itself; instead, the victim’s task increasingly entails negotiating selfhood in a manner that acknowledges the impact of trauma upon her narrative, but rejects its impulse to overtake her.

Thus, narrative representations of female non-combatant postwar identity authored by Warner, Woolf, and H.D., exhibit woman’s ability to performatively integrate various strands of her identity, placed into conflict by war trauma, as well as patriarchal ideology. Each writer examined in this study takes a distinct approach to mapping this multiplicity; and (re)presents it differently over the course of her career. For this reason, the texts discussed here reflect the following three trends in “war writing” authored by Modernist women: first, they elicit notable shifts in individual consciousness with respect to whether they were written during “wartime” or the “interwar” period. Second, because the texts surveyed were published at varying points in each author’s career, they elicit the evolution of her commitment to negotiating the oft-

invisible impact of war upon women as individuals, and womanhood as a collective. And third, with the exception of the chapter on Virginia Woolf, my dissertation examines lesser-known (and in one case, unpublished) text(s), in order to demonstrate that these authors' respective pursuits of self are not confined to her major works; rather, it traverses their respective oeuvres. Although these portrayals develop across an array of literary genres, all embody the collusion of narrative, performance, and subjectivity, and regard it integral to individual postwar recovery.

Chapter 1, ““She is more living, more real, than I am myself”: Female Interwar Subjectivities in Sylvia Townsend Warner” opens with an analysis of a 1916 essay in which Warner anonymously details her experience as a munitions worker, and harshly critiques the factory system. The essay exposes war as a disruption to outmoded Victorian ideals of womanhood; and its thematic tension—domestic roles versus war labor—gives way to other paradigms that exhibit Warner's ongoing negotiation of the shifting category of female non-combatant identity in the interwar period. In sum, these include economic independence versus traumatic loss in the long poem, *Opus 7* (1926); and marriage and motherhood versus lesbianism and political activism in the novel, *Summer Will Show* (1931). Through these paradigms, my argument traces a noteworthy progression among Warner's consideration of the numerous social forces that preclude efforts at recovery forged by female non-combatant figures. For example, Rebecca Random of *Opus 7* functions as a re-appropriation of the absent subjectivity of the essay, “Behind the Firing Line,” but her failed recovery is a preamble to Warner's subsequent delineation of the terms of securing individual agency in *Summer Will Show*. Its protagonist, Sophia Willoughby becomes the clearest articulation of sustainable selfhood

procured through performance, a journey realistically punctuated by a series of traumatic losses.

To foreground that the inevitable advent of World War II only exacerbates the interwar tensions cited throughout Warner's oeuvre, Chapter 2, "'We Act Different Parts But Are the Same': Interwar Performance in *Between the Acts* and *Mrs. Dalloway*" elicits the larger evolution of women writers' artistic engagement with the impact of war on female subjectivity. The insularity that plagues Warner's protagonists recurs in Woolf, yet is negotiated through Woolf's more forthright insistence upon multiple subjectivity as integral to female postwar identity. Through its examination of the central female figures in both novels, the chapter attributes the plausibility of securing a sustainable postwar narrative to the performative exercise of this flexible subjectivity. For example, I contend that the characters Lucy Swithin and Mrs. Manresa of *Between the Acts* are ultimately imprisoned by their singularity, and therefore harbor little potential to adapt to the cultural shifts incited by war. However, I show that the novel invests its artist-figures, Isa Oliver and Miss La Trobe, with distinct capacities for survival, dependent upon their ability to *exercise* this plurality.

My analysis of Woolf's final novel brackets my discussion of *Mrs. Dalloway*, whose protagonist, I argue, counters her psychic insularity by continually re-examining her most formative relationships—specifically her bonds with Peter Walsh and Sally Seton—that enable her to work through the competing strands of her identity. Although they seem utterly irreconcilable to her, she sustains them through performance. As a precursor to *Between the Acts*, Clarissa's inability to relinquish or privilege a single facet

over the others attests to the inherent multiplicity of female identity in this historical moment.

My third and final chapter, ““You have seen for yourself”: Subjectivity, Recovery, and Identity in H.D.’s *Within the Walls*, *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (*Synthesis of a Dream*), and *Compassionate Friendship*,” presents these lesser-known texts as testimonies to the horrors of war conveyed exclusively from the female non-combatant perspective. Of the three authors examined in this study, H.D. most boldly experiments with the transparency of the speaking “I,” as evinced by the influence of her biography upon these texts; and for this reason, it becomes an indicator of the progression of H.D.’s own recovery from war and identity trauma. Accordingly, the chapter considers her fictional protagonists as performative embodiments of H.D. herself, and asserts that they enable her to eclipse the subjective limitations of the conventional trauma narrative. I chart the increasing transparency of the speaking “I” thus: *Within the Walls* and *Sword* respectively depict the literal onslaught of World War II, and the ensuing loss of self unique to female non-combatant experience, yet do so through a fictional construct who closely parallels, but does not mirror H.D. As the postwar era materializes, and she recuperates from a nervous breakdown, H.D. composes *Compassionate Friendship*, wherein the “I” should be read transparently, as she openly reflects upon her experiences of war, loss, writing, and illness.

This dissertation contends that as an artistic, experimental practice, narrative constitutes a viable method of reclaiming selfhood, for it responds to the profound psychological instability brought about by war by refiguring female identity as a complex constellation, perpetually subject to revision. The notion that the non-combatant figures

in these texts might be read, to varying degrees, as fictional embodiments of their respective authors secures my implicit assertion that the process of writing itself constitutes a performative act that enables one to forge and sustain self in the aftermath of war.

Chapter 1

‘She is more living, more real, than I am myself’: Female Interwar Subjectivities in Sylvia Townsend Warner

Regardless of her choice of genre, Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote not only with the aim of expressing self, but also as a means of locating self. As we find in the work of both Virginia Woolf and H.D., Warner’s writings across the essay, the long poem, and the novel, become a mode of externalizing and systematizing her disparate experiences of war on the home front. Although war is very rarely figured as identifiable or literal subject matter in her published works⁵, it nonetheless bears upon Warner’s writing in ways that are vital to our understanding of the complexity of the personal, literary, and theoretical undertaking she carries out therein. Like Woolf, Warner grounds her exploration of postwar individual and collective consciousness in the everyday, through an intense focus on minute details which mark that consciousness as permanently fragmented, yet harboring the potential to function in spite of such fragmentation. However, Warner differs from Woolf most notably in her move toward resituating everyday occurrences, objects, and predicaments into *imaginative* spaces in order to hypothesize the conditions under which the self might initiate and perpetuate the recovery

⁵ Exceptions to this claim include selections from *Collected Poems* in which the speaker considers war in terms of the opposing spaces of the battlefield and the hearth, and theorizes the positionality of the soldier and the female non-combatant, respectively. Some of these poems include: “In this Midwinter,” “Benicasim,” “Waiting at Cerebre,” “Journey to Barcelona,” “Port Bou” and “We Accuse.”

process. Consequently, Warner's writings across the genres of poetry and the novel, as well as her diary entries, seem to repeatedly push for some articulation of everyday existence in the aftermath of World War I; but most importantly, her experimentation with these genres enables her to postulate a sustainable vision of self that accounts for the complexities of her roles as woman, non-combatant, and bisexual. Her artistic and literary negotiation of these roles occurs throughout her writing career, which spanned more than fifty years, beginning in 1925, with the publication of her first volume of poetry, *The Espalier*, until just weeks before her death in 1978.

As Claire Harman asserts in *Sylvia Townsend Warner 1898-1978: A Celebration*, Warner's literary depiction of the social and economic climate anticipates the onset of another World War, yet remains rooted in the local, personal effects of war upon non-combatants on the home front. Harman states, "Instead of the haunted London of the Blitz one is made aware of provincial England, beset as much by inconveniences as hazards. Food shortages, the upending of taboos, the disparity between the war and the response it ordinarily evokes, are what interest Sylvia Townsend Warner. Few writers have such a feeling for the long littleness of life and such a flair for making its dissection entertaining" (Harman, *A Celebration* 45). Reading about war through Warner's textual artistry thus yields a depiction that runs counter to mainstream reports of devastating destruction, tragic loss of life, and unstable economic and political conditions. Through her almost exclusive focus on non-combatant experience, Warner invests her fictional characters—which often prove to be thinly-veiled versions of herself—with the potential to performatively recreate themselves in order to facilitate recovery from the effects of war as sustained, albeit indirectly, on the home front. The works Warner published

throughout the 1930s, upon which this chapter focuses, prove particularly vital to this study because they seem to exist in conversation with one another, as they anticipate further complications to, and even repudiations of, the vexed notion of female non-combatant identity during the period that is referred to today as “the interwar years.”⁶

This chapter examines three of Warner’s texts that elucidate the impact of war upon non-combatant subjectivity during the interwar years: “Behind the Firing Line: Some Experiences in a Munitions Factory. By a Lady Worker,” an essay composed in the midst of World War I; “Opus 7,” a long poem completed in 1931; and *Summer Will Show*, a novel published in 1936. Together, the three map Warner’s developing vision of postwar existence as articulated across genres, and the performative component that underlies them is posited as a means of sustaining that vision. These texts portray the process of recovering a sustainable narrative of self in the aftermath of war, and illustrate Warner’s own project of locating self within the conflicted space of the interwar years, without forsaking any facet of her identity, including her gender, political affiliation, non-combatant status, sexual orientation, or lack of religious belief.

Beyond merely offering readers insight into the vicissitudes of the twentieth century from a woman’s perspective, Warner’s writing presents a snapshot of the author’s multivalent journey toward claiming and asserting herself in and through the personal traumas she endures, which are then exacerbated by the onset of war and its stagnant socioeconomic aftermath: the cultural and political upheaval brought about by war, the breakdown of Victorian ideals of the feminine, and her own experiences of love and loss, which for Warner, ultimately have little to do with war itself. That her work is

⁶ In addition to Claire Harman’s extensive biographical and critical work on Warner, other critics who focus specifically on Warner’s negotiation of the context of war itself, as well as the historical moment of the interwar years, include Barbara Brothers, Thomas Foster, and Brian McKenna.

intensely personal, yet at times also carries out a sophisticated social critique is in part how Warner sustains herself holistically, overcoming the seeming disparate nature of the aforementioned facets of her identity.

I. “By a Lady Worker”: Psychological and Textual Distance in First-Person

Accounts of Identity Trauma

Sylvia Townsend Warner is important to the study of women’s roles throughout World Wars I and II, and the interwar period, because she pushes the culturally-sanctioned boundaries of womanhood, particularly with respect to sexuality. Warner’s experiences while employed in a munitions factory in 1915 illustrate and prefigure the sense of liminality that would define her identity for decades to come.⁷ Warner began her employment at a time when England suffered “a severe shortage of shells on the fighting fronts” (Ouditt 72). While biographers tend not to focus extensively on her tenure in this position, historical accounts attest to the dangers associated with factory work. Ouditt describes, “Munitions factories were of course prime targets for enemy zeppelin raids, events that engendered a trench spirit in the workers as they waited for an attack in darkness and surrounded by high explosives... Industrial injuries were quite common: as well as losing hair and teeth as a result of handling TNT, workers might also become trapped in the machinery” (75). Aside from these gruesome physical dangers, Ouditt highlights the contradictions extant in a woman munitions worker’s relationship to the war effort:

That this status [of soldier-women] is second class is underlined by the comparisons with the ‘real’ danger zones. This strategy, then, constantly reaffirming women’s *relative* safety by way of honouring the fighting males, not only hindered the long-term improvement of industrial

⁷ For an informative overview of Warner’s biography, consult Barbara Brothers, *British Short Fiction Writers, 1945-80*. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Ed. Dean Baldwin. Detroit: Gale, 1994. 302-10.

conditions but also effectively ensured that, no matter what their sacrifice, women would continue to be socially constructed as permanently subservient. (Ouditt 76)

Given their exposure to these dangers, the advent of World War I thus heightened the pressure for women to shift their social function from domestic servitude to war service, Thus, Warner's first hand experiences as a relief munitions worker—detailed in her first publication—initiate her effort to negotiate selfhood through writing.⁸ Published anonymously in February 1916, “Behind the Firing Line: Some Experiences in a Munitions Factory. By a Lady Worker,” methodically describes munitions production and her related responsibilities. Written in the first person, Warner's account only distantly echoes a conventional trauma narrative, but constitutes her earliest documented textual engagement with war. Ultimately, the essay forwards a pointed critique, faulting the factory system for “bad air, bad organisation, and lack of tools” and for “...waste of time, waste of power, waste of labour, waste of material, and again, waste of time” (“Behind” 207). It proves significant to this study because it prefigures the intersection of trauma, violence, and gender that encapsulates female non-combatant existence during the early half of the twentieth-century, a conceptual matrix that becomes a hallmark of Warner's literary oeuvre. Throughout, she documents the physical component of factory work as exhausting, grueling, and repetitive, evident in her description of the first shell

⁸ In addition to working in a munitions factory, Warner also participated in an organization entitled “War Help.” Claire Harman explains:

In the first few months of the war Sylvia had attached herself to an organisation in Harrow which had been thrown together under the ambiguous name of War Help. Much of its activity was concerned with fund-raising for the Red Cross, but when the first Belgian refugees began arriving in London, the War Help committee applied itself to find homes for them. Sylvia, whose mind was essentially practical, thought it would be less disruptive to the Belgians (and the people of Harrow) to house the refugees together...One of the refugees, a young Belgian woman, remained in affectionate correspondence with Sylvia for the rest of her life and it is clear that Sylvia's youthful concern and curiosity heartened the refugees, if only by providing a talking-point. (Harman *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* 29)

she formed: “I chose my shell; I measured and marked it with a tremendous expenditure of chalk and pencil; I resisted the temptation to drop it, or to smudge the penciling, or to fit it into the chuck wrong end out; I screwed up with all the strength that was in me, and then, flushed and elated, I looked to start the machine” (“Behind” 192). In particular, the parallels she establishes throughout between war labor and domestic labor, such as comparing her machine to a sewing machine,⁹ point toward the extensive identity trauma that underlies this experience.

For Warner, munitions work directly contradicts the non-combatant status ascribed to she and her co-workers by virtue of their gender. She notes the collusion that such labor incites between wartime responsibility and traditional female identity as she reflects upon the extent to which her employment systematically defrauds women factory workers of their individuality. She writes, “The work of a shell-machinist has an obliterating effect upon one’s sense of individuality: however monotonous, it is exacting; it has to be attended to. After a while it begins to flatten one into the essential dough: every shell thieves a little of one’s pride of self” (“Behind” 196). While physically, psychologically and emotionally draining, Warner’s awareness of the daily challenges that factory work poses to her self-identity suggest her ability to maintain some psychological distance from the experience. Crucial to her capacity to endure, this distance enables Warner to position herself objectively in relationship to her work and the potentially damaging psychological effect that it has upon her. Therefore, this psychological distance creates a kind of shield between Warner, her work, and her

⁹ Warner notes, “Indeed, things of humbler horse-power have temperament also: most women have known days when the sewing-machine was in a nasty-temper” (“Behind” 193).

complicity in the human atrocity that occurs on the battlefield, made possible by the munitions that she produces.

But at the same time, the gradual erasure of identity that munitions workers undergo threatens the relative safety that such distance affords, revealing the bitter implications of their contribution to the war effort. As her writing of the 1930s will illustrate, writing becomes a way for Warner to negotiate the traumas of war, brought about by witnessing unprecedented destruction, loss of life, and the ensuing displacement and disintegration of self, as well as the utter upheaval of the governing cultural narrative of English national identity. Writing about her trauma enables Warner to testify to her lived experiences of war, a process that forges a space between the event and her ongoing narrative of self. The space fosters objectivity, which enables Warner to mitigate the effects of war, so that she might meaningfully integrate her trauma into her ongoing narrative of self. In attempting to conceptualize her personal relationship to the war effort, she ponders the attitudes her peers harbor toward munitions labor:

Other workers have told me how at first they would pass away the time in picturing to themselves the various things that had happened and were to happen in the making of a shell—the furnaces flaring and bellowing all night, and the molten steel being poured out, stately, like cream: the shell-cases tumbled out on the workshop floor all rough and clumsy, to pass through process after process till, slim and polished, they went off to be filled, discreet of curve, demure of color, Quakerish instruments of death: and that one day when, alive and voiced at last, they would go shrieking over the trenches. (“Behind” 195)

Immediately following this account, Warner muses on other conversations she has overheard between women workers, without reflecting upon the underlying fact that munitions work constitutes a gross distortion of childrearing, as the above account unequivocally conveys, in spite of its sarcasm. That women munitions-workers

metaphorically liken the shells they produce to the children they rear, imagining the shells reaching fruition not through education, professional success, or in raising families of their own, but by “shrieking over the trenches,” inevitably bringing about death and destruction, points toward Warner’s critique of the seamlessness with which women’s responsibility to her nation in wartime supplants and supersedes her responsibility to her husband and children.

Although it is valid to attribute Warner’s traumas to war and its aftermath, I maintain that her trauma results more specifically from a clash of conflicting identities that war incites, particularly with regard to her sexuality. According to several published biographical accounts,¹⁰ she did not meet Valentine Ackland, who would become her life-long intimate, until 1926, and none provides any indication that Warner acted upon her bisexuality prior to meeting Ackland. In fact, in 1913, she began a secret love affair—which would last until 1930—with her music teacher, Percy Buck, “who was twenty-two years older than she, and married” (Brothers *DLB* 139). The point here is that while employed in the munitions factory, Warner was in the midst of an illicit affair and had not fully actualized her sexual identity; therefore, her experience in the factory, though she never explicitly states as much, forced her to reconcile the culturally imposed and inherited paradigm of heterosexuality and domestic caretaker with her conflicting roles as non-combatant munitions worker, mistress, and bisexual.

¹⁰ The most thorough biographical accounts of Warner’s life published to date are: Claire Harman’s *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989; New York: Viking, 1989); Wendy Mulford’s *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland. Life, Letters, and Politics, 1930-51* (London: Pandora, 1988), and Barbara Brothers’ entry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entitled, “Sylvia Townsend Warner,” *British Short Fiction Writers, 1945-80. DLB*. Ed. Dean Baldwin. (Detroit: Gale, 1994. 302-10).

Consequently, because trauma narratives negotiate trauma through content as well as form, the factual and methodical manner in which Warner describes the manufacturing process, combined with her disinclination to integrate such work within her identity as female non-combatant, enables us to read this essay, at least in part, as an indirect textual negotiation of the identity trauma that Warner experiences during World War I, and continues to struggle with throughout the 1930s. At the level of text and content, this essay should be read as a critique of the factory system; but paying careful attention to its form, and especially to what remains unstated, reveals Warner's attempt to reconcile the aforementioned conflicting facets of her economic status and gender identity. Comprised predominantly of description and not reflection, the essay also exhibits the careful distinction made between traumatic and narrative memory as named in the late nineteenth-century by Pierre Janet. Given that she grounds the essay in critique, and never mentions the violence sustained by she or her co-workers, Warner's articulation of her experience in the factory is not inherently traumatic, and thus the term "traumatic memory," used to describe non-linear, recurrent, and intrusive memories, or flashbacks, does not apply here. But "narrative memory," or "mental constructs, which people use to make sense out of experience," or a social act, possessing flexibility and variability, addressed to an outside audience (van der Kolk and van der Hart 160; 163), aptly describes the process by which Warner translates the memory of her wartime labor to her textual critique of the factory system.¹¹ Her ability to depict her experiences in a linear,

¹¹ The terms "traumatic memory" and "narrative memory" coined by Janet in the late nineteenth-century have catalyzed discussion among contemporary trauma theorists about the relationship between trauma, memory, and recovery, which accounts for the complexity of this matrix, particularly when used to theorize the personal dimension of trauma. To illustrate, Ruth Leys aptly summarizes van der Kolk's concept of traumatic memory: "Specifically, van der Kolk suggests that traumatic memory may be less like what some theorists have called 'declarative memory' or 'narrative' memory, involving the ability to be consciously aware of and verbally narrate events that have happened to the individual, than like 'implicit' or

coherent way provides further evidence that her trauma stems not from the experience of factory work itself, but the collision of identities that the experience cultivates and signifies. At the same time, conveying it methodically, without reflecting at length upon this underlying tension, reinforces Warner's strategic distancing of self from the identity trauma that she unconsciously articulates throughout the essay, and more generally prefigures her project of rebuilding a sustainable narrative of self as carried out in her fictional works of the 1930s.

Accordingly, portions of the essay are written in the third person, allowing Warner to displace any reflection upon her role as female non-combatant munitions worker, onto an engagement with how *other* women workers internalize their role in the war effort. In one account, she describes her suspicion of the ease with which some of her peers have forsaken their domestic roles in the name of promoting Britain's cause. Her mockery of a fellow worker who claims to "swell with pride" at the thought of aiding the "brave men in the trenches" informs Warner's characterization of her as "the lady-who-felt-(and mentioned)-things" ("Behind" 195). Depicting this woman as foolish for so openly conveying her pride subverts the monotony of factory work that has ostensibly compromised her ability to uphold her own political views. In essence, Warner likens 'the lady-who-felt-(and mentioned)-things' to the very machine she operates: both are incapable of independent thought. Consistent with Modernist writing and trauma narratives, the significance in these accounts lies as much in Warner's stark juxtaposition of motherhood with war, and presenting as typical the mixture of ignorance and guilt that belabors female munitions workers, as in the pervasive absence that defines them.

'nondeclarative' memory, involving bodily memories of skills, habits, reflex actions, and classically conditioned responses that lie outside verbal-semantic-linguistic representation" (Leys 7).

In spite of the detailed descriptions of the physical space of the factory, the dress and mannerisms of its laborers, and the rote process of manufacturing shells, Warner herself remains largely absent from “Behind the Firing Line,” which is most explicit in her choice to publish the essay anonymously. In doing so, she strategically divorces herself from the textual body that testifies to the horrific implications of wartime munitions production, as sustained directly by combatants on the battlefield, and indirectly, though no less severely, by non-combatants on the home front. Warner’s disembodied “I” suggests a hesitancy to openly criticize the government for its aim to achieve victory at any cost, even if doing so entails risking the health and economic well-being of its female factory workers. This disclaimer conveys her apprehension: “The following account gives only the results of personal experience: it is certainly inadequate, and it may be misleading because of its inadequacy, but its limitations exactly coincide with the boundaries of that personal experience” (“Behind” 203). While these political and authorial apprehensions dissolve over the course of the next two decades as she becomes more openly involved in politics,¹² the anonymity surrounding this early work marks Warner’s attempt to think about her experiences as objectively as possible so that she might represent them with some degree of critical distance.

¹² William Maxwell, editor of *Letters: Sylvia Townsend Warner*, describes her involvement in the Communist party thusly: “Profoundly affected by what was going on in Germany at the time and believing that there was a very real danger of the madness spreading to England, STW and Valentine Ackland concluded that the only adequate defence against fascism was communism. In 1935 they applied for membership in the Communist Party of Great Britain and were accepted. The letters of this period sometimes have the irritating tone of the newly converted. In at least two of the novels *Summer Will Show* (1936) and *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938) a political element is obvious. It doesn’t take the form of propaganda; STW was never not a literary artist” (Maxwell xiv). Following discussion of Warner’s long poem, *Opus 7*, this chapter will take up the issue of political involvement as illustrated in *Summer Will Show* as one way in which the female non-combatant might redirect her narrative of self in the aftermath of war. To some extent, then, Warner’s critique of factory working conditions as conveyed in “Behind the Firing Line” catalyzes her more direct intervention into political matters that would materialize in the 1930s.

Second, this distance enables readers to evaluate the efficacy of Warner's textual negotiation of identity trauma because her reliance upon it as a narrative strategy reveals much about her relationship to her latent trauma. Ruth Leys theorizes this distance using the term "anti-mimesis," which she conceptualizes in terms of the traumatized person's ability to "...reestablish a strict dichotomy between the autonomous subject and the external trauma" (Leys 9). Anti-mimesis further entails that the subject remains a spectator of the traumatic scene, which she can therefore see and represent to herself and others (Leys 299). Warner's textual confrontation with her experiences in the munitions factory qualifies as anti-mimetic, for she retreats from integrating this role as munitions worker into her narrative of self, commenting upon her trauma from the standpoint of a spectator; and by publishing the essay anonymously, she absents herself from the experience itself, as well as the critique forwarded throughout. Because she shifts her focus away from personal trauma and onto the abstract impact of factory work upon the health of the nation, the essay does not ultimately achieve what Dominick LaCapra has termed "working through," or the articulatory practice that mitigates the effects of trauma (LaCapra 22). While it may seem at this early period in her career that Warner displaces self in the name of safeguarding society at large, in fact, as her writing progresses into the 1920s and 30s, it becomes increasingly apparent that she strategically employs this distance as a means of *self-preservation*. In addition to depicting the grim realities of wartime non-combatant labor in the form of a non-fiction essay, "Behind the Firing Line" effectively establishes psychological and textual distance as significant to Warner's ongoing negotiation of trauma throughout her writing. As my discussions of *Opus 7* and *Summer Will Show* illustrate, this distance—between lived, personal trauma and its

textual representation—gives way to the emergence of the female non-combatant's multiple subjectivity, which enables her to mediate the cultural uncertainty that defines the interwar period.

Unlike the essay, in Warner's fiction, this distance manifests in the parallels and departures she draws between herself and her fictional characters. In many cases, it is this very psychological and emotional separation that enables Warner to withstand and write through her traumas;¹³ but as readers, we must remain aware of the author's capacity to collapse this implied boundary and seamlessly assume a likeness to her characters, and at the next turn, to reinstate the boundary once more. Within the *spaces* created by this fluid distance lay Warner's textual negotiation of trauma. Among much else, Warner's diaries occasionally make the reader privy to some of her authorial choices regarding the representation of self in her literary works, allowing the reader to briefly enter the privileged, yet abstract space between author and text. In her *Diaries*, the space between the body of the author and the textual body that she produces becomes momentarily fixed, such that the reader can understand, at least in part, the points of separation between author and text, and how they are delineated.

In her "Introduction" to *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner*, editor Claire Harman explains the purpose of keeping a diary as Warner understood it: "When she wrote her diary, it was 'for her own eye', as if she were writing letters to herself...the important function which Warner's diary fulfilled was that of kindly blank-faced correspondent" (Harman viii). This assertion suggests that Warner intended her diary to facilitate a dialogue about her life and experiences that would enable her to appreciate

¹³ I refer here both to the aforementioned traumas of identity incited by war as well as the trauma of loss that Warner undergoes with the death of Valentine Ackland in 1969.

how one enhances the other. Even so, one must not lose sight of the fact that she did not wish for her diaries to be published, on the grounds that they are “too sad.” To this end, it bears noting that access to her diaries and letters is limited to what has been released for publication to date by Warner’s estate.¹⁴

In a 1930 diary entry, the reader enters the space between Warner and her long poem, *Opus 7*. This entry illustrates the author’s awareness of the distinction between she and her protagonist, Rebecca Random, and conveys her questioning of the usefulness of that separation. Musing on the likeness between she and Rebecca—who supports herself financially during the interwar years by selling flowers, yet devotes all of her profits to supporting her alcohol addiction—Warner records the following: “This evening it struck me how odd it was that I haven’t taken to drink. Once, I should have supposed it the certain thing for me to do, yet in these six months I have drunk less than for years. As I am now writing the Faithful Bottle passage in Rebecca this thought rather chills my hand” (*Diaries* 4 June 1930; 61). Here, Warner’s admission that she *could* respond to the uncertainty that characterizes the interwar years in the same way as her fictional character makes clear that she upholds a definable space between her actual response—infrequent alcohol use—and one alternative to dealing with trauma—alcohol dependency—as explored in her writing. At the same time, Warner’s near conflation of these two responses to postwar trauma suggests that she considers herself no less susceptible to fatal intoxication than Rebecca. Therefore, in its reflection on the fictional persona of Rebecca, this diary entry illustrates the dynamic interplay between Warner’s own indirect experiences of war and the material textual body. In the tension between author and text

¹⁴ Following Warner’s insistence that her diaries were ‘too sad’ to be published, Harman writes, “The estate has nevertheless agreed to the editing and publication of this selection from the diaries on literary grounds, judging that it is the right compromise to make” (Harman *Diaries* xi).

lies Warner's developing concept of postwar reality and identity, and the challenge she encounters in attempting to reconcile the two.

Insofar as female identity is constructed throughout the nineteenth-century through domestic spaces and the related feelings of warmth, security, and sanctity that women are charged with fostering therein, much of Warner's writing might then be read as both negotiating the collapse of this paradigm with the advent of World War I and the subsequent relocation of women's work beyond the domestic and into public spaces such as the munitions factory, *and* as a strategic subversion of the now-collapsed paradigm of domesticity, working to expose its rather artificial and absurd place in twentieth-century culture. Accordingly, critics cite the hearth as the quintessential symbol in Warner's writing, especially in her poetry.¹⁵ In her literary works, Warner imagines her female subjects in spaces removed from the hearth in order to test their viability, and to determine which social and economic conditions foster a sense of productivity and significance, so that woman might (re)define her identity through personal experience and preference, not inherited cultural ideals. It is in this way that Warner's writing carries out recovery via narrative, for what she seeks to recover is the sense of individuality that has been systematically erased through the cultural imposition of rigid ideals of gender and sexual identity: her munitions work points directly to such erasure. To this end, the performative dimensions of Warner's writing—her conscious and unconscious experiments in carving out individuality through varied (re)presentations of self—thus prove crucial to understanding the complicated process by which she imagines recovery through writing. While Warner's uses and manipulations of narrative form can

¹⁵ In her Introduction to *Opus 7*, Claire Harman terms the hearth "that potent Warner symbol" (*Collected Poems xv*).

and should be read in part as mechanisms through which she strives to overcome the traumas of identity, and to some extent, war, the following discussions of *Opus 7* and *Summer Will Show* focus principally upon the process by which she *sustains* the selves that she creates through writing.¹⁶ Mining the performative dimensions of the recovery process—a largely unexcavated realm of trauma theory—by reading Warner’s poetry, novels, and diary entries as performances of a self-in-process, not only complicates existing theories on the relationship between trauma, narrative, and recovery, but also sheds new light on the nearly-forgotten work of Sylvia Townsend Warner, qualifying her for a more prominent position in the literary canon as we understand it today.

Published in 1931, Warner’s *Opus 7* enacts her quest to locate a viable and sustainable self within the gendered and social paradigms in which the figure of the female non-combatant must function. Susan Stanford Friedman figures the long poem as a rich space in which to engage the liminality of self and text:

This geometry of forms—long poems, big poems—may itself be a displacement for a geography of forms—the territorial imperative of literary history to map literary *landscapes*, canonize *centers*, chart pathways to *horizons*, define *margins*, patronize the *borderline*, and dismiss what is *beyond the pale*—to exercise, in short, the tyranny of categorical *boundaries*, to declare what is inside, what is outside, *us* and *them*. (Friedman 722)

In its negotiation of these textual and extra-textual boundaries, *Opus 7* illuminates the ways in which Warner conceived of her fictional characters as embodiments of herself, and the points at which she separated herself from them, while more indirectly theorizing the position of the woman author in the interwar years. Despite the dearth of critical

¹⁶ Implicit in this project is the claim that, because of the shattering impact of World War I upon Britain, individual identity should no longer be conceived in singular, unified terms. Consistent with LaCapra’s assertion that “identity is best understood as a problematic constellation of a more or less changing configuration of subject positions” (LaCapra *History* 5), we might attribute the pluralization of individual identity to the advent of the twentieth-century, war, and the related traumas it incites.

attention it has received to date, *Opus 7* provides valuable insight into Warner's postwar negotiation of self, for it can be read as a critical inquiry into the terms under which the female non-combatant assumes control over her fate. That it is written and published during the interwar years provides further evidence into the idea that not unlike her protagonist, Rebecca Random, Warner grappled with an ambiguous sense of self.

II. "All this for gin": Performative Masking and Failed Recovery in *Opus 7*

The opening two stanzas of *Opus 7* enact an immediate reversal of the nineteenth-century domestic, situating the reader in an unfamiliar and liminal textual space. Initially making herself known to the reader only through "I," Warner's use of this pronoun throughout *Opus 7* functions quite differently than it does in "Behind the Firing Line"; for here, Warner employs the long poem, a form rooted in the male-dominated epic tradition, in order to investigate the terms under which the female non-combatant might locate a sense of purpose in the aftermath of World War I. From the outset, the poem frames the protagonist's journey of self-(re)discovery in relationship to her impending death. Accordingly, at the poem's opening, Rebecca summarizes her state of mind: "Ere I descend into the grave, / let me a small house and large garden have" (Warner lines 1-2).¹⁷ This statement links grave, house, and garden, establishing what becomes an important structural paradigm governing the poem. Two components of this paradigm—garden and grave—exist as spaces external to the hearth, and represent the binaries of life and death, respectively. While Rebecca becomes an embodiment of this duality, of particular interest in the first two stanzas is the depiction of Rebecca's cottage. In

¹⁷ Line numbers are provided here in order to establish the immediacy of the connection between Rebecca's character and the home that she inhabits. Due to the length of the text, throughout the remainder of my analysis, I will cite textual quotes and paraphrases by providing the page number and the stanza number, separated by a period.

structure, as a small cottage, it signifies domestic propriety and its related sense of security, evident in its deep thatch, large beams, and small windows (195.1). As Ouditt writes, “Englishness and womanhood were frequently conflated into an image of blossoming pastoral simplicity, which easily slipped into the ideology of the rural organic myth” (Ouditt 48). However, Warner counters this “rural organic myth” throughout much of her writing, and particularly in *Opus 7*, politicizing the pastoral by recasting it as a confining space that denies female agency. That a woman resides alone in the cottage divests this space of its traditional associations with maternal care, upending the idealized tranquility of rural living, and replacing it with a sense of mystery and uncertainty, which is inscribed upon it from the outside—by the passersby:

...strangers stood
admiring it, cars stopped, Americans
leveled their cameras, and a painter once
sat for two days beside a pigsty wall
to take a picture of it... (Warner 195.1)

These spectators intrude upon Rebecca’s tranquility by objectifying the cottage via their gaze. In this way, the cottage itself becomes a body, a living emblem of the unknowable woman who resides within. Aside from illustrating the extent to which Rebecca’s reputation is constructed in and through her cottage, the poem stresses her vulnerability by rendering the cottage utterly susceptible to the opinions of the passersby. Therefore, of the three components of the text’s opening triumvirate—grave, garden, and cottage—the latter’s significance derives from the fact that it is the site at which Warner initiates her experiment with the tenacity of dual associations—the cottage can be seen, but not

known, it is both a physical structure *and* an objectified body; and its inhabitant, Rebecca, also comes to embody both life and death.¹⁸

Rebecca's solitary existence within her cottage also subtly situates the poem within the historical context of the interwar years; and although neither the speaker nor Rebecca ever unequivocally explains *why* Rebecca lives alone, we are later informed that it is because she has no living relatives. The speaker muses, "War trod her low. // Her kin all dead, alas!" (199.2). In this way, the intrusive passersby reinforce war as disruptive and destructive, not only to the physical landscape, but particularly to the lives of women on the home front. Rebecca thus denies her cottage any significance outside of its practical purpose—to provide shelter from the elements—it in no way represents "home" to her. Instead, she survives the trauma of war by attempting to refigure her identity *outside* of the domestic and by relocating it within her garden. But in depicting the domestic landscape, particularly Rebecca's flowers, in militaristic language, such as "countrified militia," "reigned," and "confederate" (196-7), the text conflates the fronts of

¹⁸ While my discussion to follow of Warner's novel, *Summer Will Show*, overtly explores lesbian subjectivity as a means of rejecting the patriarchal ideal of heteronormativity, and therefore broadening the realm of sustainable identities that the female non-combatant might claim, Rebecca's lesbianism in this text is only *implied*. Nonetheless, several dominant and recurrent tropes throughout the poem point toward the probability that Rebecca is a lesbian, and together, they suggest that her trauma results at least in part from her inability to reveal or act upon this identity, symbolized by her literal retreat into her cottage. The first of these tropes engages Terry Castle's metaphor of "apparation" as a way to discuss and critique the latent positionality of lesbian fiction within the literary canon: "the lesbian is never with us, it seems, but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night" (Castle 2). This concept is mirrored in Warner's invocation of ghosts and graveyards throughout much of her writing, particularly in her first volume of poetry, *The Espalier* (1925), as well as in the visions and hallucinations that Rebecca experiences in the latter half of *Opus 7*. In addition, with respect to *Lolly Willowes* (1926), critic Jane Garrity reads the presence of the spinster in Warner's novel as "code" for latent lesbianism, which certainly applies here. She condemns the fact that Warner's fictional theorization of lesbian identity has been largely ignored by critics: "...no one has attempted to read the figure of the spinster, or the witch, as codes for lesbianism, or analyzed the way that Warner covertly maps lesbian desire by displacing it in the text" (Garrity 244). Consistent with Garrity's observation, this chapter will argue that Warner employs the lesbian figure to expand the concept of trauma and recovery, to include not only the difficulties faced by women on the home front, but to complicate the cultural narrative of the female non-combatant and her "role" in the interwar years, by resituating her within this alternative sexual category.

battle and home, subtly undercutting the feasibility of Rebecca's attempt to escape the aftermath of war. Still, she forges both an economic and spiritual connection to the earth, for it harbors her only potential for survival, and shall also serve as her final resting place.

As the poem progresses, it gradually relocates the construction of Rebecca's identity beyond her cottage into her garden. The contradictions inherent to this space are again conveyed with immediacy: here, Rebecca is depicted as "herself no flower" (197.2), a means by which Warner dislocates the traditional gendered correlation between woman and flower, and disrupts as well the economic correlative of tending a garden to support oneself.¹⁹ For example, and consistent with her surname, "Random," the narrator clearly emphasizes that Rebecca's plight could have befallen nearly any female non-combatant; and that Rebecca in particular possesses no special talent for gardening. For of the whole town of Love Green, Rebecca's soil is the "easiest" (195.3). Rebecca confirms this assertion, "...they throve, said she, / as children do, by mixing company" and the flowers "...all at peace together grew" (196.1). Most notable, however, among the contradictions between the garden and basic survival is the fact that Rebecca's garden yields aesthetic fulfillment through beautiful flowers, but no physical fulfillment gained through food. While we might expect Warner to align women's reproductive capacity with the fertile soil of Rebecca's garden, she again employs a reversal in order to critique the lack of respect shown to women writers:

Save those wizened apple-trees,
whose windfalls only wasp and ant found sweet,
this garden offered nothing one could eat.
Fie, fie, indeed! How wanton and perverse!
Grow only flowers?—as well write only verse!
And in so good a soil? (198.1)

¹⁹ Beyond negating Rebecca's reproductive capacity, this phrase also alludes to her lesbian identity.

Here, Warner amalgamates the output of her garden with women's literary output in order to satirically mock the male-dominated pastoral tradition. She boldly carries out this critique in content as well as form, employing the long poem as a mode of inquiry into the complexity of the feminized and traumatized post-war subject.

Through the perspective of the female non-combatant, the poem also broadens and criticizes the measure of peace in the aftermath of war. In order to stress the effects of war on the individual, Warner carefully distinguishes political and psychological peace. Although the text faults the government for terming the cessation of fighting as "peace," without ensuring the economic well-being of its people,²⁰ another layer of its critique is revealed as Rebecca chooses to perpetuate her psychological trauma by devoting all of her earnings from the sale of her flowers to support her addiction to gin. As in "Behind the Firing Line," *Opus 7* carries out a nuanced political critique with gendered as well as economic dimensions, which coalesce in the figure of Rebecca Random. In fact, Rebecca embodies the challenge of redefining the domestic to suit twentieth-century cultural ideals and realities, namely the plausibility of woman's economic independence, particularly in the aftermath of war; and the impact of national events upon the citizenry, especially women on the home front. Part of Warner's own process of locating and sustaining self as mapped in *Opus 7* is to insert her voice as a non-combatant woman writer into the ongoing discourse surrounding war and its aftermath during the 1930s. As she had in "Behind the Firing Line," in this poem,

²⁰ The speaker describes the economic difficulties faced by English citizens during and after the war:
many the mother, draggled from childbed,
who wept for grocer's port and prices fled;
and village Hampdens, gathered in the tap,
forsook their themes of bawdry and mishap
to curse a government which could so fleece
on spirits under proof, and call it Peace. (199.1)

Warner again grapples with the compulsion to distance oneself psychologically and emotionally from the personal trauma brought about by war, as Rebecca quickly becomes addicted to gin. Because the sale of her flowers literally fuels this addiction, the text exposes and condemns the implicit commodification of the natural landscape (the flowers) and its inhabitants (Rebecca) in the aftermath of war as the only viable means of survival available to non-combatant women.

But to Rebecca, the link between growing flowers and psychologically distancing herself from the harsh realities of postwar existence is not initially clear. In the poignant and final line of the stanza quoted above, “Rebecca lived on bread, and lived for gin” (198.1), we learn that Rebecca meagerly sustains her body with bread; and that in fact, the traumas of loss and war that she has endured have merely been displaced by her addiction to alcohol, and thus remain largely unaddressed. Her realization that selling flowers will enable her to continue to deny her psychological turmoil occurs in a chance meeting that she has in a bar with a soldier recently returned from war. On their second meeting, Rebecca befriends the soldier, who is described as a “crippled Anzac,” (200.1), and offers him some of her flowers. The text links Rebecca to war through her flowers’ ability to charm and delight the soldier:

Mute and intent he turned them in his hand.
She watched them too, and could not understand
what charm held him thus steadfast to a thing
that just bloomed out by nature every spring. (200.2)

But in addition, their meeting casts her as willing to blindly sacrifice self in order to fulfill her needs—here, for companionship. This trait becomes clear when the soldier merely asks her for “a few” flowers, and without thinking, Rebecca “gave him all” (200.1). Because the flowers signify in part Rebecca’s potential to support herself

independently, the simple act of surrendering ‘all’ of her flowers to the soldier points to the multiplicity of Rebecca’s identity. Metaphorically, the flowers function as an extension of her physical body and her sense of self. At the same time, the text strategically absents Rebecca from the exchange, giving no indication of whether parting with the flowers fulfills her desire for companionship. Instead, the focus remains solely upon the recipient. The flowers prompt the soldier to confide in Rebecca about his childhood, family, and most importantly, his disgust regarding England’s involvement in the war (200-01). At the next turn, however, he implies that Rebecca’s flowers have redeemed him, pays her for them, and leaves (201.1). Warner compounds the significance of Rebecca’s encounter with the soldier by marking it as a catalyst for her realization that her flowers possess exchange value, creating the opportunity to secure continued economic independence, and perhaps even to prosper from their sale. Yet without any deliberation over their redemptive potential, Rebecca chooses to use her earnings to purchase gin: “When she undid / its crumples she was clutching a pound note. / The liquor seemed already in her throat” (201.1).

By marking the flowers as economic commodities, Warner invests them with the potential to foster Rebecca’s recovery, in the sense that earning a living fosters her autonomy, and will enable her to continue to support herself financially without relying upon a man. Further, the poem suggests that in assuming responsibility for her financial well-being, Rebecca becomes capable of redirecting her postwar narrative in a meaningful way. The text aligns Rebecca’s flowers and her recovered self, in the sense that both must be *continually* cultivated, nurtured, and harvested. These processes harbor many performative underpinnings, especially in conjunction to Elin Diamond’s

straightforward definition: "...performance is a doing and a thing done" (Diamond 1). To underscore Rebecca's capacity to attain economic independence through the growth and sale of her flowers, the speaker stresses her seemingly inherent business savvy, evident in that she knows precisely what to charge: "Rebecca, with an air of every day, / was well prepared to tell them what to pay" (Warner 203-04). Moreover, the protagonist employs performative language in describing the lushness of her garden, "My wallflowers are a show" (201.2). The flowers thus constitute a performative embodiment of a recovered landscape and a recovered self, yet they simultaneously mask Rebecca's unresolved trauma. To this end, for Rebecca, performance becomes a means of disguising reality; for although her successful business attests to her economic survival in the aftermath of war, she and the community of Love Green implicitly and mistakenly equate the lushness of her garden with her emotional and psychological stability. In truth, Rebecca concerns herself only with supporting her addiction to gin, evident in the remark, "So, drinking flowers, Rebecca drank content" (214.2), which substantiates the fact that the aesthetics of her garden enact an (un)conscious denial of the traumas Rebecca has sustained.

In an attempt to cope with the uncertainty that defines the interwar years, the poem thus establishes an inverse connection between Rebecca's recovery process and the flowers she grows. That the flowers diminish her capacity to support herself independently (by leading a purposeful life after war) insists upon the complexities of non-combatant survival during the interwar years. Because the sale of her flowers fuels her addiction to gin, the flowers signify the potential for recovery *and* Rebecca's forfeiture thereof. Her flower business affords her a rare opportunity to participate in

economic exchange, evident in the speaker's insistence that Rebecca's flowers adorned every tea party, funeral, and bazaar held in Love Green (213.1). Instead of realizing her prosperity, Rebecca delights in inebriation, and the hallucinations that accompany it, to the extent that drinking becomes a ritualized behavior. The speaker states:

Order, solemnity and ritual
beseemed her drinking, and at each nightfall
she like a priestess trod the kitchen floor.
The blind must be drawn down, and locked the door,
the lamp well-trimmed set on its crochet mat,
plumped up the cushion, and shut out the cat,
and sometimes she'd wash hands, and comb her hair. (215.1)

As a ritual that affords her a sense of comfort, no matter how fleeting, alcohol replaces Rebecca's individuality as the center of her existence. Rather than enabling herself to emerge from the trauma she has endured, Rebecca is figuratively and gradually submerged into it.

Through addiction, the text insists upon the inseparability of material body and the narrative body that comprises individual identity. Critic Jane Lilienfeld explains the complexities of the narrative body by citing alcoholism as symptomatic of its disintegration: "Ironically, the process of becoming an alcoholic is a process by which the self becomes less integrated...the onset of and living with alcoholism express the miseries of such a fragmented personality" (Lilienfeld 10). The identifiable effects of alcoholism, written upon the material body, are merely a manifestation of the dissolution of the narrative body.²¹ Thus, later in that stanza, Warner emphasizes the severity of

²¹ A significant biographical parallel underlies Warner's exploration of the effects of alcoholism upon the female subject. Warner's long-time partner, Valentine Ackland, grappled with alcohol addiction for much of her adult life, which Warner witnessed from October 1931, when the two took up residence together at "Miss Green's Cottage in Chaldon," until Valentine's death from breast cancer in 1969. In her biography of Warner, Claire Harman explains Ackland's attempts to hide her addiction from Sylvia:

It is odd that Sylvia did not, apparently, connect these collapses with drink, or smell, with her fine nose, the whisky which Valentine could not always—certainly not while

Rebecca's condition by describing her fantasy of literally submerging her material body into alcohol:

... it should be possible not to drink but drown!
Slow the invincible circle wooed her down,
until the smell encountered, living and rank,
struck like a wave, and drowned her, and she drank. (Warner 215. 1)

These poignant images of drowning build upon Rebecca's earlier encounter with the soldier, suggesting that her need for companionship remains unsatisfied, while stressing the intensity of her despair, and her increasing inability to free herself from it. That Rebecca's related traumas go unnoticed and unaddressed, despite the fact that her alcoholism is known amongst the townspeople, highlights Warner's subtle call for a public discussion of the impact of war upon the female non-combatant.

Displacing reality by drinking excessively thus reveals Rebecca's inability or disinclination to acknowledge, or bear witness to, the trauma she has sustained. Among contemporary trauma theorists, the relationship between testimony and recovery is perhaps most cogently articulated by Holocaust survivor Dori Laub. He claims that the victim must expel the trauma from the psyche by conveying it to an outside witness. The means by which such expulsion might occur are myriad, but his work focuses primarily on the intricacies associated with semantic communication. Testimony requires the victim to confront the trauma; as such, it is a "ceaseless struggle" (Laub 61). Regardless of whether it occurs in written, spoken, artistic, or some other form, testimony constitutes a repetition, or reenactment of the event. Laub remarks, "What ultimately matters in all

collapsing—have concealed. 'I thought sometimes that she *must* know' wrote Valentine, who was increasingly ashamed of herself and felt trapped by her debilitating dependence. The problem complicated itself as time went on because whereas at first Valentine had lied to protect Sylvia, later she lied because she feared Sylvia's reaction to having been deceived. (Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* 111)

It should also be noted that Warner also explores alcoholism as response to traumatic events in several poems published in her first volume of poetry, *The Espalier* (1925).

processes of witnessing, spasmodic and continuous, conscious and unconscious, is not simply the information, the establishment of the facts, but the experience itself of *living through* testimony, of giving testimony” (70).

For Warner, writing constitutes one mode by which she testifies to the experience of war and its irrevocable impact upon her identity. As mentioned earlier, Warner is careful to maintain a separation between herself and her protagonist, even though her diary entry concedes to the likelihood that she easily could have reacted to war in a manner similar to Rebecca. Instead, Warner acknowledges her trauma and fictionalizes it in an attempt to integrate it into her ongoing narrative of self. The textual body of *Opus 7* enables her to establish the psychological and emotional distance that allows her to examine it objectively. Warner manipulates the form of the long poem, creatively blending the genres of fiction, poetry, and short story to craft a practical mode of trauma representation. As Kristeva claims, “Literary representation is not only an elaboration; rather it possesses a real and imaginary effectiveness that comes closer to catharsis than to elaboration—it is the therapeutic device used in all societies throughout the ages” (Kristeva 24). To this end, Warner’s use of humor and sarcasm throughout the poem might be read both as creating a climate in which such therapy can occur, as well as her way of inviting readers to consider the impact of war upon female identity, in order to expand public discourse on the subject. More importantly, however, *Opus 7* points toward Warner’s project of textually representing her psychological self, the third layer of the tri-layered body that frames this project. Warner performs recovery throughout the poem by projecting the severity of war-related trauma onto a fictional character that, as her diary entries suggest, does not differ significantly from her. The distance that such

fictional representation affords, allows Warner to perform an alternative self through the textual body of *Opus 7*, even though the outcome that she constructs for Rebecca is tragic.

Rebecca's fatal flaw lies in her substitution of alcohol consumption for testimony, in the sense that she surrenders herself not to an empathic other,²² but to the psychological and emotional numbing of drunkenness. Rebecca's response to war trauma is not to testify to it in order to take control of it, but to submit to it, allowing it silence her. About the power of silence over the traumatized individual, Laub states, "That while silence is defeat, it serves them [victims] both as a sanctuary and as a place of bondage. Silence is for them a fated exile, yet also a home, a destination, and a binding oath. To *not* return from this silence is rule rather than exception" (Laub 58). Textual depictions of Rebecca's various intoxicated states engage this duality: for her, inebriation is a source of comfort, yet it remains a "site of bondage" insofar as the reader bears witness to the gradual process by which addiction consumes Rebecca's sense of self. That Warner cautions against alcohol use as a viable "treatment" for post-war trauma is made clear in the poem's opening line, in which the speaker prefigures her death, "Ere I descend into the grave" (Warner 195). Countering the debilitating effects of silence through testimony—a confrontation with trauma that can manifest itself in a myriad of forms—lies the crucial distinction between performance as a perpetuation of trauma versus performance as working through: to engage with the trauma enables the victim to expel it from the psyche and then to purposefully reintegrate it into his or her ongoing narrative of self. Thus, without testimony, as Laub claims, recovery simply

²² "Empathic other" is a term used by Dominick LaCapra, which he defines as someone who "...puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (LaCapra *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 78).

becomes impossible. During one of her hallucinations, Rebecca sees a rather poignant image, “of blooms and bottles endlessly entwined” (208.2), which encapsulates the ongoing dialectic between submitting to the trauma or taking it on, that victims inevitably face in its aftermath. Warner in fact establishes this collusion of survival and recovery from the poem’s opening line, in which Rebecca foreshadows her material body collapsing into the earth, preceded by the collapse of her narrative of self into her physical body through the destructive effects of alcoholism.

III. “A Gazing-Stock and Raree-Show”: Performative Spaces in *Opus 7*

Rebecca Random occupies a central position throughout *Opus 7*, but on occasion, Warner broadens the scope of her inquiry to encompass the complexities of war trauma beyond the figure of the female non-combatant, exploring it specifically through the lens of the garden. The prosperity of Rebecca’s garden is inversely proportionate to Rebecca’s physical health and psychological well-being; but in many ways, the garden also becomes a performative embodiment of, and thus commentary upon, the health of the nation at large. For example, the garden’s susceptibility to swift climate changes parallels England’s vulnerability to the deleterious effects of war. In the latter part of the poem, the garden represents less the potential for rebirth and regeneration of the traumatized individual and nation, than it showcases the material destruction of war. Early in the poem, the garden possesses an almost surreal, generative capacity, requiring little cultivation by Rebecca, “...how all at peace together grew:...Nor did their mistress labour overmuch” (196-7). Later, however, the garden is crippled by a frost, and Rebecca is entirely ill-equipped to restore it, much as a beleaguered nation cannot reverse the onslaught of war:

Against this iron, what could her annuals do—
her summer soldiers, who had wantoned through
an easy warfare since the first of May?
Mauled and dispersed the sixpenny squadrons lay,
their vigour bruised, their flaunt wilted and burned,
their fatness to a dismal jelly turned,
until the traitor sun, who was their friend,
smote with his midday scorn, and made an end. (217.2)

Warner's pointed use of militaristic language to describe the garden alludes to the physical and economic ramifications of warfare that Britain must address. This noteworthy shift from garden as emblem of life to garden as site of death illustrates the swiftness with which war alters material reality and the individual's experience thereof. In addition to linking femininity and death, the flowers also become metaphors for soldiers on the battlefield who were entirely unprepared and ill-equipped to respond effectively to the overwhelming military assault enacted upon them. The poem foreshadows this association by earlier depicting Rebecca's flowers as "Uprooted in full bloom" (206.2).

Like Rebecca, the garden becomes another performing body in this text, a way of gauging the plausibility of individual and national recovery during the interwar years. Similarly, as a performing body, the garden likewise possesses the capacity to conceal the grim reality of this historical moment. To passersby, it is aesthetically pleasing in its fruition, and on the surface, it presents Rebecca's existence as harmonious. Yet as Shelley Saguaro cautions, "Beneath the veneer of a carefully constructed public space, private dwelling or not-so-individual persona, there are some disrupting complexities" (Saguaro 4). As in Rebecca's decision to use her flowers for either profit or gin, via its aesthetic harmony, the garden at one time signified the potential for a restored landscape and thus, national recovery. Yet as the poem progresses, nearly all images of graveyards

are depicted as gardens, thus connoting death and the inevitable interment of the body into the earth, a conflation that renders the garden a dualistic site of death and recovery. As a body capable of performing death or recovery, the garden, particularly when linked to a female subject, connotes the performative relation between femininity and death as discussed by Elizabeth Bronfen. She stresses that representations of this interrelation are always misrepresentations, because, “They repress what they purport to reveal and they articulate what they hope to conceal” (Bronfen xi). Warner links femininity and death by accentuating the fact that Rebecca’s flowers adorn graveyards, not homes.

Commemorating death, the flowers not only foreshadow Rebecca’s own death, but also suggest that any attempt to reclaim her pre-war identity is ill-fated. Regardless of the space through which its critique is figured, whether it be cottage, garden, or graveyard (discussed in the following section), *Opus 7* never abandons its foray into the complex constellation of conflicting selves that seems to comprise female selfhood in the interwar years. Given Saguaró’s claim that gardens enable a realization of “the impact of the politics of the wider world upon the politics of a personal one” (Saguaró 59), for Warner, and for Woolf and H.D. alike, the political climate that surrounds and determines the course of warfare *always* bears upon the personal, and the female non-combatant serves as the locus of this intersection.

Replete with allusions to her death throughout, as it nears its conclusion, the poem confirms Rebecca’s death as immediate, evident when she asks herself, “Why should she draggle to strife impure?— // her gin was sure as death, and death was sure” (Warner 218.3). Though her death results physiologically from excess alcohol consumption, Rebecca’s hallucinations also imply that psychological trauma preexisted

and fueled her addiction. In one hallucination, it initially seems as though she reflects objectively upon her actions, much as writing affords Warner an objective viewpoint from which to negotiate the conflicting strains of identity that she seeks to reconcile into a unified self. Venturing toward the graveyard in the middle of the night, Rebecca seems to transcend all experience, occupying the liminal vantage point between life and death that the graveyard commonly represents:

Strange was the night, and strange the road well-known;
everything strange, as though the wind had blown
thin the substantial world; and still it blew.
In the close tap she saw things she knew,
heard casual greetings, and her own reply,
as though she were some traveller standing by,
whose glance, exact and unconcerned, sees plain
the seen-by-chance and never seen again. (220.2)

However, it becomes clear that Rebecca cannot internalize what she hears or observes, which renders her disconnect from the material world complete and permanent. The striking similarities between Rebecca and her deceased friend, Bet, confirm the imminence of her death. Aside from the homophony of their names, Bet, a mother of seven, died of alcoholism, and even in death, continues to crave the very substance that consumed her life. The chemical dependency that aligns female experience in the following passage elucidates Warner's critique of the domestic ideal that silences women; that it "robs" them of their livelihood becomes apparent as Rebecca discovers that someone has stolen one of her floral wreaths from Bet's grave. Even to Rebecca, this theft signifies a much greater loss:

She clenched her limbs to shriek her loss aloud,
But in the gale's dominion words came not.
And wherefore shriek, and shriek to whom? And what
Loss should she howl for, and what thief accuse?
And what this loss that was so deadly to lose?

Cry for a mess of flowers, and blame the wind?
No, it was more, was more! (222.1)

While Warner employs elements of fantasy throughout her writing, especially in her later works, she does not allow them to subvert the realist aspects of this text, particularly in its concern with female postwar subjectivity. Thus, Rebecca's "conversation" with Bet, though imagined, in which Bet consoles Rebecca's loss by encouraging her to "Look in your own heart" (223.1), might therefore be read as Warner's visioning of an alternative fate for Rebecca, in which she triumphs by harnessing her inner-strength, not squandering that potential with gin. Ultimately, these imaginative possibilities do not, and cannot, materialize. Rebecca's "encounter" with Bet does not bring her a sense of promise or give her determination to live. As a result of unresolved trauma, she has ruined her health, spent all of her earnings, and has no friends or relatives to support her. In the graveyard, Rebecca turns once again to gin. The speaker describes her final moments as hallucinatory, and marks her death with an ellipsis (225), rendering her body, in all of its complicated subjectivity, completely absent.

The coda that concludes the poem details the speaker's reflection upon the state of Rebecca's cottage after her death, reemphasizing physical spaces as embodiments of presence and absence in the aftermath of trauma. According to the speaker, the cottage, under new ownership, now showcases "Teas and Minerals," apparently unsuccessfully; and no traces of Rebecca's garden remain: "Where once the flowers had been there was a row / of tottering iron tables where no one sat" (226.1). It seems that even in Rebecca's death, the sense of isolation about her cottage lingers. Aside from the passersby, the only

other representation of the cottage materializes in the description of a painter's visual rendering. The speaker describes this painting in the opening stanza:

...and a painter once
sat for two days beside a pigsty wall
to take a picture of it, though as all
agreed who stole a passing squint, his view
was Bedlam-work, all daubs, red spots and blue,
mingling with white unearthly atomies
where drawers and nightgowns hung to better eyes. (195.1)

His attempt to artistically depict the cottage is deemed a failure by the intrusive passersby and townspeople. This pervasive sense of misrepresentation surrounding the cottage and its inhabitant unequivocally echoes Warner's concern with the vulnerability of the individual and nation to external forces; but here, the reference to "Bedlam-work" more specifically bespeaks the author's questioning of the constructs of sanity and madness that dominated public discourse in the aftermath of World War I, with respect to the shell-shock sustained by soldiers in the trenches. With respect to Rebecca, the abstract representation of her death at the end of the poem, denoted textually through an ellipsis, followed by a noticeable space on the page appearing nowhere else in the poem, retreats from definitively casting her as mad, but creates reasonable suspicion that her unresolved trauma and ensuing alcohol addiction are indicative or symptomatic of an undiagnosed mental instability. Although she leaves this question unanswered at the close of *Opus 7*, Warner continues to ponder the delicate dialectic between madness and sanity throughout much of the twentieth-century.²³ In a journal entry written four years following the "end" of the Second World War, Warner conceptualizes the terms "sanity" and "madness":

²³ One of the key similarities that unites Warner with Woolf and H.D. lies in their shared concern with madness and sanity in the aftermath of war as experienced by combatants, and particularly non-combatant women. One of the fundamental claims of this project is that in varying ways, each of these writers

Between sanity & madness there is a territory like a darkened moor, full of peat-hags, & mists, with no perceptible water-shed or frontier. The moisture sinks into the ground, is sucked up, & its division, whether it flows to sense or madness, takes up invisibly & underground. But there is a water-shed of mental direction, of choice, apart from the vital, willy-nilly watershed; & that is touched when one's thoughts look towards madness as towards a sheltered valley—still far off & hard to obtain, but [to] which one looks with a wearied longing, as towards a place that *could*, with time & endurance, be travelled to. It is only a few who are transported to madness, the rest have to stumble towards it, over the soggy misleading ground, & a through the obstacles of being a nuisance to those who love them, & a laughing-stock to strangers. (*Diaries*; July 25, 1949; 133)

In this passage, Warner effectively maps a territory that is inherently un-mappable, insofar as she is able to glean a sense of direction and vision from the disorientation and aimlessness that defines the space between madness and sanity. As readers, we witness Warner's use of writing as sanity-making, her ability to represent a psychological state that resists representation. The performative dimensions of Warner's writing take on the challenge of representing the traumatized psyche, with the aim of acknowledging and evacuating latent trauma. That she classifies those whose traumas remain unresolved as "transported to madness," effectively cautions against passive responses to trauma that mirror Rebecca's downfall. Still, that the mad become "a nuisance to those who love them, & a laughing-stock to strangers" conveys her disinclination to hold trauma victims responsible for their compromised psychological state.

That Warner denies Rebecca recovery from the traumas of war and identity effectively portrays the figure of the female non-combatant in her complexity and instability. Warner seeks not to unravel these complexities, but to map them in order to theorize recovery as a highly subjective and performative process. While Rebecca might

survives the political, economic, and existential uncertainty of the early twentieth-century by employing writing as a process of sanity-making.

be read as helpless and reckless, and even deserving of her fate, as a result of the traumas of war and identity that she has sustained, we realize that her identity is comprised of layers of contradiction. Rebecca is isolated, yet the subject of gossip; she is artistic, yet unable to express her trauma; she is physically present, yet disembodied; and like her flowers, she harbors the potential for growth and renewal, yet remains utterly susceptible to externalities, and defenseless to shield herself from them; she is in control of her fate, yet chooses to destroy it.²⁴ In reading Rebecca as a traumatized subject, it becomes clear that Warner strategically and repeatedly thwarts her recovery not to punish her protagonist or to elicit the sympathy of her reader, but to construct a definitive link between performance and recovery, a connection she develops throughout the 1930s by experimenting with literary representations of self across several genres.

Opus 7 posits the terms of recovery via performance thus: the individual must, in some way, testify to the trauma; and in doing so, he or she needs to foster some connection to another. Consistent with the foundational principles of performance as described by theorist Peggy Phelan, testifying to the trauma entails finding a form to express it (Phelan *Mourning* 11).²⁵ Additionally, she contends that identity can only

²⁴ Although used in reference to *Lolly Willowes*, my description here of Rebecca seems to enact what Robert Caserio has termed a “play of contraries” central to Warner’s writing (Caserio 267). Aside from their centrality as a writing technique, such contraries encapsulate the complexity of the female non-combatant subject. Another compelling parallel between Warner and Woolf lies in the nature of the contraries described here that define their respective protagonists, Rebecca of *Opus 7* and Miss LaTrobe of *Between the Acts*.

²⁵ Throughout *Mourning Sex*, Phelan employs the term “performative writing” to describe the process by which the traumatized individual finds a form to represent trauma in order to facilitate recovery. While I do not explicitly employ “performative writing” to discuss Warner’s protagonists in this chapter, this term nonetheless provides a useful vocabulary for thinking about writing as a recuperative process for Warner, particularly through the 1930s, and after World War II. To explain, consider Phelan’s working definition of “performative writing”:

Performative writing is different from personal criticism or autobiographical essay, although it owes a lot to both genres. Performative writing is an attempt to find a form for ‘what philosophy wishes all the same to say.’ Rather than describing the performance event in ‘direct signification,’ a task I believe to be impossible and not terrifically

reemerge and prosper, through relation to an other (*Unmarked* 111). Phelan also notes that the potency of trauma derives in part from how well it is contained (*Mourning Sex* 5), and so by drinking excessively, Rebecca perpetuates her trauma by ensuring its containment, instead of releasing it through performative testimony. Rebecca is ultimately denied recovery because she recoils from her trauma, instead of confronting it.

To some extent, writing about identity trauma through Rebecca enables Warner to work through her own traumas. It is important to note that in May 1930, while writing *Opus 7*, in her diary, Warner recorded her feelings of depression, presumably brought about by the dissolution of her long-time affair with Percy Buck (Brothers “*Sylvia Townsend Warner*” 304). Warner writes, “In the evening I was rather redeemed by a good beginning to the 5th section of *Rebecca*...I have lost initiative to be happy, my instincts, my roots into life, decay. I could still be saved at any moment, but I shan’t be, and I can do nothing about it myself” (*Diaries* 22 May 1930; 60). Here, Warner testifies to her loneliness and desperation, yet she posits her progress on *Opus 7* as redemptive. This entry substantiates the idea that for Warner, writing facilitates recovery because it affords her an opportunity to imagine and construct alternative selves, thereby allowing her to project a consuming sense of fatalism onto a fictional being, not to internalize it as Rebecca does. This thin divide between the material textual body (*Opus 7*) and the textual representation of the psychological self (the diary entry) illustrates that the bodies

interesting, I want this writing to enact the affective force of the performance event again, as it plays itself out in an ongoing temporality made vivid by the psychic process of distortion (repression, fantasy, and the general hubbub of the individual and collective unconscious), and made narrow by the muscular force of political repression in all its mutative violence. (Phelan 11-2)

Aside from calling attention to the need for a cultural discourse surrounding women’s (indirect) experiences of war on the home front, Warner’s writing also stringently counters the historical repression of the female voice. Read in the context of “performative writing,” her body of work unequivocally serves cultural, political, and personal ends.

that inform and comprise textual representations of trauma collude at times, yet ultimately remain distinct entities. In this way, performance—because it creates a space for fluid and experimental (re)presentations of self, particularly through repetition—affords the traumatized female non-combatant with a means by which to reclaim a sense of identity.

IV. “Enraptured with her own performance”: The Emerging Subjectivities of

Sophia Willoughby in *Summer Will Show*

Warner’s refiguring of female identity in the wake of war germinates during the interwar years, yet as this analysis demonstrates, her works published throughout the 1930s mark her focused inquiry into the process by which woman (re)locates and sustains self. As Barbara Brothers comments, while these issues informed Warner’s writing in the aftermath of World War I, her writings of the thirties particularly attest to war’s fragmenting impact upon individual subjectivity: “In the twenties, before she became politically active, her identification with and empathy for those marginalized by society were evident in her poems and novels; but in the thirties, she spoke out in deed and word against the injustices she witnessed and the hypocrisies she deplored” (Brothers ““Through the Pantry Window”” 162). In publicizing the oft-eclipsed reality of women’s lives between the wars, Warner experiments with a number of genres, including: the long poem (*Opus 7*; 1931), the short story (*More Joy in Heaven*; 1935), collaborative verse (*Whether a Dove or a Seagull*; 1934, with Valentine Ackland), and the novel (*Summer Will Show*; 1936 and *After the Death of Don Juan*; 1938). As she had done in *Opus 7*, in both of the aforementioned novels, Warner theorizes the figure of the female non-combatant from a unique subject position, in what I see as an attempt to imagine and

enact its positionality, while implicitly gauging its sustainability from cultural, gendered, and economic standpoints. The myriad forms through which Warner employs literary expression as a means of negotiating her identity as non-combatant, woman, and postwar subject during this pivotal decade warrant consideration.²⁶

Through the bond shared between its two central female figures, a bond which traverses the spheres of friendship, politics, and sexuality, *Summer Will Show* intensifies the link between artistry and recovery as established in *Opus 7*. A sense of immediacy as well characterizes Warner's examination of the therapeutic potential of performance. Detailing a longer, pivotal period in the protagonist's life, the novel-as-form thus enables Warner to map out the complexities of female non-combatant subjectivity more fully than in *Opus 7*. *Summer Will Show* especially focuses on the dissolution of the domestic as sole-determinant of female identity and selfhood, particularly by culminating with her overt political involvement. Set in the mid-nineteenth century, at the novel's opening, protagonist Sophia Willoughby is estranged from her husband, Frederick, and subsequently suffers the sudden deaths of her two children, Augusta and Damian.²⁷ Their deaths immediately give way to Sophia's formal break from the nineteenth-century "cult of domesticity," and like Rebecca, without a husband or children to care for, Sophia has no governing cultural precedent to dictate the course her life shall take. Similarly, Sophia's trauma initially seems to result from the conflict between her physical and narrative bodies, given that as a mother, her body and sense of self had been defined

²⁶ It should be noted as well that while this chapter was under review, the New York Review of Books released a new edition of *Summer Will Show*, with an Introduction by Claire Harman (2009). The first since 1987, this edition suggests a flourishing critical interest in Warner, particularly in her role as a novelist.

²⁷ Sophia's children die of smallpox, which they contract from exposure to a lime-kiln, which was thought to be a cure for whooping cough.

exclusively in terms of childbearing and childrearing. The deaths of her children effectively void this narrative, leaving Sophia to reconstruct it alone.

Juxtaposing protagonists Sophia and Rebecca reveals that Warner theorizes recovery specifically through the female non-combatant's *response* to the trauma she has endured: yet where Rebecca surrenders her self to it, Sophia almost instinctively sets out to recover her former narrative. Reading *Summer Will Show* alongside "Behind the Firing Line" and *Opus 7* thus highlights the evolving connection Warner's writing forges between woman's performance of self and recovery from identity trauma incited by war. Where *Opus 7* explores the tragic fate of a woman consumed by her trauma, *Summer Will Show* exhibits the complexity of the recovery process by charting Sophia's performance of multiple selves that account for the competing strains, sexual and otherwise, that comprise female identity in the interwar years.

In the immediate aftermath of her loss, Sophia's recovery largely entails foolish attempts at repair: she blindly resolves to resurrect her failed marriage to Frederick, and seeks to literally replace their deceased children by conceiving another. She decides, "Fate should not defeat her, she would have a child yet. And having already a husband it was certainly best and most convenient that the child should be his. So she would go to Paris, fetch Frederick back if needs be, beguile him, at the barest, explain her purpose and strike a bargain" (Warner 84). In her desperate determination, Sophia pursues Frederick, regardless of her knowledge that he has a mistress. The ensuing failure of her plan, though predictable, engages a crucial facet of contemporary theories on recovery: for one, the trauma cannot be "repaired," because, as Cathy Caruth claims, "Trauma... does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that

is not yet fully owned” (Caruth 151). Healing requires that one *integrate* the event into one’s ongoing narrative; therefore, Sophia must acknowledge the permanence of her loss and its irreparability. Frederick’s mistress, Minna Lemuel, will ironically function as a crucial agent of Sophia’s recovery, as their affair negates Sophia’s desire to bear more children; but more importantly, the relationship that later develops between Sophia and Minna catalyzes Sophia’s reclamation of self.

Locating Frederick requires that Sophia abandon the comfort and security of her Blandamer estate, and travel unaccompanied to the dangerous landscape of urban Paris.²⁸ Her departure marks a vital moment in her transition toward restoring her shattered narrative, because traveling without the customary assistance of her maid, Harlowe, forces Sophia to realize her independence. She thinks:

To travel without a maid was not possible. So she thought, till a few days without Harlowe’s ministrations showed her that she could brush hair and lace stays quite as well as she could wind on a bandage, and then every consideration seemed to point out the superior convenience of travelling alone. Only the world was against it. But since her visit to the lime-kiln Sophia was against the world. (Warner 85)

This moment foreshadows the novel’s privileging of process over outcome: in other words, the *means* by which Sophia reclaims selfhood prove more significant than the simple fact that she manages to survive her traumas of loss, the breakdown of her marriage, and the literal turbulence of war.

²⁸ Warner’s exploration of the rigid dichotomy between the country and city appears throughout much of her work. In a discussion of *Lolly Willows* (1926), Jane Marcus theorizes a link between the city and alternative sexual identities, which can feasibly be extended to *Summer Will Show*. She writes that the female protagonist, “...envision[s] a wilderness of one’s own, away from family control of domestic space, and male control of public space. Central to the concept of female wilderness is the rejection of heterosexuality” (Marcus “Wilderness” 136). Though I do not discuss the country v. city dichotomy at length in this chapter, I read Sophia’s move from rural Blandamer to urban Paris as prefiguring her lesbian affair with Minna. Given the applicability of this dichotomy to latent sexuality, Rebecca’s retreat to her cottage in *Opus 7* should also be read as another subtle indication of her lesbianism.

In fact, Sophia's willingness to physically extract herself from the monotony that comes to define her existence at Blandamer in the wake of the deaths of her children signifies her claim to personal independence; and at the same time, it previews the novel's larger representation of the female non-combatant as an embodiment of the coalescence of violence, trauma, and gender. Although Sophia sets out for Paris in the hope of resuscitating this shattered narrative, the friendship and eventual lesbian affair that ensues between she and Frederick's mistress, Minna, enables her to realize agency. This agency will ultimately empower Sophia to redirect her narrative of self in a way that secures her survival through the perils of the 1848 Revolution of Paris and its aftermath. Moreover, Minna's active involvement in the Communist party, and the interest that Sophia accordingly takes in it, conveys Warner's assertion that such agency should also include the ability for non-combatant women to intervene in politics. As the following discussion will demonstrate, *Summer Will Show* posits women's active political participation as its clearest example of the claim that recovery occurs (and is upheld) by performatively repositioning self in an array of compelling and rewarding roles. Therefore, Sophia's ability to survive war and the uncertainty of its aftermath in fact rests upon her involvement in public affairs, a role that directly counters the domestic ideology from which she emanates.

Given these larger thematic considerations, the passage quoted above encapsulates the intricate connection between performance and recovery that the novel gradually develops: Sophia's resolves to *perform* independence as a way of surmounting her grief, and of convincing Frederick of the plausibility of rekindling their romance. That the narrator discloses Sophia's fear and apprehension leads us to interpret her

performance as contrived; yet at the same time, performing determination in this moment facilitates Sophia's realization that she can control the direction her life shall take, despite the tremendous loss she has suffered.²⁹ Sophia also represents a progression in Warner's representation of the evolving post-war female non-combatant subject in the 1930s: rather than reacting passively to trauma, and becoming a recluse, as Rebecca had, Sophia boldly seeks (re)connection with others. Such a response proves consistent with a theory proffered by clinical psychologist Judith Herman, M.D., who asserts that, "Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (Herman 133).

Thus, on one hand, performance affords Sophia the ability to reflect objectively upon her decision to relinquish the security of her life at Blandamer, and enables her to imagine an alternative, and perhaps more meaningful, existence. Performance facilitates Sophia's agency because it invests her with the potential to redirect her narrative of self in the manner of her choosing, which Herman also views as integral to recovery (133).

But upon her arrival in France, Sophia depicts herself thus:

...she had been carried back to Dorset, and to Sophia Willoughby of Blandamer, whose children were dead, whose husband ran in the train of another woman—Sophia Willoughby, that desperate female who had so little to lose that she was now breakfasting alone in a foreign town, landed secretly there to carry out her foray. She did not want to think too much about the reason of her journey. The determination in her was so strong that it was like an actual pain, she would avoid while she might the pressure of a thought upon it. (Warner 88)

²⁹ Through the narrator, Warner forges a remove between her own negotiation of trauma and that of her protagonist. Granting the reader access to Sophia's thoughts in this way contributes to the novel's realism. David James argues that across her work, Warner subverts the presupposition that, "novelistic realism has always had a particularly unchanging objective, so passively mimetic of mere surface appearances as to leave it unequipped to analyze the psychological complexities of the human interior" (James 113). Sophia's psychological complexity, which comprises much of the novel, portrays how she internalizes events around her, thereby allowing readers to gauge the authenticity of her outward actions.

As she does here, and throughout *Summer Will Show*, Warner presents the connection between performance and recovery as vexed, in order to convey the obstacles associated with personal trauma, and to emphasize the extent to which they become exacerbated by war. Here, Sophia's inner-workings reveal her deliberate attempts to uphold a rigid divide between her emotions and her outward actions. In a passage that follows, she goes so far as to try to control how others will read her body: "There must be nothing in her adventure that could be called adventurous, nothing visionary or overwrought, no sense of destiny to betray her. As other people go to Paris to buy gloves, she was going to Paris to bargain for a child" (90). The space between Sophia's psychological narrative of self—which details her inner struggle and her feelings of isolation—versus her performance of confidence carried out through her body, suggests that both performances are contrived. In her disinclination to internalize the impact of her loss, she avoids confronting its reality, thereby evading the challenge of meaningfully integrating it into her ongoing narrative. That Sophia relies upon others' opinions of her as the principal means of regaining self-confidence, underscores the indelible effect of identity trauma upon non-combatant women.

When Sophia arrives in Paris, amidst the tempestuous Revolution of 1848, she is implicitly ascribed non-combatant status, thereby compounding her personal trauma with the material reality of war, a collusion that here characterizes the period leading up to the Spanish Civil War, and likewise defines H.D.'s experience of World War II, as discussed in the final chapter. Unlike Rebecca of *Opus 7*, Sophia attempts to overcome her trauma by fleeing Blandamer, mistakenly convincing herself that geographic displacement might heal her emotional and psychological wounds. That she is physically surrounded by the

material reality of battle emphasizes the unseen, inescapable psychological effects of trauma, and reinforces her need to confront it. Moreover, in that Sophia "...began to array herself as though for a battle" (91), in preparation for her meeting with Frederick, Warner subtly collapses Sophia's sense of self with the materiality of war, thereby aligning her vulnerability with that of an inexperienced soldier in battle. Yet in her determination to confront and sway Frederick, Sophia remains an arbiter of her own fate.

Contrary to her expectations, meeting her husband's mistress, Minna Lemuel, disrupts Sophia's ability to perform resilience and contentment. In fact, because Minna "sees through" Sophia's performative veil, dismantling its capacity to mask her fragmented psychological self, the ensuing friendship between the two thereby equips Sophia to locate her authentic sense of self. Through Minna, Warner gradually expands the realm of possible roles that the female non-combatant might assume as she works toward forging a sustainable postwar narrative. Although Sophia's initial reaction to Minna consists of a complicated mix of jealousy and animosity, it quickly becomes clear that associating with her, and becoming familiar with her revolutionary ideals, exposes Sophia to the means by which a woman becomes involved in political matters. Moreover, Minna's Jewishness accentuates her background and ideals as altogether unfamiliar to Sophia. Through Minna, Warner rethinks the feminine by divorcing it from its inherited notions of domestic propriety, and replaces these with the autonomy and freedom achieved through political involvement, here conveyed explicitly through Minna's ownership of firearms.

Sophia's friendship with Minna invests her with the capacity to define self beyond the paradigm of a childless mother; and doing so proves recuperative because it reframes

her memory of her children outside of the context of their deaths. Earlier, Sophia questioned, “Must every thought twist her back upon the loss of her children, her stratagem to have children again?” (88). Now, ostensibly because she acquires a sense of fearlessness from Minna, Sophia no longer perceives death as a likely outcome of everyday life. She reflects on her own progress: “For the last nine years of her life Sophia had seen in every human activity death as a factor... Yet the day passed, and the February dusk had fallen, and Sophia had not once bethought her that death might wait upon a revolution” (127-8). That death no longer lurks as a consequence of her every action signifies Sophia’s gradual reclamation of her identity, and her increasing ability to direct the course of her ongoing narrative of self.

This newfound freedom, and the positive outlook that it fosters, should not only be attributed to Sophia’s unexpected friendship with Minna, but also to the fact that with Minna, Sophia realizes her lesbian identity. Although some critics reject the palpability of their sexual relationship,³⁰ given the following passage, the sexual intensity between them is unmistakable. Of Minna, Sophia thinks:

Never in her life had she felt such curiosity or dreamed it possible. As though she had never opened her eyes before she stared at the averted head, the large eloquent hands, the thick, milk-coffee coloured throat that housed the siren voice. Her curiosity went beyond speculation, a thing not of the brain but in the blood. It burned her like a furnace, with a steadfast compulsive heat that must presently catch Minna in its draught, hale her in, and devour her. (120)

Sophia’s private thoughts acknowledge her physical attraction to Minna; and moreover, they suggest that the realization of her lesbian identity frees Sophia from the confines of

³⁰ In her Introduction to the 1987 edition, Claire Harman writes that, “Lesbianism was not Sylvia Townsend Warner’s theme in this book, though at points it seems implicit” (Harman viii). Similarly, Gillian Spraggs remarks, “In *Summer Will Show*, Sylvia Townsend Warner chose not to make an issue of the sexual element in the relationship between Sophia and Minna” (Spraggs 111).

the performative veil she had heretofore relied upon to assert herself, and allows her to attain a level of happiness that she describes as "...of an immortal kind" (236). In privileging her own desires above her preoccupation with the views of others, Sophia equips herself to reclaim a sustainable identity.

Recognizing her lesbian identity also eradicates her former compulsion to blindly capitulate to the artificial, patriarchal assignations of acceptable femininity that her earlier, and rather scripted confrontation with Frederick now symbolizes. This idea is consonant with Castle's assertion, "What makes this novel paradigmatically 'lesbian,' in my view, is not simply that it depicts a sexual relationship between two women, but that it so clearly, indeed almost schematically, figures this relationship as a breakup of the supposedly 'canonical' male-female-male erotic triangle" (Castle "Counterplot" 537). Furthermore, in Sophia's acknowledgement of her lesbianism, Warner carefully revises the terms by which performance facilitates a realization of self after trauma: performing a false or contrived identity is not adequate to confront or mitigate trauma; rather, one must locate or reestablish a latent aspect of self, or one that existed prior to the trauma, and employ it as the site from which the narrative of self might reemerge and continue.³¹

But just as Warner denies Sophia the ability to reclaim the maternal, neither can she seamlessly transition into the lesbian community. Castle interprets the novel's commitment to envisioning alternatives to singular notions of individuality as further evidence of its classification as a lesbian text.³² The imaginative impulse at work in the

³¹ Later in the novel, the narrator describes the freedom that Minna affords Sophia: "...she offered her one flower, liberty. One could love her freely, unadmonished and unblackmailed by any merits of body or mind. She made no more demands upon one's more approval than a cat, she was not even a good mouser. One could love her for the only sufficient reason one chose to" (Warner 238).

³² In her article, Castle claims that, "By its very nature lesbian fiction has—and can only have—a profound attenuated relationship with what we think of, stereotypically, as narrative verisimilitude, plausibility or 'truth to life'" (Castle "Counterplot" 546-7).

novel actively defines the feminine as a pluralized and complicated site of identity. As it unfolds, Sophia's process of self-reclamation becomes disrupted by several factors, not the least of which is another unexpected meeting, this time with her aristocratic great-aunt, Léocadie. Reconnecting with her great-aunt after an extended period of separation forces Sophia to again recall her past.³³ During this encounter, being reminded of the admiration that she had for Léocadie as a child leads her to think of her own children. She remembers, "Never since then had she loved so well; and though with course of time her love for great-aunt Léocadie had been put aside, as one puts aside a piece of piano-music, the well-learned was still with her, she could still play it by heart" (Warner 147-8). Especially in its emphasis on loving "so well," this passage conflates past and present, as Sophia's reunion with Léocadie triggers her memory of having once experienced a genuine emotional connection with another human-being, that is replicated, albeit with a difference, in her bond with Minna. The emotional and sexual intimacy Sophia and Minna share, coupled with Warner's use of piano-music as metaphor in this passage, establish two noteworthy biographical parallels between Warner and her protagonist—music and same-sex intimacy—substantiating to some extent that *Summer Will Show* constitutes Warner's own writing of recovery.³⁴

Ever conscious of the multiplicity of female identity, Warner resists the temptation to render transparent the divide between author and fictional construct.

Accordingly, Léocadie represents the traditional ideal of womanhood, which continues to

³³ In an earlier scene, shortly after meeting Minna, Sophia learns that she owns several firearms. The narrator notes that Sophia feels comfortable in Minna's presence because the firearms conjure a memory of Sophia's father (127).

³⁴ With this said, in her Introduction to the 2009 edition, Harman notes Warner's insistence to the contrary, writing that Warner contended, "...that the characters of Sophia and Minna were entirely imaginative creations of long standing and not, as many readers familiar with her life might surmise, based rather closely on her own character and that of her lover, Valentine Ackland" (Harman viii).

intrigue Sophia, particularly as she grieves the deaths of her children. To insist upon this plurality, Warner strategically positions Sophia midway between the opposing poles of traditional and radical femininity, as represented by Léocadie and Minna, respectively, in order to foreshadow the novel's outcome: Sophia learns the tremendous possibilities of female identity through her liaison with Minna, but will ultimately recoil from her radical, revolutionary affiliations; neither will she revert to the confining ideals that have dominated Léocadie's life. Like Rebecca, Warner affords Sophia the opportunity to direct the course of her life in the path of her choosing. Perhaps substantiating some progression in Warner's vision of the potential for the female non-combatant not simply to survive, but to recover, Sophia is unequivocally more self-reflective than her poetic counterpart; and this trait enhances her ability to withstand her trauma. Still, the emotional and psychological trauma of loss, combined with the material trauma of battle that encompasses Sophia in France has a divisive effect on her worldview.

While walking through the streets of Paris, Sophia describes her divided consciousness: "With all of her reason and with half of her heart she would have given away the other half in order to do what was the obvious and sensible thing—to extract herself from this unpleasant and dangerous turmoil, walk off to the hotel and go to bed. But the other half of her heart, the half which had landed her in this situation, held firm, and kept her there" (139-40). Using her heart as metaphor, the text conflates Sophia's fractured emotional state with the gruesome materiality of war. The difficulty she experiences in formulating a response to external events points toward the severity of her trauma, and affirms that the realization of self she has achieved through emotional and sexual intimacy with Minna cannot, in and of itself, undo the trauma she has endured.

Herman explains that traumatic events produce psychological fragmentation that “tears apart a complex system of self-protection that normally functions in an integrated fashion” (Herman 34). By the close of the novel’s second section, Sophia has attempted to perform a coherent narrative of self through a variety of roles, including mother, estranged wife, lesbian, and devoted niece. No single role fulfills her, which is indicative both of the complicated nature of the recovery process, and the intricacies associated with employing performance as a mechanism by which to facilitate it.

Throughout its third and fourth sections, Warner explores the delicate matrix of art, war, and performance that informs the recovery process as manifested in Minna’s interest in storytelling. That Minna likewise inspires Sophia to tell stories substantiates Sophia’s quest to sustain and redefine her narrative of self through performance, and forges an explicit link between female recovery and the exercise of artistry (Warner 150-51). For example, a conversation that Sophia has with a homeless man outlines the potential for art to redress war trauma. The man informs Sophia that Minna donates generously to charitable causes, even though she can barely support herself; and as a result, Minna is impoverished. He remarks, ““She is an artist, and there is no time now for art”” (164). This telling statement prefigures Warner’s cautious delineation of the relationship between performance and recovery: during wartime, art may do little to measurably impact the course of events on a national scale; but its potential to foster individual recovery remains unexcavated. Sophia’s foray into politics shows that she must learn the fundamental difference between performance and mimicry: to be inspired by Minna’s artistry as a way of expressing and negotiating trauma is reasonable, *as long as* that performative expression enables Sophia to realize her own individuality. In other

words, it is insufficient to simply mimic another, because the recuperative capacity of performance lies in the female non-combatant's reassertion of a self-made narrative that has been silenced by war.

For this reason, Sophia's most overt performance in the novel, when she sings in front of an audience, harbors no therapeutic potential because the director, Dury, disempowers her: "His glance rested upon her with extraordinary satisfaction, as though, for the purpose he had in mind, she were even better suited than he had supposed" (227). Dury thus employs Sophia merely to suit his own agenda; as Sophia's subsequent reflection details, she thought her audience, "very unsettling company... They were idle... In their assumption of simplicity they were arrogant" (229). Sophia's attempt to assert herself artistically fails both because she is not in control of the performance, and she lacks a receptive audience. Trauma theorist Susan Brison insists upon the value of an audience to the survivor's attempt to recover through performance: "It is not sufficient for mastering the trauma to construct a narrative of it: one must (physically, publically) say or write (or paint or film) the narrative and others must see or hear it in order for one's survival as an autonomous self to be complete" (Brison 62). This experience impels Sophia to confront the fact that artistic performance does not harbor the same restorative potential for her as it does for Minna; and more importantly, she and Minna are not as alike as she had once thought. Consistent with contemporary notions of recovery that posit it as a process without end, Sophia's, and by extension, Warner's, quest to find a form through which to actualize her reclamation of self continues.

Accordingly, the gradual dissolution of the relationship between Sophia and Minna that comprises the novel's final section might be attributed, at least in part, to the

idea that Minna espouses greater allegiance to the Communist party than to Sophia. To Sophia, Minna is a role model, and the only woman to whom she can relate, aside from Léocadie. In a desperate attempt to salvage their relationship, Sophia compromises her own beliefs—which repudiate Communism—and risks being arrested when she blindly agrees to distribute Communist propaganda at the request of Inglebrecht, a revolutionary, and friend to Minna (Warner 294). She thinks to herself, “What idiocy, what futility, to be carrying revolutionary tracts through these streets!” which leads her to conclude, “...At least, she had assured herself, Inglebrecht was not an idealist; but she must revise that opinion now” (297). Couched within her dissidence exists a reiteration of the text’s subtle, yet critical distinction between performance and mimicry—the former enables a realization of self, and the latter displaces it.³⁵ It becomes clear that since she met Minna, Sophia has resorted to mimicry as a means of survival, instead of recovering her own narrative by working through the complications brought about by the collusion of the two opposing identities she embodies: arbiter of domestic propriety and lesbian. Reinforcing the significance of this distinction, Warner employs performative language to describe Sophia’s perception of Minna: “Looking back at the house she saw Minna leaning from the balcony, her black hair glittering in the morning sunlight, her large hand waving, and every line of her body expressing an invincible sense of drama” (295). Sophia’s exclusive focus on Minna’s physicality relegates the locus of their connection to the

³⁵ Describing *Summer Will Show* as an “unillusioned book,” Claire Harman’s exploration of the realistic portrayal of Sophia’s involvement in politics as articulated throughout the novel further supports my claim that prior to Minna’s death, Sophia participated in the Communist cause only out of love for Minna, not because she genuinely ascribes to its ideals. Of Sophia, Harman writes: “There is no revolutionary halo around the part she has to play, nor round her—the reader is not spared her slightly acid feelings of having been snubbed by real revolutionaries” (Harman *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* 150).

realm of the body, which cannot withstand the divisive impact of their opposing worldviews.

Yet Sophia's ability to see herself in terms distinct from Minna conveys that the most concrete aspects of Sophia's narrative of self are those in which she forged a genuine emotional connection with others: her love for her children, her admiration for her great-aunt Léocadie, and her intimacy with Minna. Because they are disparate, Sophia's identity—much like that of trauma survivors—remains in flux, because its definition shall be determined in and through the aforementioned governing relationships. For this reason, that Sophia finds herself on the barricade at the beginning of the June uprising of workers against the bourgeoisie, illustrates her loyalty to Minna, as well as Warner's broader conflation of women and revolution. Situating Sophia amidst ongoing battle marks her willingness to directly confront the turmoil of war, but the scene ultimately retreats from altogether negating Sophia's non-combatant status. As critic Thomas Foster points out, Sophia's thought, "I have no place here" (304) implies "that she sees the story of her life and the story of revolution as mutually exclusive" (Foster 552).

As this battle scene unfolds, Warner intensifies the collusion of Sophia's conflicting identities—especially between her past and present—when she is reunited on the barricade with Caspar, a West Indian boy whom she took in at the behest of her slaveholding uncle years earlier, prior to the deaths of her children. As an adolescent, Caspar joins the *Gardes Mobiles*, a counterrevolutionary organization. A counterrevolutionary and anti-Semite, Caspar plunges a bayonet into Minna's chest; and Sophia reacts by shooting Caspar at point-blank range. This violent scene catalyzes

Sophia's survival because it signifies her ability, and by extension, that of the female non-combatant in general, to mitigate violence with action, rather than passively retreat from it. Her split-second decision to murder a young man for whom she once cared effectively marks the text's erasure of the temporal boundaries that had heretofore inhibited the proliferation of her narrative of self; the deaths of Caspar and Minna on the barricade represent the symbolically interweaving of Sophia's past and present, denoting her as the sole determinant of her future.

Unlike Rebecca, Sophia possesses an inherent capacity to adapt to circumstances as they confront her, and to perform different selves. This multiplicity equips her to respond even in extreme ways, such as committing a violent murder. Caspar's murder also signifies a final and permanent denial of Sophia's maternal narrative, constructed exclusively around domestic propriety and the privileging of others over oneself. After her release from the barricade, the narrator remarks, "She was her own creature again—flipped back into the farewell world, to fend for herself, sink or swim" (Warner 317), a corroboration that Minna's death, though another sudden and tragic loss in Sophia's life, shall not signify the end of Sophia's quest for self.

In a passage that follows, Warner effectively collapses the competing threads of body, life, death, and narrative that inform Sophia's female non-combatant identity at this pivotal textual moment. Yet with a degree of objectivity not entirely dissimilar to Rebecca's in the graveyard scene in *Opus 7*, Sophia imagines:

With a sleep-walking obstinancy her body was taking her back to the barricade. Murderers go back. And if it comes to that, I may be said to have murdered Caspar. 'Do you know, in the year '48 old Mrs. Willoughby murdered her uncle's illegitimate son—a boy of fifteen, a poor stupid blackamoor who worshipped the ground she trod on?' 'No, really? One would never think it.' 'Such a dull old woman. Rather cold-

hearted, don't you think?' This icy pain in her bosom, the pain of a heart beclouded, it would go on and on, she supposed, the counterpart to that flowering crimson on Minna's white muslin gown, that flowering of her warm and generous blood. (318)

Through these poignant images of the trauma sustained by the physical body, coupled with Sophia's extant concern with the public narrative of her reputation, the text fuses the representation of self via the physical body, and the representation of self via the narrative body. In contrast to Rebecca Random, however, both of these bodies shall endure, in spite of the circumstances that threatened to destroy them. That the novel denies the possibility of survival to Minna through its overt omission of her role in the revolution enacts Foster's suggestion, "At this point in the novel, its main narratives interrupt one another, thereby calling into question the authority of either of those narratives, the revolution's or Sophia and Minna's, to typify the totality of social life" (Foster 552). The text reinforces the permanence of this omission in Sophia's inability to locate Minna's body amid the carnage. In its refusal to provide an explicit indication of whether, and onto whom, narrative authority is ultimately bestowed, the novel suspends the expectation of a definitive argument for women's appropriate sexual and social roles. Heather Love describes the text's linking of political and sexual revolution:

Revolution in *Summer Will Show* is also begot by despair upon impossibility: it appears in the novel as an analogue for the 'impossible object' of same-sex desire... Revolution in the novel is both that which must happen and that which cannot happen; Warner describes the mixture of hope and despair that are produced by attachment to such an impossible object. (Love 143)

While Love defines this "impossible object" as the desire between Sophia and Minna, the notion of impossibility also encompasses the steep polarity between the path that Sophia intended her life to take at the novel's outset—raising her children at Blandamer—versus

its actual outcomes to this point—the death of her lesbian lover, and her newfound Communist impulse.

Because they reinforce the stark divide between competing narratives of motherhood and lesbianism that inform Sophia's narrative of self, the deaths of Caspar and Minna textually mirror the deaths of Sophia's children, Damian and Augusta. Through violent and unnatural death, the text negates both models, fostering Sophia's reversion to her role as independent subject. The image of Minna's "warm" blood embodies the profound and extant influence their relationship in particular shall continue to have upon Sophia, marking the lesbian bond as her most gratifying and empowering. Thus, her memory of Minna will always conjure accompanying feelings of emptiness, suggested via the "icy pain in her bosom." In some ways, this juxtaposition of warm and cold, life and death, prefigures the novel's contradictory sentiments regarding woman's place in society. As an independent subject, Sophia must nonetheless reconcile the tension between traditional and radical womanhood. A closing conversation between she and Léocadie presents this disparity as nearly irreconcilable, as the old woman tells her, "I have no arguments, no theories," assuring her that, "It is people like you and me, Sophie, who have never done a day's work in our lives, who wonder, and meditate on society, and ask ourselves what good we can do in the world" (Warner 328). This comment reinforces the rigidity between the opposing realms of idea and action, and relegates women to the former. Read in the immediate aftermath of the violent battle scene in which Sophia murders Caspar, and witnesses the death of her closest companion, Léocadie's comment critiques the sense of paralysis that society inherently ascribes to non-combatant status, in its suggestion that war necessitates a broadening of the concept

of women's "work," to account for the myriad challenges that war as lived event poses to female non-combatant subjectivity.

Contrary to her great-aunt's value system, the novel closes with an image of Sophia seated alone in Minna's apartment, becoming "by degrees absorbed" by the Communist tracts she happens upon, carrying out what Foster sees as, "the possibility of feminist intervention around issues of sexuality and pleasure in the Marxist narrative of revolution, while at the same time demonstrating the need for women's stories of liberation and narratives of same-sex desire to come into contact with narratives of class, race, and colonialism, beyond their own borders" (Foster 554). Although her reading of the tracts might be interpreted as yet another attempt to blindly adopt the principles of others, it bears noting that reading them *herself* highlights Sophia's growing ability to direct the course of her life on her own terms. Most importantly, it highlights Warner's refusal to accept the idea that the female non-combatant cannot meaningfully intervene in matters of politics, which bear irreparably upon her social and economic well-being.

V. "As if you needed a man": Feminist Recovery in Warner

Warner's works across the genres of the essay, the long poem, and the novel represent female non-combatant recovery as the process by which woman reclaims self in the aftermath of the public trauma of war, and especially the personal, unresolved identity traumas that war incites. In so doing, these texts subvert the social, political, and economic limitations that patriarchal ideals have historically placed upon women. The realist impulse throughout Warner's writing serves as an acknowledgement that reconciling the conflicting facets of self—especially concerning sexuality, politics, and gender—will not occur seamlessly. For Warner, as for Woolf and H.D., performance

functions as a means of negotiating these multiple, scattered strains of self that resurface after the divisiveness of trauma. Highlighting the performative dimensions of her protagonists' efforts to remake self suggests as well that writing across genres enables Warner to artistically map her own recovery, while conveying the need to broaden existing clinical and theoretical notions of recovery to account for the myriad challenges specific to women's wartime experiences. As her fictional constructs Rebecca and Sophia, as well as her own background in munitions labor evince, Warner's writing during the 1930s redefines the feminine as an identity that remains in process, and dwells in the possibility of continually recreating itself.

With the exception of Minna Lemuel's overt performative qualities, Warner rarely calls explicit attention to the place of performance within the quest to relocate and reestablish self in the aftermath of trauma. However, her work throughout the this decade was as much a performative experiment with asserting her own identity as a writer, as it was a germane period in which to construct several, and often opposing, identities for her fictional characters, and utilize the text as a space in which to assess the veracity and sustainability of the conflicting roles of these characters. In so doing, as the writing of Woolf and especially H.D. likewise illustrates, Warner employs the text—in her first-person narrative of munitions labor, and in her fictional forays into non-combatant subjectivity alike—to forge a vital boundary between self and experience. This boundary affords her the objectivity necessary to separate her sense of self from the lived experience that threatens to compromise it. Years after the publication of the texts discussed here, in her 1959 address to The Royal Society of Arts, Warner criticizes this separation between a woman writer and her work: “Women as writers seem to be

remarkably adept at vanishing out of their writing so that the quality of immediacy replaces them” (*Collected Poems* 269). Yet in the context of trauma and recovery, the very invisibility that Warner condemns here takes on an invigorating dimension, because it recasts such separation as indicative of the author’s strategic negotiation with her trauma.³⁶

As Warner recognized through writing, performing multiple selves provides the female non-combatant with a means of continually exploring the aspects of her identity that remain unrealized. As characters like Rebecca Random and Minna Lemuel illustrate, performance, like testimony, harbors the potential to perpetuate the trauma, even if its intent at the outset is recuperative. To distinguish these ends, Warner makes clear that performance fuels trauma when one employs it as a mechanism to displace or mask the trauma. By contrast, it proves recuperative in those circumstances in which it empowers the non-combatant to define self in such a way that celebrates her rich multiplicity. Warner’s realist impulse, combined with her redefinition of the feminine in and through process, captures the essence of performance as it informs her written works. Comprising the fundamental boundary between author and subject, these textual bodies enact survival as they subvert the very terms under which such survival had been historically suppressed.

³⁶ It should also be noted that critic David James identifies the significance of this separation as well. He argues, “Her implicit striving for an impartial separation of author from artwork is a quintessential component of her aesthetic aspirations for narrative fiction” (112).

Chapter 2

“We Act Different Parts But Are the Same”: Interwar Performances and Non-Combatant Identity in *Between the Acts* and *Mrs. Dalloway*

“War, you say, is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost. And we echo your words. War is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped. For now at last we are looking at the same picture; we are seeing with you the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses.”

-*Three Guineas* (1938)

In *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf admonishes patriarchal ideology on the grounds that it promotes war, and proffers unequal gender relations, thereby contributing to the erosion of social and economic vitality. As she explains, these outcomes—irrevocably intertwined—disparage the lives of the citizenry as a whole; however, without equal opportunity for education and advancement, women are particularly vulnerable to the destructive social and economic ramifications of war, and altogether unprepared to redress its damaging psychological and emotional effects. For these reasons, *Three Guineas* provides a useful framework for considering Woolf’s exploration of female non-combatant recovery and identity as it transpires in her fictional works. Consonant with this pacifist polemic, as well as her feminist principles, many of her novels incisively fault patriarchy for thwarting individuality by defrauding women of the opportunity to realize and exercise the full import of their intellectual and artistic capacities. In so doing, Woolf’s fiction posits the exercise of female autonomy as central

to redefining self in the aftermath of war, as it delineates the terms upon which that recovered narrative might be realized. This chapter focuses on *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *Between the Acts* (1941) as sites that specifically, yet distinctly, exhibit Woolf's engagement with the interplay of identity, narrative, and performance as a framework that enables women to endure the traumatic aftermath of World Wars I and II.

Aside from the fact that both novels take place during a single day, I pair *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* because they evince a shift in Woolf's use of performance as a mode of remaking self astride the massive social, political, and cultural disruption war incites. Each novel showcases an array of non-combatant women who are fundamentally united on the basis having endured war, regardless of the socioeconomic barriers that divide them. As facilitated by stream-of-consciousness, the seamless transitions from the private thoughts of one woman to another reveal their respective proclivity and capacity to withstand such tumult. *Mrs. Dalloway* portrays this process through its title character, Clarissa, as well as Sally Seton, and to a lesser extent, Rezia Smith. *Between the Acts* features Lucy Swithin, Mrs. Manresa, Isa Oliver, and Miss La Trobe.

Through these characters, each novel represents interwar female subjectivity as a rich multiplicity that traverses the spheres of ethnicity and religion, domesticity and motherhood, education and class, as well as sexuality. As I will argue, this multiple subjectivity facilitates recovery because it invests the female non-combatant with the flexibility to redefine self in the manner of her choosing; and empowers her to continually adapt that narrative in response to ongoing cultural change. As *Three Guineas* asserts, the exercise of agency constitutes a direct renunciation of patriarchal

ideology, which categorically regards woman as an arbiter of domestic propriety, not of her individuality. In this way, Woolf's novels seem to enact the complexities of representing female identity as theorized by Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith, who claim not only that, "Identities, therefore, are discursive, provisional, intersectional, and unfixed" (Smith and Watson10), but suggest as well the subversive potential that such fluidity creates, as they observe: "Women become conscious of being biographically scripted in disabling ways, disciplined to a constraining script of femininity" (14). In *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*, recovery therefore becomes at once a strategy of self-preservation and resistance.

In particular, Smith's and Watson's insights suggest the nuanced manner in which Woolf constructs and critiques the shifting category of womanhood in these novels. The shattering of individuality that ensues in the wake of war is indeed "disabling" to several of her non-combatant figures; yet, by positioning them along a continuum—wherein the emerging, interwar narrative identity of each woman represents a unique departure from conventional womanhood—Woolf experiments with the possibility of "rescripting" this fragmentation as a gateway to individual recovery *and* the cultural redefinition of the category of womanhood. The uniqueness of each non-combatant figure attests to recovery as a highly subjective process; and at the same time, bespeaks the specifically feminist aims of Woolf's project, for the narrative of self most likely to facilitate recovery, and equip woman to withstand impending war, is the one she authors.

This process of self-authoring is intensely performative. As the following discussion will illustrate, the non-combatant women in these texts are not all progressive: some forthrightly ascribe to patriarchal ideals, performing selfhood in order to

demonstrate their willingness to conform, in one case to the moral code of devout religious belief; and in another, to the social code of sexual desirability. However, by presenting an array of female subjectivities in both novels, Woolf reinforces self-authoring as an artistic practice, wherein the performative exercise of woman's non-singular subjectivity allows the emerging self to be continually revised and remade.

While the scope of this project is limited to Woolf's fiction, the proliferation of scholarship surrounding her diaries, and the diaries themselves, confirm that for Woolf, the textual canvas becomes a formative space enabling her to artistically work through her own experiences of personal and national trauma; and this process alludes to the biographical dimensions of self-authoring. Thus, we cannot ignore the link that Woolf identifies between plurality and survival, which she writes about extensively in her diaries. As Deborah Martinson explains, a non-singular subjectivity fostered political as well as personal ends for Woolf: "A woman exploring consciousness and evading cultural hegemony, Woolf thus depicts the multiple facets of personality, of the feminine. She maneuvers in opposition to the exact definitions that such an audience can interrogate" (Martinson 32). In addition to highlighting Woolf's push to broaden the cultural discourse pertaining to war trauma to encompass non-combatant and veteran experience alike, the elusive audience to which Martinson refers also suggests that Woolf approaches identity as a provisional category that can shift with respect to audience. To this end, performativity in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* showcases the interplay between self and other, and public and private, as crucial to woman's pursuit of a sustainable postwar narrative.

Separately, each novel explores the extent to which a non-singular, shifting subjectivity promotes woman's capacity to adapt to the permanently altered material aftermath of war, and to withstand its psychological and emotional effects. In both, social interaction—occurring at a party, pageant-play, or even in everyday conversation—evinces coping and survival; but more importantly, these exchanges reveal woman's varied performances of self, as well as the systems in place that substantiate these performances. For example, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the dissimilar proclivity for such interaction as exhibited respectively by Clarissa and Rezia, prefigures not merely Rezia's eventual succumbing to postwar secondary trauma, but exposes the divisive barriers—concerning national origin, class status, and the exercise of individual agency—that promote Clarissa's agency and all but guarantee Rezia's continued despair.³⁷

Conversely, as it anticipates a resurgence of the cultural upheaval incited by World War I, *Between the Acts* assumes a slightly different approach, as it surveys woman's ongoing struggle to claim selfhood amidst war. In so doing, the novel ultimately suspends the fates of the two figures whose propensity for recovery seems most likely—artists Isa Oliver and Miss La Trobe—within the realm of possibility. In its refusal to definitively articulate the fate of any character, and through its insistence that the lives and fates of the individual and the nation are interwoven, *Between the Acts* underscores the broader, historical implications of promoting female non-combatant recovery by rethinking the parameters of “acceptable” womanhood.

³⁷The scope of this project precludes detailed analysis of Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth Dalloway. Elizabeth represents Woolf's closest approximation to the hope that the female non-combatant will successfully claim and exercise agency; however, the advantage afforded Elizabeth—but denied to many other women, as epitomized by Miss Kilman—should be attributed to Elizabeth's education, and particularly to her age, given that she was not raised according to Victorian ideals concerning woman's domestic propriety.

By retreating from clinical approaches to veteran trauma that theorize recovery in binary terms—wherein the “result” is either success or failure—as I have suggested, Woolf’s novels instead embrace the subjective underpinnings of this process, and thus represent recovery along a more nuanced continuum. Her focus on non-combatant traumatic experience promotes her political aims as well, insofar as re-figuring female postwar identity in terms of non-singular subjectivity, and specifically one that allows for multiple sexualities and flexible identity—circumvents the social and political boundaries that preclude gender equality, and highlights woman’s capacity to attain personal fulfillment by defining self of her own volition. How and why Woolf reserves such capacity exclusively for the feminine, however, becomes clear through an exploration of the strategic denial of recovery to men in each novel.

I. “There was nothing whatever the matter”: Woolf’s Disavowal of Masculine

Recovery

The figures of Septimus Smith and Peter Walsh—in many ways opposing masculine subjectivities in *Mrs. Dalloway*—are in fact linked by their common inability to recover selfhood, and especially to reintegrate themselves into society following World War I. Through their respective hardships, the novel suggests a crucial distinction between combatant and non-combatant recovery; and, as contrasts to attempts at recovery waged by their female counterparts, Septimus’s and Peter’s respective failures, and the reasons why they occur, provide a valuable framework for the complex representation of female recovery that unfolds throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*.

Peter Walsh proves an intriguing, albeit complicated, suffering-male. Although at once male and non-combatant, and largely uninhibited by the physical, psychological, or

emotional traumas of war, Peter's inability to conform to patriarchal dictates of masculinity—and especially to attain the contentment that purportedly results from marriage and fatherhood—fuels the overwhelming inadequacy and anxiety that come to define his character, and precludes his ability to express to Clarissa the depth of his feelings for her. For instance, Peter's first visit to Clarissa and Richard's home rouses this sense of insufficiency: "Oh yes, he had no doubt about that; he was a failure, compared with all this—the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks, the chair-covers and the old valuable English tinted prints—he was a failure" (Woolf 43). The décor in the Dalloway's home magnifies the material comfort that they relish; and in turn, by repeatedly depicting Peter as a "solitary traveller," the text highlights a stark contrast between his lifestyle and Clarissa's. Although not homeless in an economic sense, Peter is definitely something of an aimless wanderer.

While this disparity indeed causes Peter a great deal of frustration, the traumatic aftermath of Septimus's experience on the front lines unequivocally eclipses Peter's anguish. A veteran who has returned to London after World War I, Septimus is physically disfigured and psychologically disturbed by the uncontrollable repetition of terrifying memories of battle, and flashbacks of his fallen comrades. He attempts to overcome these effects by rebuilding his prewar life alongside his wife, Rezia. In one sense, Septimus's emotional paralysis functions to protect him from these traumatic memories, as he blatantly admits to his lack of feeling: "He watched [the last shells] explode with indifference" (86). Yet his recurrent flashbacks and visions exacerbate this paralysis to the point of utter social dysfunction.

Therefore, a significant component of Woolf's critique of patriarchal ideology throughout the novel relates not merely to war as a deliberate act of aggression, but to the corresponding lack of a sanctioned cultural discourse for addressing and assuaging veteran trauma. The extensive critical discourse pertaining to the figure of Septimus Smith substantiates this claim; yet, as a *non-combatant*, Peter Walsh exemplifies Woolf's belief that patriarchal ideology likewise makes little provision for the exercise of masculine individuality, instead reducing manhood to the singular aim of promoting war and aggression. In so doing, patriarchy curtails the likelihood that men—combatants and non-combatants alike—will effectively adapt to the cultural tumult incited by war.³⁸

To different degrees, both men are wanderers, in search of something that they cannot articulate. As Septimus reveals, "...it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (88). Moreover, his anxiety about "be[ing] alone forever" (145) parallels Peter's own transcontinental search to India for emotional intimacy and fulfillment. The text sustains these parallels as Lady Bruton and her aristocratic friends discuss Peter's return to London after an extended absence: "He had come back, battered, unsuccessful, to their secure shores. But to help him, they reflected, was impossible; there was some flaw in his character" (107). This dismissal in fact applies as acutely to

³⁸Much of the critical discussion surrounding Septimus deals with the erasure of individuality as a traumatic effect of war, and a strategy of perpetuating it. For example, Mark Hussey contends, "Virginia Woolf was thoroughly aware of war's dependence upon secrecy, deception, and lying, upon the denial or erasure of personal experience and perception by a public myth" (Hussey 5). Specifically referencing Septimus, Susan Bennett Smith observes, "Because Septimus has internalized an excess of stoicism in the Great War, he reacts by expressing his grief in self-abnegation" (Smith 313). Aside from this erasure, critical attention to his suicide abounds. Where most agree that it occurs as a direct response to the inadequate societal and medical response to war trauma, whether it can or should be read as an assertion of self remains contested. For example, Laura Sager claims, "His suicide is the ultimate defiance of a society he feels both isolated from and victimised by. Thus, his suicide represents the total rejection of patriarchal law" (Sager 27). Yet Karen Levenback proposes a different approach: "His suicide is not a cure for the sickness of the postwar world, which had been indifferent to his life and ignores his death; it is his final capitulation to its power" (Levenback 73). My work departs slightly from these considerations of Septimus's postwar reality and his death, and seeks to position him instead as an example of Woolf's insistence that recovery must necessarily entail the exercise of autonomy.

Septimus as it does to Peter, for their respective returns to England force each to confront the gulf between expectation and reality. Most importantly, both men desperately seek the embrace of a community, yet the community at large regards the suffering male beyond help, for to come to his “rescue” would implicitly constitute a subversion of the cornerstones of masculinity, such as, physical strength, repression of emotion, and total self-sufficiency, all of which work to uphold the existing social order.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the unsuccessful efforts of Peter Walsh and Septimus Smith to remake self in the wake of war expose the oppressive effects of patriarchy, and akin to Woolf’s argument in *Three Guineas*, also render it a threat to the prosperity of the nation as a whole. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf revisits and lays bare the complex implications of patriarchal authority and aggression through the figures Giles Oliver and William Dodge. Like Peter and Septimus, neither Giles nor Dodge finds the rigid dictates of masculinity fulfilling or sustainable, albeit for very different reasons. But for Giles, a transparent embodiment of masculine aggression, this frustration manifests as an appalling hatred for Dodge on the basis of his homosexuality. By juxtaposing Giles’ aggression with Dodge’s capacity to forge meaningful interpersonal connections with Lucy as well as Isa, the novel reinforces the damaging social constraints created and perpetuated by patriarchy.

Giles Oliver unequivocally represents the conflation of the destruction of war with its debilitating effect upon masculine subjectivity. Imprisoned by his blind allegiance to patriarchal ideals, Giles becomes a tragic embodiment of the collusion of the public justification of war—death to the enemy, no matter the cost—with selfhood. Giles therefore tragically finds that he is unable to function in accordance with any set of

principals outside of male dominance, which imperils his marriage and ostensibly his role as father. Through Giles' disturbing abhorrence, *Between the Acts* ultimately posits masculine aggression and cultural recovery as mutually exclusive.

Aside from the oft-referenced scene in which Giles externalizes his rage by killing a snake, the most overt textual evidence of his undignified ideals manifests through his hatred of William Dodge, attributed to Dodge's homosexuality. Through a series of perspectives, achieved by transitioning seamlessly from the voice of the narrator, to Isa, and finally to Dodge's consciousness, the text confirms Giles' blatant dislike for Dodge:

This afternoon he wasn't Giles Oliver come to see the villagers act out their annual pageant; manacled to a rock he was, and forced passively to behold indescribable horror. His face showed it; and Isa, not knowing what to say, abruptly, half purposely, knocked over a coffee cup.

William Dodge caught it as it fell...His expression...gave Giles another peg on which to hang his rage as one hangs a coat on a peg, conveniently. (60)

As described here, Giles' indignation exists apart from Dodge; yet the passage prefigures that like the snake, which in no way posed a threat to Giles, Dodge shall bear the wrath of his anger still. David Eberly explains:

What is important to note here is not so much his hatred of Dodge but his refusal to greet the (homosexual) other and to take his place among the audience of humanity...In refusing to speak even the name of the other and thus give it an existence, no matter how pejorative or marginalized, Giles refuses to engage in the dialogic encounter on which the human community is built and instead exposes the underlying violence that traumatizes those seen as other-than-ourselves. (Eberly 213)

Imprisoned by singularity, which pollutes his attitude toward others, as well as his own self-image, Giles' animosity becomes a microcosm of intensifying masculine aggression, which historically mirrors the rise of Nazism and the outbreak of World War II.

Moreover, as a father and husband, Giles Oliver constitutes a portrayal of manhood distinct from those in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Throughout the novel, Giles verges on being completely consumed by his frustration and anger related to the impending declaration of world war. Like Peter Walsh, as a non-combatant male, Giles is powerless to intervene politically; yet as a more extreme case, he cannot effectively contain his anger. Where Peter's anxiety manifests through a constant, albeit harmless, fidgeting with his pocket-knife, as we have seen, Giles externalizes his frustration in overtly violent ways. That he attempts to justify such violence by recasting his assault on the snake through the silent admission, "But it was action. Action relived him" (Woolf 99), conveys Woolf's textual reprimand of the baseless political justifications for warfare.

As with Peter Walsh, Giles Oliver becomes an exemplar of the damaging effects of patriarchal ideology as they bear upon men. More explicitly than Peter, however, two scenes in *Between the Acts* firmly circumscribe Giles within his own singularity. First, from the moment of his initial appearance in the novel, in which he returns to Pointz Hall to spend the weekend with his family, the act of changing out of his professional attire into casual clothes signifies his transition *between* the socially-prescribed roles of professional man and father: "Had he not read, in the morning paper, in the train, that sixteen men had been shot, others prisoned, just over there, across the gulf, in the flat land which divided them from the continent? Yet he changed. It was Aunt Lucy, waving her hand at him as he came in, who made him change" (46). The idea that this simple transition is ministered by someone else—and not insignificantly, Lucy Swithin, the epitome of tradition in the text—points to Giles' dissatisfaction with the roles of husband, father, and provider; and yet, his inability to transform *beyond* them solidify them as his

persisting reality. Second, during an intermission of the pageant-play staged by the townspeople, the narrator's comment, "Giles remained like a stake in the tide of flowing company" (96) renders his body and identity static. It is not until the final scene of the novel, in which he and his wife, Isa, purportedly speak, that the text gives any indication of the possibility of his relief from such suffocating stasis.

Regardless of whether she does so deliberately, Woolf's denial of recovery to the male imaginary, as exemplified by Peter Walsh, Septimus Smith, and Giles Oliver, helps cultivate her textual representation of female non-combatant recovery throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*. As the discussion that follows will show, by depicting female interwar subjectivity in a pluralized fashion, and by traversing the subjectivities of very different women, these novels renounce the singularity that patriarchy historically ascribed to women. In so doing, they posit a cultural re-envisioning of female identity as a necessary outcome of war. In Woolf's renderings, women survive the aftermath of World War I and the onslaught of World War II by performatively claiming multiple subjectivities. Accordingly, each text maps individual recovery along a continuum, affording woman the versatility to adapt to the continued destabilization of her personal and cultural roles. Particular to *Between the Acts* is its suggestion that the most satisfying narratives are those that afford autonomy sustained through artistry and/or multiple sexualities.

II. "So it was the play then. Or was it the prologue?": Re-scripting Subjectivities in

Between the Acts

Any of Woolf's novels might be paired alongside *Mrs. Dalloway* as evidence of her ongoing aim to textually negotiate the considerable shifts in female identity that

transpire in the first half of the twentieth century—*To the Lighthouse* and *Jacob's Room*, for example, attest to precisely this tension. But *Between the Acts* stands apart from these texts, and alone within Woolf's oeuvre in general: it is the most overtly performative text; and, given that like *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is temporally bound within the confines of a single day, *Between the Acts* should be read as a second attempt—Woolf's deliberate return—to the ordinary as a framework for examining the impact of war on non-combatants. Liesl Olson explains, "The main quality of the ordinary is that it eludes representation, or that no representation of it (no matter how experimental) can be totally satisfactory" (Olson 44). Therefore, by pinpointing the narratives of four disparate women—Isa Oliver, Lucy Swithin, Mrs. Manresa, and Miss La Trobe—Woolf reiterates her mounting concern with the ambiguous and shifting roles of non-combatant women in the historical moment of June 1939, as she anticipates the outbreak of World War II.

As in *Mrs. Dalloway*, performance functions as an antidote to the overwhelming sense of paralysis that comes to define non-combatant subjectivity; and therefore, the pageant-play staged by the townspeople living on the outskirts of London provides not simply a narrative frame for the text, but functions as an overt, performative examination and critique of individual and cultural narratives, their origins, and the conventions in place to sustain them. Thus, while the two novels share a consciousness about the production and projection of individual identity, as exhibited respectively by Clarissa's party and the pageant-play, given that the townspeople attempt to stage in particular the "History of England," *Between the Acts* compels the reader to acknowledge the link Woolf clearly saw between performance, identity, history, and surviving the escalating anxiety associated with impending world war.

Between the Acts deems the interrelationship of public and private identity implicit to recovery, evident in that some concern with English national history and identity manifests in the consciousness of nearly every major character. The novel therefore argues that a sustainable individual narrative identity is one that recognizes the influence of nationhood upon selfhood. Although Clarissa's party provides a performative subtext enabling her to actuate, in an attempt to reconcile, her public and private selves, as the cornerstone of *Between the Acts*, the pageant-play underscores the centrality of performance to the formation of individual identity, especially as its focal male and female characters—few of whom ever actually perform on stage—are defined alternatively in terms of the complicated performances they enact in everyday life.

The undeniable influence of nationhood upon individuality functions as a governing ideology to which some characters strictly adhere; and for others, it becomes an oppositional frame from which to differentiate self. For example, the preeminence of national history and identity are denoted by Lucy Swithin's diligent reading of an "Outline of History," as well as Miss La Trobe's staging of the history of England. More subtle indications occur as well, particularly in reference to the elusiveness of personal heritage, which becomes a concern for Manresa as well as for Miss La Trobe. Isa observes of Manresa, "Her hat, her rings, her finger nails red as roses, smooth as shells, were there for all to see. But not her life history...She had been born, but it was only gossip said so, in Tasmania" (Woolf 39). Similarly, of Miss La Trobe, the townspeople ponder, "But where did she spring from? With that name she wasn't presumably pure English" (57). In both of these passages, the lack of a known lineage—couched particularly within the suspicion that that lineage is not English—implicitly others

Manresa and La Trobe from the community at large. On the other hand, such ambiguity circumscribes Isa's resistance to English national identity as a marker of privilege within this community. As quoted earlier, the narrator points out the intrinsic validity afforded by English lineage: "The Olivers couldn't trace their descent for more than two or three hundred years. But the Swithins could" (30-1). The inherited national lineage of Englishness, and especially of the privilege thereunto attached, functions at once as a narrative to live in accordance with, and as Woolf would have it, one that is continually subject to rejection, revision, and redirection.

Perhaps more directly than its predecessor, however, *Between the Acts* confronts the question of representation. Through simple phrases such as "We haven't the words—we haven't the words" (55), the novel reinforces the implicit challenge that war brings to bear on representation. As one critic puts it, in this novel, war is "the act to end all acts" (Pridmore-Brown 1). Woolf's feminist and pacifist stances, passionately developed in *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and elsewhere, all suggest that she viewed war itself as a stage upon which patriarchal aggression is acted out and perpetuated. As her final written work, authored on the brink of World War II, *Between the Acts* indeed becomes the culmination of Woolf's indictment of these tendencies. As discussed earlier, Woolf's denial of recovery to the male imaginary cements her aim to broaden and complicate the terms of individual recovery through a decidedly gendered lens.

In mapping multiple representations of individual female postwar identity, *Between the Acts* employs this struggle with inherited, collective narratives as a framework to consider as well the influence of gender ideals upon that identity. This is to

say that one's response to the shifting gender dictates of the era—whether to mirror or deflect them—catalyzes the performative components of their respective identities. Although male and female characters are both troubled by the upending of these ideals, both texts reserve the recuperative capacity of a pluralized subjectivity solely for the feminine. In so doing, they call for public discourse to address the effects of war upon culturally silenced, non-combatant groups. Poised on the brink of war, the complex representations of performing female subjects throughout *Between the Acts* lend a sense of urgency to this issue.

Categorically speaking, the central figures in the novel tend to either adhere to socially prescribed gender dictates, or refuse to live in accordance with them. Regardless, these efforts are generally met with limitation: for, to abide—the choice made by Lucy Swithin, and in an altogether different way, Mrs. Manresa—implicitly entails closing oneself off to the limitless possibilities afforded by self-definition. Yet on the other hand, forthright rejection plunges one into a figurative, exiled space fraught with uncertainty, a microcosm of the cultural instability that comes to define this historical moment. Specifically, in building upon *Mrs. Dalloway's* foray into issues of gender and sexuality, which I will discuss in a later section, *Between the Acts* dismantles the economic security purportedly achieved through capitulation to social dictates of womanhood through Swithin and Manresa, and counters with a series of troubling figures—namely Isa Oliver, William Dodge, and Miss La Trobe—whose discontentment, fueled by the dearth of emotional and physical intimacy in their lives, becomes a necessary condition for ideological freedom, even though it remains doubtful that any will outwardly assert it.

Where Swithin and Manresa, and even Sally and Clarissa, derive some sense of fulfillment from performing selfhood, similar attempts made by Isa, Dodge, and La Trobe ultimately deepen the sense of longing and social exile that define them. By deliberately reserving multiple subjectivity for characters who magnify the destructive effects of her society's exclusionary ideals regarding gender and sexuality, Woolf here exposes the limitations of performance, refiguring it primarily as a coping mechanism for those whose ideological freedom remains interminably at odds with his or her material reality. My separate analyses of Isa, Dodge, and La Trobe suggest that while each recognizes that his or her narrative—freed from rigid social expectation—would diverge significantly from such artificial social standards, each uniquely negotiates the boundaries that confine them. Through these varied responses, the text shudders at the interrelatedness of public and private, and attributes society's restrictive ideals pertaining to gender and sexuality, as well as the impending threat of war, to patriarchy itself.

III. “Was that voice ourselves?”: The Public and Private Dimensions of Female

Recovery in *Between the Acts*

In this regard, to claim that, “Impasse and repetition is the overt theme of this plotless novel; without a plot, there is no climax, no resolution, not even a dialectics of progress; only the repetitive struggle between oppositional forces” (Kahane 241), may pertain to the male imaginary, but eclipses the nuanced articulation of female non-combatant recovery forwarded throughout *Between the Acts*. By constructing four very distinct female figures, the novel exhibits varied attempts at remaking self in this volatile historical moment. One way that the novel mitigates such volatility, as Patricia Laurence

has argued, is to render unmistakable “the breakdown of public and private life” (Laurence 236), particularly as it impacts the lives of women on the home front.

In order to emphasize the profound impact of world war—withstood and forthcoming—on women’s daily lives, *Between the Acts* constructs the feminine as an ineluctable conflation of *public*—which includes the aforementioned national narrative of Englishness, as well as cultural dictates of womanhood—and *private*, or the exercise of autonomy, irrevocably at odds with patriarchal governance. In the novel, a woman who does not grapple with the tension between public and private has a diminished capacity to adapt to the social and cultural changes that World War II inevitably brings about.

The clearest example of such restricted purview is the widowed matriarch of Pointz Hall, Lucy Swithin. In sum, because she wholeheartedly embraces the narrative of her national and familial heritage, the text makes little provision for Mrs. Swithin to shift her identity in any significant way. Still, Mrs. Manresa represents an even more tragic case. As one critic summarizes, “Flaunting convention and deflecting judgment, Mrs. Manresa announces the power structures within society’s fabric” (Johnston 65). Because she is averse to claiming selfhood apart from these “power structures,” Manresa simply cannot proffer a useful approach to recovery.

Apart from Lucy Swithin and Mrs. Manresa, the novel engages the collusion of public and private through its more nuanced, artist figures: Isa Oliver and Miss La Trobe. As we will see with Clarissa Dalloway, marriage likewise virtually guarantees Isa’s economic well-being; and, her private thoughts similarly reveal her discontent with the narratives of wife and mother and their related expectations, evident in her admission: “And she loathed the domestic; the possessive; the maternal” (Woolf 19). That Isa stifles

her compulsion toward artistic self-expression complicates her potential to define self outside of these roles. As an author, Miss La Trobe continually strives to externalize her vision, but is plagued by repeated failures to secure acclaim for her work. However, her struggle proves more complex than Isa's, because as an outsider, her acceptance within the larger community rests upon the success of her pageant-play.

Despite these differences, in varying ways, all four engage in performance as a means of negotiating the collusion of public and private, but significantly, only two—Isa and Miss La Trobe—do so through a pluralized subjectivity. That none definitively redefines self at the conclusion of the novel indicates not, as some critics contend, that recovery is itself impossible; but instead points to Woolf's glaring critique of the impact of politics—particularly pertaining to gender equality, which is subdued by war—upon the citizenry. By disavowing woman's unique experiences of war, England undermines its capacity to effectively respond to the cultural shifts incited by war, thereby thwarting the possibility of a sustainable national recovery.

IV. “to dress and live like the English”: Lucy Swithin, Mrs. Manresa, and the

Reification of Patriarchy

In her disinclination to live in the present, and to instead continually replay the narrative of her childhood, familial heritage, and especially English national history, Lucy Swithin illustrates the extent to which outmoded Victorian ideals left women grossly unprepared to adapt to the cultural upheaval of the twentieth century. As the oldest of the female figures cited in this study, Lucy Swithin embodies the tension between past and present,³⁹ as well as that between public and private. Beyond merely

³⁹ While I read Swithin as the clearest example of Woolf's push to reconcile past and present, Alex Zwerdling, among others, identifies this tension as one that encompasses the entire text: “Woolf's novel is

representing “the aging spirit of domesticity at Pointz Hall” (Esty 258), her character broadens the construction of female identity as depicted in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Both novels are firmly rooted in their respective present moments of June 1923 and June 1939, and both traverse the temporal states of past and present, featuring characters that imaginatively revisit their pasts as they struggle to find meaning in the present. Yet, where Clarissa’s confrontation with the past is always intensely personal, Lucy’s approach to self-definition consists of situating self within a historical narrative, as evident in her disciplined reading of an “Outline of History.” Although Lucy is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to envision self apart from this grand narrative, the novel nonetheless invalidates her intent to perpetuate it. For example, Lucy stifles her compulsion to elaborate on her brother’s oft-quoted thought: “The Olivers couldn’t trace their descent for more than two or three hundred years. But the Swithins could. The Swithins were there before the Conquest” (Woolf 30-1), by reminding herself that her remarks often become the object of ridicule. She thinks, “And she had had two jokes cracked at her already; one about an umbrella; another about superstition” (31).

Thus, Lucy’s allegiance to history and tradition, while perhaps admirable in another context, renders her tragically ill-equipped to endure the inevitable tumult that World War II will bring about. The text juxtaposes her belief that the beauty of the natural landscape will outlast her generation with Giles’ very realistic fear that war will bring about unprecedented destruction. Lucy’s remark, ““That’s what makes a view so sad...And so beautiful. It’ll be there...when we’re not”” (53), is countered by Giles’ private thought, “Thus only could he show his irritation, his rage with old fogies who sat

rooted not only in her observation of the barbaric present but in an acute longing for an earlier, more civilized phase of English culture” (Zwerdling 225).

and looked at views over coffee and cream when the whole of Europe—over there—was bristling like...Only the ineffective word ‘hedgehog’ illustrated his vision of Europe, bristling with guns, poised with planes. At any moment guns would rake that land into furrows...” (53). By contrasting these two thoughts, the novel reduces Lucy’s comment to mere wishful thinking, supplanting it with the grim reality proffered by Giles’ fears.⁴⁰ To this end, Alex Zwerdling has also argued that Mrs. Swithin harbors a “...civilized hesitation to recognize what is everywhere apparent around her—man’s capacity for violence and destruction” (Zwerdling 225). More importantly, however, in faulting Lucy for her blind inclination to hope, the text attests to her lack of a pluralized subjectivity: she views history itself as a singular narrative, and her position within it as unchanging.

In assigning her this singular subjectivity, the text prefigures the unlikelihood that Mrs. Swithin will be able to withstand the utter dissolution of historical continuity as yet induced by war, through her lack of foresight to imagine the extent to which a second world war would impinge upon all demographics, including her own. In spite of the pride she takes in her heritage, and the hospitality she shows to outsider figures such as William Dodge, Mrs. Swithin’s ignorance concerning material reality renders her a symbol of Woolf’s fear that tradition itself will be obliterated by the sweeping tide of war. References to Lucy’s blurred vision confirm that she cannot see past her own subjectivity: “A film fell over her eyes, shutting off the present” and “She gazed at Miss La Trobe with a cloudless old-aged stare” (Woolf 152). Therefore, despite Lucy’s belief that “1830 was still true in 1939” (52), Miss La Trobe’s assigning her a peripheral role in

⁴⁰ Situating the dichotomous relationship between Swithin and Giles in a gendered framework, Patricia Cramer argues, “Woolf identifies emotions which sustain patriarchal social groups by focusing on the unspoken loyalties, socially constructed sexual fantasies, and values that bind characters in the novel to Giles, and she represents our potential for a non-warlike, matriarchal society by highlighting and valuing the qualities which attract characters in the novel to Lucy” (Cramer 167).

the pageant-play harbors significant public and private implications: it symbolically dislodges Victorian tradition as a defining influence upon English identity, as it reinforces Mrs. Swithin's incapability to craft a new or different role for herself in the aftermath of war.

Because she cannot meaningfully redirect her narrative apart from traditional ideals, Mrs. Swithin represents as well the tendency for society to blindly adhere to outworn principles, particularly those that thwart woman's ability to exercise her intellect. In staging the history of England, the pageant-play evinces the breadth of Woolf's aim as undertaken in *Between the Acts*: she seeks to invest women with the personal and political agency to direct the course of their lives; yet the play itself attests to her acknowledgement that doing so requires a re-envisioning of history itself. Karen Schneider explains, "Through the pageant, moreover, she [Woolf] excoriates the past for its tendency—which has condemned the present and jeopardizes the future—to repeat itself endlessly" (Schneider 102). As I will discuss in a later section, where Clarissa's confrontation with her past in *Mrs. Dalloway* seems to facilitate her ability to claim a fulfilling narrative identity, Lucy's refusal to relinquish the past imprisons her within a historical narrative that sustains itself by confining her, and countless other traditionalists, to it.

Similarly constrained by a limiting worldview, Mrs. Manresa illustrates that the sense of ignorance that plagues Mrs. Swithin is unfortunately not merely a function of her strict Victorian upbringing. Through both of these non-combatant figures, Woolf exposes woman's complicity in her own downfall, which occurs as a result of her unthinking allegiance to social dictates. Just as Lucy Swithin categorically pledges

herself to traditional values and practices, Mrs. Manresa suffers from having had her identity thrust upon her; and therefore, we witness her repeated attempts to solicit attention and recognition from others. That these attempts verge on the obnoxious, however, ascribes a similar sense of ignorance to Manresa as that which plagues Swithin.

Yet it is through Manresa that Woolf pinpoints the gendered component of woman's ignorance in this historical moment, attributing it in Manresa's as well as Lucy's case, to a social hierarchy that systematically defrauds women of the capacity to secure economic independence from men. Unlike Swithin, Manresa indeed possesses a pluralized subjectivity, but she remains a tragic figure because her performances are conducted solely in the service of a governing social narrative that inhibits her from realizing or actuating any facet of self apart from it. Nicknamed "the wild child" (Woolf 55) and therefore not at all demure like Swithin, the text calls attention to, but does not severely fault Manresa for the fact that she is, "Vulgar...in her gestures, in her whole person, over-sexed, over-dressed for a picnic" (41). Instead, Manresa's principal downfall lies in her blind obedience to the stereotype of Englishness, as well as society's arbitrary dictates of female sexual desirability.

By emphasizing her transparency, the text demonstrates not merely that Manresa fails to "fool" others into believing her façade, but more importantly denotes her performances as conscious projections of her superficiality. In describing one of Manresa's earliest encounters with Isa, the narrator notes, "...but always when she spoke to women, she veiled her eyes, for they, being conspirators, saw through it" (41). This passage exhibits the unspoken compulsion experienced by most women to conform to the dictates of sexual desirability as proffered by patriarchal ideology. Yet the fact that

Manresa so willingly sacrifices self in the name of these confining ideals makes her as ignorant as Swithin, if not more so. In addition, that Manresa deliberately “veils her eyes” draws a crucial parallel between she and Swithin: neither is capable of “seeing” reality, nor would either likely conduct herself differently if she were to comprehend the self-effacing implications of her behavior.

Thus a trajectory in the development of Woolf’s representation of female non-combatant recovery as articulated in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* becomes apparent: by coupling Swithin and Manresa in terms of their ignorance—which negates the likelihood that either can claim independence from patriarchal ideology—Woolf clarifies the appropriate uses of performance as a tool to facilitate the (re)construction of female identity. On the other hand, the complexity surrounding a character like Clarissa Dalloway, whom Woolf revisits separately in the figures of Isa Oliver and Miss La Trobe, functions as an implicit indication of her propensity for survival, for none falls prey to the seductive lure of security that Swithin finds in her lineage, or that Manresa finds in her willingness to be an object of masculine desire. In order for performance to facilitate recovery, it must be carried out in the service of selfhood, not as a mode of self-sacrifice. To this end, the terms ‘freedom’ and ‘genuine,’ used respectively by the narrator and Isa to describe Manresa, “She had given up dealing with her figure and thus gained freedom,” and “‘That’s genuine... Quite genuine” (42), ironically convey that Manresa is neither free nor genuine.

Isa’s disdain for Manresa can be attributed to her attraction to Isa’s husband, Giles, evident in that she imagines herself “in conspiracy” with him, and thinks, “A thread united them—visible, invisible, like those threads, now seen, now not...” (55).

Yet the text forges a more telling distance between Isa and Manresa on the basis of their opposing abilities to confront the grim reality of impending war in June 1939. Manresa's positivist view of the world, "Why waste sensation, she seemed to ask, why waste a single drop that can be pressed out of this ripe, this melting, this adorable world?" (56), unmistakably echoes Lucy's belief that the world shall remain the same through eternity (53). By contrast, in her private thoughts, Isa confronts the confining reality of woman's domestic servitude: "'That was the burden,' she mused, 'laid on me in the cradle; murmured by waves; breathed by restless elm trees; crooned by singing women; what we must remember: what we would forget'" (155). Andrea Adolph conceptualizes the significance of this stark difference between Isa and Manresa in terms of gender ideology: "Division within the female sex defines the consuming Manresa as masculine, and therefore abhorrent, even while Woolf's methods of characterization suggest that Mrs. Manresa might exhibit modern, desirable qualities akin to a liberatory feminist ideology" (Adolph 451). Thus, Manresa's use of the term "adorable" to describe a world on the brink of total chaos, poignantly renders her (masculinist) worldview as largely ephemeral, a performative effort to mask some unknown truth about her identity.

That the pivotal phrase, "scraps and fragments" (Woolf 38) used throughout to prefigure the shattering impact of war upon civilian identity, also describes Manresa's past, and symbolically collapses she and the townspeople into a shared narrative of unnamed trauma. Eberly conjectures, "Comfortable in her skin, and cognizant of her sexuality, she displays the *self*-satisfaction denied the trauma survivor" (Eberly 210). While the nature and depth of her trauma remain unconfirmed throughout the novel, one can nonetheless surmise that Manresa intentionally limits her purview to the surface as a

means of repressing her (traumatic) past. The text subtly aligns she and Dodge in the vein of some unspoken trauma that must be repressed in order to achieve inclusion within the community at large: “Her hat, her rings, her finger nails red as roses, smooth as shells, were there for all to see. But not her life history. That was only scraps and fragments to all of them, excluding perhaps William Dodge...” (Woolf 39). Even though he knows “no strict biographical facts” about Manresa (39), as a homosexual, Dodge can nonetheless relate to the pressure to perform a false sense of self with the aim of achieving social acceptance. However, his resolve at the novel’s close to leave Pointz Hall and never return, signifies his rejection of the governing social hierarchy in favor of individual agency. By contrast, when the pageant-play reaches “The Present Moment. Ourselves,” Manresa’s look in the mirror emphasizes her superficiality, as it belies her commitment to securing a sustainable narrative of self. The narrator describes, “All evaded or shaded themselves—save Manresa, who, facing herself in the glass; had out her mirror; powdered her nose; and moved one curl, disturbed by the breeze, to its place” (186). In this moment, the text solidifies Manresa’s inability to view self in any manner outside the façade she has created, magnifying only her susceptibility to (post)war trauma. Through her disinclination to engage in serious self-reflection, Manresa forfeits her capacity to withstand the inevitable shifts that she will undergo as a result of World War II.

Although motivated by different principles, the primary downfall common to Mrs. Swithin and Manresa concerns their respective disinclination to adapt, even apart from the context of war. And yet in light of the likelihood of the outbreak of another world war, each still refuses to acknowledge that the politics of public life will irrevocably

encroach upon their lives, undercutting Lucy's stolid faith in tradition, and Manresa's narcissism. They are tragic figures, Woolf seems to suggest, because the possibility exists for each to think and act differently; they simply repudiate it in favor of the allure of constancy. The text reprimands their passivity, all but guaranteeing that neither shall successfully withstand the impending threat that war poses to selfhood. The suppression of autonomy in the name of the public narratives of Englishness and womanhood that occurs here in the case of Mrs. Swithin, and particularly Mrs. Manresa, echoes the fate realized by female non-combatants of Woolf's earlier fiction. Thus, examining Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton through the refracted lens of *Between the Acts* reveals much about the extent to which Woolf's final novel might be read as a revision or elaboration of her project as represented throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*.

V. "making oneself up; making her up, creating an exquisite amusement, and something more": Multiple Subjectivity in *Mrs. Dalloway*

By centralizing the inner workings of its protagonist, Clarissa, *Mrs. Dalloway* pointedly configures the category of female non-combatant subjectivity as plural. Accordingly, Clarissa perceives reality through a decidedly vacillating lens, as she imagines herself, "...being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself" (Woolf 9). Other moments of self-portrayal verge on a stable awareness of self, but ultimately retreat from it: "She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (8-9). As these passages illustrate, Clarissa's refusal to

definitively classify herself, coupled with her conceptualization of self almost entirely in terms of lack, attributes her complex identity to a multiple subjectivity that resists articulation.

Clarissa's multiplicity manifests as a central component of Woolf's representation of individual postwar identity; yet it ultimately denies her the ability to reconcile these competing strands of self into a seamless narrative. Clarissa admits to her struggle with the compulsion to consciously (re)construct her identity in the opening scene of the novel, as she approaches a flower shop: "Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently!" (10). In spite of its indication of Clarissa's dissatisfaction with her physical appearance, the wish have her life "over again" bespeaks the true significance of this thought: that Clarissa imagines her life as a narrative. In addition to a pluralized female subjectivity, at its outset, *Mrs. Dalloway* also locates narrative as fundamental to reclaiming self in the aftermath of war. As a process and practice, narrative facilitates and sustains individual self-examination.

As in the earlier quoted passage in which Clarissa imagines her identity as a mist that "spread ever so far" (9), her sense of self also manifests in how she regards her physical appearance. Nowhere is this more explicit than when she examines herself in the mirror. Beyond portraying her physical body, or even reflecting seriously upon her relationships and personal integrity, this moment unleashes Clarissa's psychological self. In confronting her physical and psychological bodies simultaneously, she announces herself as both author and audience to her narrative reworking of her identity:

She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self-pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the

world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps; she had helped young people, who were grateful to her; had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her—faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions... (37)

Clarissa's thoughts enact her multiple subjectivity, representing her identity as incongruous, yet functional, at once "incompatible and composed." In this way, her non-singular sense of self functions at once as an acknowledgement of the fragmenting impact of World War I—an impact so intense that it extends even to non-combatant women, who reside a nation away from the front lines, and delight in aristocratic privilege—and it exists as a testament to the notion that womanhood can be productively remade in its wake. Clarissa's sense of self-worth exhibits this duality, for it derives from her ability to provide companionship to others; yet that she intentionally masks her unfavorable traits from others elicits her penchant to perform. Somewhat ironically, the principle motivation driving Clarissa's performances is her desire to portray self as unified and integrated, as she admits to, "...some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together." As So-Hee Lee notes, "The voices of Clarissa's plural selves are waving along her inner incompatible parts and an external reflection of the whole" (Lee 703-4). Thus, the performance of identity arises out of the conflict Lee identifies between internal and external: Clarissa knows self, yet deliberately and performatively masks those aspects that are "incompatible" with class and gender expectations.

The most feasible solution to mitigating the tension between self and its portrayal is to literally stage these selves in all of their multiplicity by hosting a party. Because her guests embody conflicting strains of her narrative identity, as hostess, her interactions with them necessarily compel Clarissa to draw upon her pluralized subjectivity, to

transition from one facet of self to another. Her party essentially functions as an amalgamation of her constellated identity, a material manifestation of her psychological self. As Kaley Joyes remarks, “Hosting parties simultaneously builds the self-regard that feeds the private soul and creates the connections that bring subjectivity into being” (Joyes 82). By and large, however, Clarissa’s aristocratic guests embody traits that are antithetical to her narrative of self as she imagines it: the “unspeakably pompous” Hugh Whitbread (Woolf 114), who symbolizes the arrogance Clarissa could ostensibly exercise by virtue of her husband’s political association; as well as the asocial Ellie Henderson, who “stand[s] in a bunch at a corner” (168), yet solicits gossip because “(She must remember everything to tell Edith)” (169). More importantly though, the party gives way to encounters with Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, who not only precede Clarissa’s attainment of privilege, but would almost certainly, if she actually “had her life over again,” play larger roles in her narrative than they do in June 1925.

In particular, and in an intense way, Sally Seton prompts Clarissa’s acknowledgement of the permanence of the choices—and specifically, the commitments—she has made. In one sense, like Peter, Sally triggers Clarissa’s memories of her adolescence: a period in which she was independent, prior to the loss of her individuality in exchange for her roles as wife and mother. To Clarissa, Sally represents the realization of sexual and intellectual passion:

There they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out. The ideas were Sally’s, of course—but very soon she was just as excited—read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour. (33)

Still, that Clarissa describes the kiss they shared as “the most exquisite moment of her whole life” (35), and characterizes her feelings for Sally in terms of their “purity” and “integrity,” “...not like one’s feeling for a man” (34), authenticates the fulfillment Clarissa derives from the emotional and physical intimacy she shared with Sally over that in her marriage to Richard. In perceiving herself as at once virginal and mother, Clarissa underscores her discontent with society’s codes of heteronormativity: “So the room was an attic; the bed narrow; and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet” (31). This vivid memory portrays Clarissa’s relationship with Sally as one of crystalline erotic perfection; yet that it subsequently compels her to “see what she lacked” (31) confines it to her past. As perhaps the most dramatic example of the intense impact of memory upon Clarissa’s identity, her pluralized subjectivity manifests throughout as she strives to reconcile memory with lived reality.

While marriage to Richard might in part constitute Clarissa’s performative attempt to repress her past attraction to Sally, it instantly resurfaces upon Sally’s arrival. Clarissa’s first thought at the unexpected sound of Sally calling her name—“She loomed through a mist” (171)—marks Sally as a symbol of Clarissa’s non-singular subjectivity. Yet that they “kissed each other, first this cheek then that” (171) asexualizes their relationship; Sally then solidifies the gulf between them by announcing that she is the mother of “five enormous boys” (171). Her declaration of her status as wife and mother suggests the pride she takes in these roles; but more importantly, it functions as a public revelation of their permanent bearing on her identity. Moreover, that she forthrightly details the material comfort afforded her by marriage, “Yes, I have ten thousand a year”

(188), points to Sally's unwillingness to sacrifice these responsibilities in the name of resurrecting her romance with Clarissa—even if she too is guilty of performing contentment in the name of ensuring continued economic security.

Although marrying and bearing children signify Sally's choice of material comfort over her attraction to Clarissa, the fact that she and Peter Walsh simultaneously reemerge in Clarissa's life ultimately reveals less about each of them than it does about Clarissa herself. In fact, aside from Clarissa's own thoughts, Sally and Peter reveal the full depth of Clarissa's performativity. They unmask Clarissa, crystallizing her performance of selves as a marker of her pluralized subjectivity. For example, Peter muses about Clarissa as a performing subject, in a way that highlights her theatricality: "...he always saw through Clarissa...There were always people about—she'd go on as if nothing had happened. That was the devilish part of her—this coldness, this woodenness something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability" (60). Moreover, Sally's inner-workings constitute a specifically feminized site through which the text deepens its critique of performance and subjectivity. For example, conveying Sally's reaction to Hugh Whitbread's attempts to perform aristocratic sophistication (which in fact verge on buffoonery), the narrator simply remarks, "Sally, to do her justice, saw through all that" (73). Because Hugh's inclination to perform stems from feelings of inadequacy, which are parenthetically established at the novel's outset, "(he was almost too well-dressed always, but presumably had to be, with his little job at Court)" (6), Sally's assessment draws a clear distinction between performances enacted by women versus those of their male counterparts, which the novel employs in order to reinforce its critique of patriarchy.

In essence, in performing multiple strands of her identity, as Clarissa aptly illustrates, the female non-combatant does not necessarily seek to order or unify these strands; rather, recovery entails claiming postwar identity in a way that accounts for the inherent, and rich multiplicity that the strands themselves symbolize. On the other hand, as the earlier discussion of Woolf's representation of the male imaginary illustrates, men exact performance to achieve very different ends: by and large, performance manifests as an attempt to deny some facet of self that proves inadequate when measured against the strict standards of manhood as defined by patriarchal ideals. Through the figures of Peter Walsh and Septimus Smith, *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates that performances of self enacted by men generally manifest as acts of denial and replacement: they strive to deny the inadequate facet of self and (temporarily) replace it with one that will meet or even exceed governing social, cultural, or political standards. Even through Lady Bruton's rather satirical perspective on gender, evident in her thought, "The difference between one man and another does not amount to much" (104), the text critiques the erasure of individuality in the name of upholding outmoded, totalizing gender ideals of masculinity; and by extension, of femininity as well. Thus, masculine performance tends to disguise a man's individuality in the name of upholding such ideals, whereas a woman's performance is a mode of realizing nonsingular subjectivity in order to assert autonomy.

Even so, part of the complexity surrounding *Mrs. Dalloway*, concerns the terms upon which it invests female non-combatants with the agency and ability to govern their narrative identities. Through the figure of Rezia Smith, the novel unequivocally demonstrates that rejecting war and patriarchy as blind justifications for men to exercise and abuse power is far more complicated than dividing the potential for recovery along

gendered lines, such that women possess a performative capacity denied to their male counterparts. Rezia emblemizes the destructive effects of the cultural silencing of the female non-combatant experience of war. Judith Herman explains the severity of woman's trauma as a defining, yet disregarded characteristic of twentieth century discourse: "Not until the women's liberation movement of the 1970s was it recognized that the most common post-traumatic disorders are not those of men in war but of women in civilian life" (Herman 28). As previously mentioned, Rezia is a pivotal figure because Woolf constructs her in large part to expose—and critique—the greater probability to claim autonomy afforded to Clarissa by virtue of her nationality, her economic status, and her pluralized subjectivity. In contrast to Clarissa, Rezia relishes neither the comfort of residing in her native country, nor the material excess of upper-class privilege. Most damning, however, Rezia remains bound by the grim, singular reality of her postwar existence. Her identity is defined entirely by her desperate attempts to assuage Septimus's mental instability and to curtail his repeated threats of suicide.

Without a social network, or even a trusted confidante to whom she can turn for support, Rezia continually represses her anxiety and fears concerning Septimus's mental instability. Yet, her private thoughts reveal the depth of her struggle: "Since she was so unhappy, for weeks and weeks now, Rezia had given meanings to things that happened, almost felt sometimes that she must stop people in the street, if they looked good, kind people, just to say to them 'I am unhappy'" (Woolf 83). Patricia Moran's assertion that Woolf's use of language, "...conflates inarticulation with bodily decomposition: it is as if the moment of unspeakable rapture metamorphoses into a stillbirth" (Moran 71),

conceptualizes Rezia's silence as a figurative death, which subsequently materializes as the physical collapse Rezia suffers in the immediate aftermath of her husband's suicide.

Moreover, in her desperation to restore some sense of normalcy to her marriage, Rezia foolishly convinces herself that, "It was a silly, silly dream, being unhappy" (Woolf 83). Her intrinsic vulnerability, promulgated by her utter lack of identity outside of her marriage, has rendered Rezia susceptible to Septimus's trauma. She becomes a victim of what Herman terms "traumatic countertransference," which suggests that as the primary witness to her husband's trauma, Rezia herself gradually begins to bear, "...to a lesser degree, the same terror, rage, and despair as the patient" (Herman 140). This countertransference manifests ideologically as well as materially: it diminishes her capacity to approach Septimus's experiences objectively, and thereby compromises her private, ideological beliefs to the point of near erasure. In the name of sheltering Septimus, Rezia locates her *raison d'etre* entirely in the material. As she glances at her wedding ring, she is forced to acknowledge that her burden as witness has escalated beyond the psychological and emotional to harbor physical ramifications: "Look! Her wedding ring slipped—she had grown so thin. It was she who suffered—but she had nobody to tell" (Woolf 23). This passage elucidates a startling symbolic parallel between husband and wife: where war has robbed Septimus of several of his fingers, as a non-combatant, Rezia's hands themselves mirror her husband's sacrifice.

Thus, although Joyes claims, "There is no recovery from war trauma within the text of the novel, and this failure underscores Woolf's social critique" (Joyes 87), to the contrary, considering *Mrs. Dalloway* in the context of Woolf's oeuvre reveals a more nuanced approach. For the problem of female non-combatant recovery may remain

unresolved within the scope of that novel, but it nonetheless constitutes an issue that Woolf would continue to grapple with for much of her career. As I have suggested, the vexed terms of recovery specific to women achieve their clearest articulation in *Between the Acts*. Yet not insignificantly, *Mrs. Dalloway* ends with a justification for the complexity of the problem itself.

As a pluralized subject, Clarissa is an embodiment of the social and political ramifications of woman's assertion of a self-determined identity in this historical moment. Although she developed her transcendental theory as an adolescent,⁴¹ and despite the fact that as an adult, she embraces the opportunity to engage conflicting strands of selfhood through performance, Clarissa can neither transcend the material reality of her party, nor her roles as wife and mother, in favor of any ideology that is at odds with the hegemonic structures that secure her auspicious lifestyle. Moran positions the female body as the specific site of this tension in the text: "...at its most inchoate level *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests that female bodies prevent articulation. The body in *Mrs. Dalloway* is the site of abjection, the place where the speaking subject drowns in materiality, the place where it is impossible to transcend embodiment" (Moran 84-5).

Clarissa accordingly reconciles herself to the reality of her upper-class status, as well as her accompanying responsibilities as wife, mother, and socialite as she bids her guests

⁴¹ Peter's recollection of Clarissa's transcendental theory illustrates Clarissa's own sense of her pluralized subjectivity, and her related ability to enact and mask various facets of her selfhood. Even as an adolescent, she conceptualized self rather abstractly:

But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places...It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her skepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death...perhaps—perhaps. (152-3)

goodnight and mused, "...for, though she loved it and felt it tingle and sting, still these semblances, these triumphs (dear old Peter, for example, thinking her so brilliant), had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart; and it might be that she was growing old but they satisfied her no longer as they used..." (Woolf 174). As the novel and her party draw to a close, Clarissa begins to distinguish the "semblances...not in the heart" from those that are; and in so doing, it becomes clear that she no longer seeks to transcend reality, but to lead a fulfilling life in concert with it. This observation perhaps best approximates Woolf's representation of female non-combatant recovery as it emerges throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Therefore, the novel's final line, "For there she was," denotes Peter's ability to perceive Clarissa, and above all emphasizes her visibility. Yet that Clarissa here no longer holds a mirror to her self, as she had done both literally and figuratively in previous scenes, suggests that individual self-definition shall remain at odds with prevailing cultural discourse, particularly as it bears upon women. At best, Peter can only approximate the essence of the woman known as Clarissa Dalloway. As her pluralized subjectivity attests, she resists transparent articulation. Her identity shall therefore remain interminably suspended between the irreconcilable spheres of the performance of self and its interpretation. In her conclusion to *Death, Men, and Modernism*, Ariela Freedman makes the following claim concerning the category of modernist narratives of war trauma: "...here, rather than ending with despair, they end with a confirmation of the female subject. If this seems incommensurable or threatens some future traumatic return, the incommensurability may be noted in the text but cannot itself be worked through" (Freedman 86).

To this end, Sally's question, "Are we not all prisoners?" (Woolf 192), indicates not that Clarissa shall remain imprisoned by her pluralized, inarticulate subjectivity, but only that Sally finds herself "imprisoned" by the choice she has made to marry, mother five boys, and surrender her economic fate entirely to her husband. In her forthright admission of the permanence of these roles, Sally assuages non-combatant paralysis by plunging her self entirely into these accepted and safe cultural narratives of womanhood. My use of the term "plunging" here intentionally echoes the early lines of the novel, "What a lark! What a plunge!" which beg the reader's consideration of which narrative Clarissa shall immerse herself into, or become submerged or suffocated by. Through the flexibility afforded her by virtue of a multiple subjectivity, and in particular her embrace of its shifts and inherent instability, Clarissa, like Sally, possesses the capacity to "plunge" herself into any narrative she so chooses; yet unique to Clarissa remains her ability to resurface at will.

VI. "Then something rose to the surface": Isa Oliver, Artistry, and Recovery

Although critics have cited Miss La Trobe, the playwright in *Between the Acts*, as an obvious biographical parallel to Woolf herself,⁴² a more useful similarity for the purposes of this discussion, is that between Clarissa Dalloway and Isa Oliver. As mentioned earlier, I read *Between the Acts* as Woolf's deliberate return to the representation of the shifting category of female non-combatant identity, arguably begun in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and reignited by coming war. Beyond the class-based similarities that unite them, Woolf invests Clarissa and Isa each with a proclivity for artistic expression,

⁴² To illustrate, biographer Hermione Lee describes *Between the Acts*: "Through this double-drama, she [Woolf] wanted to work her way inside the unconscious, communal pool of identity which linked the audience and the players in this English scene." The parallel becomes clear as Lee later refers specifically to La Trobe: "The play's author fights against the possibility that her power will desert her and that there will be no way of reaching an audience" (Lee 697, 723).

which potentially facilitates autonomy. Yet through Isa—who resides in a rural setting, and seems less connected to the surrounding community than Clarissa is to the London elite—in a novel with an annual pageant-play as its backdrop, Woolf somewhat ironically experiments, as she did in her diaries, with the recuperative potential of performances waged in the face of an elusive, or even absent audience.

As it maps Isa's ongoing struggle to free herself from being "suppressed by the leaden duty she owed to others" (67), *Between the Acts* hypothesizes the possibilities for recovery that materialize for women who assert agency to direct the course of their lives. Therefore, instead of repressing self in the name of conforming to outmoded gender dictates, as Lucy Swithin, Mrs. Manresa, and William Dodge each distinctly do, Isa's centrality to the text lies in the depth of her efforts to prioritize her individuality above her roles as mother, hostess, and especially wife. While Miss La Trobe undertakes a similar struggle, the two differ principally with respect to the degree to which they express self artistically. Artistry is foundational to the construction of each: Miss La Trobe is a writer; and Isa has a penchant for poetry and song. By ascribing an artistic capacity to each, the novel implicitly assigns Isa and Miss La Trobe a pluralized subjectivity. As Woolf, Warner, and H.D. collectively claim, by artistically representing facets of self at odds with social dictates of womanhood, the female non-combatant announces her multiplicity, and draws upon it to forge a more fulfilling narrative. Although Isa and Miss La Trobe espouse a willingness to performatively reconstruct their identities, throughout *Between the Acts*, Woolf represents the complexities of this process by exposing the distinct challenges that each faces.

As in the case of Manresa, the text contrasts various manifestations of performance in Isa's everyday life, as it insinuates her motivation to perform in the first place. For example, surrounded by her in-laws, Isa becomes complicit in the Oliver family's desire to uphold their respectable reputation among neighbors and guests. While entertaining guests, her father-in-law, Bart, accordingly stifles his inclination to call attention to Giles' cantankerous attitude, as the narrator notes, "The family was not a family in the presence of strangers" (48). This revealing statement establishes Isa's discontent with the idea of being not-herself, which subsequently recurs throughout the novel. Jane Marcus attributes this sense of unsettlement to Isa's non-English heritage: "Isa is a prisoner in her father-in-law's home. She is Irish and subject, like Ireland to England, to that old colonial tyrant, Bart Oliver" (Marcus *Languages* 94). Erica Delsandro figures Isa's subjectivity slightly differently: "...her own history is revealed as that of disguises as Isa performs the roles of mother and wife in a script that lineage and domesticity have apparently authored for her" (Delsandro 98). Delsandro's comment in particular emphasizes the dual nature of performance at work in the figure of Isa Oliver: she performs both as a capitulation to the expectations of Englishness and womanhood imposed by marriage; yet as an artist-figure, also harbors the capacity to performatively break from them. As Marcus suggests, however, the dictatorial narratives of lineage and domesticity make no provision whatsoever for woman's exercise of artistry.

Therefore, that Isa keeps her artistic impulses to herself, evident as she conceals her writing, "...in the book bound like an account book in case Giles suspected" (Woolf 15), signifies that as a performing subject, Isa is her own audience. At the same time, the narrator's use of the term "abortive" quite literally remands any possibility that a new

narrative shall emerge from her performances of self. Herein lies another relevant similarity between Isa and Clarissa: for although Isa does not literally hold a mirror to herself, performing self nonetheless gives way to her psychological workings. Even in spite of the fact that she characterizes her innate proclivity for artistic self-expression as “abortive,” Isa is nonetheless conscious of its potential to free her from the unfulfilling narrative by which she is currently bound. Situating Isa’s furtive behavior within the divide between public and private, Andrew John Miller argues, “By concealing her poetry in what appears to be an account book, she implies that the value of her poetry is too purely personal ever to form part of the discursive economy she shares with her husband” (Miller 42). That her poetry stands to be silenced by patriarchy underscores the extent to which the exercise of artistry throughout the novel harbors decidedly feminist aims. In *Between the Acts*, this capacity is reserved exclusively for Isa Oliver and Miss La Trobe, though each uses it to slightly different ends. Even as an unacknowledged artist, Isa’s artistry nonetheless distinguishes her from others in attendance at the pageant.

Through her keen ability to derive existential significance from lived reality, performance for Isa possesses a transformative capacity, whereas for her counterparts, it functions as a mode of submission to social ideals. The text calls attention to the relation between performance and artifice during an intermission, at which time the audience helps themselves to tea. The narrator describes the tea as, “...disgusting...like rust boiled in water,” yet the guests, excluding Isa, praise it as, “delicious” (Woolf 103). Instead of becoming embroiled in this absurd discussion about tea, Isa muses rather poetically about the beauty and tranquility of nature: “There... would the dead leaf fall, when the leaves fall, on the water. Should I mind not again to see may tree or nut tree? Not again to hear

on the trembling spray the thrush sing, or to see, dipping and diving as if he skimmed waves in the air, the yellow woodpecker?" (104). Couched within the wonderment of nature lie a succession of negative terms, which disturbingly allude to Isa's consciousness of her own mortality at this historical moment. She thus remains an incredibly vexed figure: her poetic imagination evinces her potential to forge an alternative narrative identity, certainly to a degree far beyond other non-combatants, such as Swithin and Manresa; yet her hesitancy to actually perform or externalize it—which unequivocally stems from patriarchal pressure, at the hands of her husband's judgment, and the pressing reality of war—compromises her capacity to break from these structures. As the novel unfolds, Woolf considers, vis-à-vis Isa, how to overcome the tension between becoming author and arbiter of her identity—which would irrevocably jeopardize the stability of her husband and children—versus the performance of self in the service of patriarchy.

VII. "...for the causes are the same and inseparable": Homosexuality and the Subversion of Patriarchy

Yet in a manner altogether distinct from Isa, William Dodge as well embodies the novel's examination of the tension between upholding social expectations of gender versus authenticating self. As a gay man who exceeds binary gender codes, Dodge complicates Woolf's forthright rejection of patriarchy in *Between the Acts*, just as Rezia Smith blurs the tendency to conclude in *Mrs. Dalloway* that gender alone predetermines the capacity for individual recovery. In fact, through homosexual subjectivity, explored through Dodge as well as Miss La Trobe, whom I discuss in a later section, *Between the Acts* concretizes the link between pluralized subjectivity and performance. As homosexuals, Dodge and La Trobe risk being socially ostracized if their alternative

sexual orientation is made public within this rural village; yet without overtly performing heterosexuality, both displace a narrative that they can sustain—and that sustains them—in the name of heteronormativity. Insofar as they straddle the boundary between these two identity categories, the text assigns each a pluralized subjectivity. As such, Dodge and La Trobe eclipse the identity categories that secure and perpetuate the existing social order, and therefore threaten to undermine it. The difficulty that the townspeople encounter in naming or identifying Dodge or La Trobe concretizes their plurality, and more importantly bespeaks the permeability of the exclusionary, patriarchal ideals upon which this community is founded. Not only has La Trobe been nicknamed “Bossy” behind her back (63), but more telling is Lucy Swithin’s repeated inability to recall Dodge’s name, “Twice she had said ‘Mr.’ and stopped” (70). By destabilizing the identities of La Trobe and Dodge, *Between the Acts* prefigures the obscure position of the homosexual within the conservative and traditional worldview that Lucy symbolizes.

To this end, the chief characteristic separating Giles and Dodge from La Trobe occurs with regard to woman’s capacity to artistically represent self, versus man’s tendency to repress, which invariably results in disabling frustration, and even self-loathing in Dodge’s case. Despite the fact that his homosexuality feminizes him, that Dodge deems his own personal history unspeakable signifies the text’s denial of recovery to men. Dodge’s private thoughts tragically convey the depth of his shame:

He saw her [Swithin’s] eyes only. And he wished to kneel before her, kiss her hand, and to say: ‘At school they held me under a bucket of dirty water, Mrs. Swithin; when I looked up, the world was dirty, Mrs. Swithin; so I married; but my child’s not my child, Mrs. Swithin. I’m a half-man, Mrs. Swithin; a flickering, mind-divided little snake in the grass, Mrs. Swithin; as Giles saw; but you’ve healed me...’ So he wished to say; but said nothing; and the breeze went lolloping along the corridors, blowing the blinds out. (73)

In this moment, Dodge silences his own narrative, subjecting himself to ongoing anguish. Performance does not enable Dodge to transcend the confines of rigid social dictates regarding sexuality; instead it enables him to continue to capitulate to them. Following the conclusion of pageant-play, Dodge and Swithin meet momentarily. However, the narrator's remark, "Putting one thing with another, it was unlikely that they would ever meet again" (207), reinforces the liminality inherent to his identity. He upholds social convention by thanking his hostess for her hospitality; yet that he explicitly intends never to meet her again indicates that he cannot realistically become part of the community that she represents. Although this admission does not compel him to commit suicide, as it does Septimus Smith, not insignificantly, his exile directly prefigures Miss La Trobe's. The novel thus elicits the reader's sympathy for Dodge on account of his outsider status, as it applauds his personal allegiance to a sustainable narrative of self.

In spite of this, the liminality ascribed to Dodge—by virtue of his homosexuality as well as his vexed position within the rural community—is not exclusive to him. Rather, it serves as a crucial, albeit unspoken, point of connection between he and Isa, and becomes as well the trait through which Woolf resumes her attempt, initiated through Clarissa Dalloway, to represent female non-combatant subjectivity as pluralized, and therefore flexible; link it with a proclivity for artistic expression, and to ultimately envision the likelihood that the marriage of subjectivity and artistry might provide a gateway to woman's ability to outlast a second, massive political conflict.

VIII. "And the stage was empty": Isa Oliver's Potentially Transformative Plurality

Thus, although Isa Oliver does not share Dodge and La Trobe's outsider status on the basis of her sexuality, even as a bona fide member of the rural community, Isa's

inner-workings position her on its periphery. Accordingly, and consistent with Woolf's depiction of Clarissa Dalloway, Isa's recurring feeling of being not herself becomes a moniker of non-combatant paralysis.⁴³ While this feeling is manifest in other characters as well, unique to Isa remains her determination to define self in spite of it. For example, as they steal away to the greenhouse to be alone, Giles and Manresa experience a similar sense of bewilderment: "Presumably there was time then for a stroll round the gardens, even for a look over the house. Yet somehow they felt—how could one put it—a little not quite here or there...Not quite themselves, they felt" (149). To return to Isa, who privately imagines an extramarital affair with Rupert Haines, "the man in gray" (96; 208) for whom she has "inner love" (14), she represses this desire; for she seems certain that an illicit relationship with him would only distance her further from individual autonomy, not position her in closer proximity to it. Through this contrast, the text admonishes Giles and Manresa, and gives credence to Isa, in order to legitimize independent womanhood as a viable site of self-definition.

In this vein, the novel includes two additional scenes in which two people extract themselves from the unfolding production of the pageant-play: together, the three work to imagine Isa's independence. First, Swithin and Dodge find themselves alone together at Pointz Hall prior to the start of the play, at which time Swithin gives Dodge a tour of the property: "The audience was assembling. But they, looking down from the window, were truants, detached" (72). Second, and perhaps more significantly, amidst the production, Isa and Dodge retreat to the greenhouse; and even though "...they talked as if they had known each other all their lives; which was odd she said, as they always did,

⁴³ Recall as well that in the midst of her party, Clarissa Dalloway admits, "Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself..." (*MD* 170-1).

considering she'd known him perhaps one hour" (114), this scene ultimately negates the possibility that any lasting emotional bond shall form between them. For it becomes clear that Isa withdraws in an attempt to temporarily free herself from the public and private realities that threaten to consume her: knowledge of her husband's extramarital affair, and fear of impending war.

In comparison, the others—Swithin, Giles, Manresa, and even Dodge—all retreat with their respective partners because they want to suspend reality by allowing themselves *to be consumed*, at least temporarily, by some alternative narrative, whether it be history, an illicit affair, or social acceptance. As Joshua Esty has argued, the pageant-play itself can be read as a manifestation of this desire for imaginative escape and historical continuity writ large: "The key to the genre, then, is that it presents a chronological series of episodes precisely in order to project the absence of historical change. The typical pageant managed to represent hundreds of years of English history by suggesting that all important things had stayed the same, by dissolving linear time into the seductive continuity of national tradition" (Esty 249). The fact that no attempt to escape the reality of imminent world war is unequivocally successful—and especially because such attempts are rather foolishly waged by those aligned with masculinity, patriarchy, and tradition, namely Giles, Manresa, and Swithin—reiterates Woolf's insistence that individual recovery cannot take the shape of a linear narrative (which correlatively points to why Miss La Trobe's production was destined to fail from its outset). Thus, it becomes clear that *Between the Acts* represents female recovery as a continuum, a model that announces and celebrates the subtleties that define Isa and Miss La Trobe. Accordingly, "autonomy" materializes separately with respect to each woman;

but both possess a discernable likelihood to forge a sustainable narrative identity, which should be attributed to the passion each has for artistic self-expression. In this way, the novel proffers an exclusively feminist approach to recovery.

Although Isa is ultimately bound by what Eileen Barrett terms her “characteristic passivity,” (Barrett 24), and does not fully set herself free from the realms of motherhood and domesticity, she nonetheless represents a closer approximation to female non-combatant recovery than either Swithin or Manresa. In the moment at which she violently plunges a knife into a wooden plank, Isa demonstrates her capacity to externalize, which stems in this case from rage and frustration fueled by knowledge of her husband’s affair (Woolf 113). Alone together in the barn, both she and Dodge can express “whatever came into their heads,” yet the fact that “They knew at once that they had nothing to fear, nothing to hope” (113) subverts the potential for either to meaningfully redirect the course of their lives, for they are both equally susceptible to social and political forces, outside of their bodies and beyond their control. As the novel draws to a close, it vividly locates the paralysis of one’s artistic capacity specifically within the feminine: as Isa observes Dodge entering the church, she notes that he is “a seeker like her after hidden faces,” emphasizing the artistic, imaginative impulse common to both. However, that Dodge “hurr[ies] to rejoin Mrs. Manresa who had gone in front with Giles,” and that Isa’s response occurs entirely through the body, “The flesh poured over her, the hot, nerve wired, now lit up, now dark as the grave physical body” (207) effectively severs what remains of any connection between the two. In this vein, it bears noting the direct parallel between Isa’s bodily response to betrayal, and Clarissa Dalloway’s bodily response to learning of Septimus’s death, described as Woolf writes,

“A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—the Bradshaws, talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt” (*MD* 184).

Therefore, in echoing Clarissa, and confining Isa’s response to the interiority of her physical body, the novel foreshadows her conscious decision to forsake her artistic freedom and individuality in the name of securing material comfort and continued economic stability. Isa accordingly represses her feelings of anger and betrayal, and resolves to heal “the rusty fester of the poisoned dart” (*BA* 207) by seeking out Rupert Haines, but takes no literal action except to leave the church and return to Pointz Hall, a prodigious symbol of her roles as wife and mother. Therefore, while several critics interpret the novel’s final words, “Then the curtain rose. They spoke” (219) as indicative of the renewed promise of marital communication and fulfillment between Isa and Giles, the position of Isa’s body—seated upon the bed she shares with her husband at Pointz Hall—singularizes her subjectivity, and repudiates the possibility that she will forge a narrative identity independent of the patriarchal ideals to which her husband ascribes.

IX. “She ignored the audience”: Miss La Trobe, Artistry, and Recovery

As writer and director of the pageant-play, Miss La Trobe functions as a pivotal figure in Woolf’s oeuvre, because she is the woman artist who exercises her creativity to claim an identity at odds with prevailing discourse. Not unlike Clarissa and Isa, La Trobe’s subjectivity is pluralized, by virtue of her roles as writer and lesbian, as well as her “impure,” albeit English, heritage (57). That *Between the Acts* strategically differentiates La Trobe from other female non-combatant figures positions her in closest

proximity to realistically recovering a sustainable narrative of self, without proffering an absolute guarantee thereof. For example, although Manresa has in common with La Trobe an enigmatic heritage, Manresa tends to be dismissed on the basis of her “buoyancy” (119), whereas La Trobe immediately establishes her authority and gains the respect of the players. By asserting control over the production, for “She had the look of a commander pacing his deck” (62), it becomes clear that La Trobe’s approach will not blindly mimic past representations of this historical narrative. The narrator presents a nuanced depiction of La Trobe: “she was not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world” (153). Finally, although she ultimately doubts the success of her play, in contrast to Isa, Miss La Trobe’s most defining trait as an artist is that she consciously privileges her vision over reality, which enables her to revise past approaches to plot, roles, and costume design. Another telling description reveals, “She splashed into the fine mesh like a great stone into the lily pool...Vanity, for example, made them all malleable...Thus conventions were outraged” (64). Particularly through the reference to malleability, the text renders La Trobe’s penchant for re-imagining identities as implicit to her being, thereby creating the possibility that she will forge a sustainable, autonomous narrative identity, unencumbered by her Outsider status.

Despite her outward assertion of control over the production, Miss La Trobe’s tenuous relationship with her players and the audience, coupled with her inner-workings, elicit her feelings of social marginalization and authorial inadequacy. Miss La Trobe uses the players to establish her control: in fact, she tends to speak only to admonish them for missing a cue, or making some other mistake. “‘Blast ’em,’ cursed Miss La Trobe,

hidden behind the tree... ‘Music!’ she signaled. ‘Music!’” (77). Even more telling, her repeated self-positioning along the margins of the stage or set parallels the social ostracism she experiences on the basis of her lesbianism, solidifying her Outsider status. The townspeople accordingly assess her: “With that name she wasn’t presumably pure English,” but the narrator comments, “Very little was known about her. Outwardly she was very swarthy, sturdy and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hand; and used rather strong language—perhaps, then, she wasn’t altogether a lady? At any rate, she had a passion for getting things up” (57-8). As an artist, Miss La Trobe thus possesses the capacity to re-imagine the identities of characters in the pageant-play, but by virtue of her Outsider status, embodies the female non-combatant’s ongoing struggle to re-invent her own identity within a cultural framework that makes little provision for her plurality. As Sybil Oldfield claims, “Miss La Trobe is defined not by her nonrelation to man or men but by her own vision and by her own passion...She is autonomous, but not nonrelational” (Oldfield 100). Of the various female figures throughout Woolf’s fiction that I have discussed, La Trobe thus represents the clearest articulation of the balance between public and private—or stated slightly differently, between individual autonomy and social inclusion—that non-combatant women encounter in defining selfhood in this historical moment.

In exercising her artistry, Miss La Trobe arguably possesses the most control of the four central female figures in *Between the Acts*; yet in forcing her to confront the limitations of that control, Woolf crystallizes the challenge female non-combatants face in claiming agency: woman’s individuality is eminently subject to erasure in the name of

ensuring the continuance of a unifying, historical narrative, for it is precisely that narrative which pacifies the tumult incited by war. Again, Miss La Trobe's physical remove from the stage literally enacts the cultural privileging of a collective, national narrative over individuality. In this vein, her production seems doomed from the outset, for the authority afforded her by virtue of her status as author and director leads her to mistakenly believe not only that the pageant-play will enable her to reach a closer approximation of her individual identity, but that she alone shall define it. Once the pageant is well underway, the narrator registers La Trobe's growing frustration with the players, which points to her gradual loss of control over the production: "'Louder! Louder!' She threatened them with her clenched fists" (139). As Toni McNaron has argued, "The act of artistic creation, then, holds out the illusion of control for the artist" (McNaron 58). In reality, at best, what La Trobe (re)enacts is still a communal narrative of shared history. Her inner-workings elicit her recognition that her control is indeed a mere illusion: "Hadn't she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony...for one moment...one moment...She hadn't made them see. It was a failure, another damned failure! As usual. Her vision escaped her" (Woolf 98). Unfortunately for Miss La Trobe, the audience only becomes cognizant of the uniqueness of her vision when they admit that they cannot comprehend it, as widow ETTY Springett blurts out: "Cheap and nasty, I call it" (173) and "I must say I like to feel sure if I go to the theatre, that I've grasped the meaning..." (200).

La Trobe's indignant reaction to the production thus evinces a dual sense of failure, measured by the audience's inability to comprehend the pageant's message, and more damaging, her belief that she has dishonored her vision. As such, her failure

harbors public and private ramifications. Miss La Trobe's foundering attempt to claim selfhood in the face of marginality impels her to "crush her manuscript" (122), confront the idea that "Her power had left her" (140), and to absent herself from the community by retreating into a bar after the audience disperses. "She raised her glass to her lips. And drank. And listened" (212). Not insignificantly, both of Miss La Trobe's symbolic gestures of surrender to her marginalized status respectively echo those forged by Septimus Smith of *Mrs. Dalloway* and Rebecca Random of Warner's *Opus 7*—the former destroys his papers, and the latter succumbs to the seductive influence of alcohol as a means of withdrawing from a grim interwar reality.

Even more telling, the crucial point of difference between La Trobe and Isa is also what distinguishes La Trobe from Clarissa: where Isa and Clarissa ultimately silence their respective pluralized subjectivities in the name of securing the material comforts afforded by marriage and domesticity, La Trobe refuses, and defiantly absents herself from the community at large. Marcus contextualizes this difference in terms of Woolf's larger critique of patriarchy and war: "Women's consent is necessary for men to go on making war and making love as if it were war. Isa consents, but Miss La Trobe does not...She is the woman artist's honest portrait of the woman artist" (Marcus 91). That La Trobe interpolates an empty stage as a figurative death, does lead her to admit that, "Her power had left her" (Woolf 140), but more importantly, the empty stage parallels Marcus's "honest portrait," insofar as it signifies La Trobe's coming to terms with the limitations of artistic expression. Although suffering a failed production and social ostracism prove painful, they nonetheless facilitate self-knowledge: "Shunned by the villagers, La Trobe is left to speak her words to herself, to be her own audience" (Eberly 218). Thus, the

question remains: Does this self-knowledge prove redemptive? At the level of the individual, Miss La Trobe's rejection of the reigning cultural system of value—which she shares with Septimus and Rebecca—seems to sever the possibility of recovery achieved through meaningful social connection.

But in a public sense, the failure of La Trobe's production serves as a platform enabling Woolf to consider the plausibility of national recovery. Miss La Trobe's unique vision—a reflection of her multiple subjectivity and her status as Other—effectively ruptures the monotony and predictability of a cultural narrative that typically caters to audience expectation, denoted for instance by Isa's annoyance at Lucy's obsession with the weather: "Every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words; about the hammer and the nails; the pageant and the weather. Every year they said, would it be wet or fine; and every year it was—one or the other" (Woolf 22). To a great extent, La Trobe's play unveils what are perhaps Woolf's own anxieties pertaining to the notion that existence itself is meaningless. As biographer Hermione Lee writes, "The writer's struggle to make a version of history exists inside the possibility that history is nothing but a meaningless repetition" (Lee 723). Despite La Trobe's self-professed failure, Woolf seems to suggest, the value of the play lies not in the final product, but in the ongoing struggle that such an undertaking demands. In light of La Trobe's admission, "For another play always lay behind the play she had just written" (Woolf 63), Esty's comment compels one to approach *Between the Acts* as a meta-narrative of the challenges of representation: "As the ritual breaks down, forcing its author (La Trobe) to recognize its incompleteness, the text delivers an oblique commentary about the ineffectiveness of modernist representation in a fragmented society" (Esty 264). Miss La

Trobe's attempts to reconcile public and private narratives thereby become her, and presumably Woolf's, only foreseeable response to such fragmentation.

Perhaps because the "repetition" that Lee calls attention to ultimately proves inescapable, Woolf concedes to end where she began: inside Pointz Hall. As a meta-narrative, the reader assumes the role of audience in the final scenes of the novel, in which Giles and Isa shall purportedly speak for the first time that day. To date, several critics have assessed the relationship between identity and performance as it manifests throughout *Between the Acts*. Consider especially the claims that, "...Woolf creates theatre in order to dismantle it, in order to break the imperialism of perfect communication; hence the endless hesitations, questions, unfinished thoughts, the aporetic moments, that pepper her novel" (Pridmore-Brown 2), and, "...identity, as reflected into the present by history's mirror, is revealed fractured and fragmented, performance—like Miss La Trobe's version of history—acted on culture's stage" (Delsandro 94-5). Read intertextually, these remarks intimate that for Woolf, identity constitutes a performance that has yet to be written. Interpreting the message of *Between the Acts* in this way facilitates an understanding of why Miss La Trobe's pageant must fail; and in particular, necessitates the rising of the curtain that will bring an end to the destructive silence between Isa and Giles (Woolf 219). Because the impact of war itself cannot be predicted, let alone imagined, Woolf necessarily suspends her reader interminably within this ongoing process of identity construction as the only way to afford her the flexibility to respond, adjust, and survive. Melba Cuddy-Keane has argued, "And, finally, the readers' and audience's expectation of definitive meaning is overturned by the novelist and playwright's rejection of closure and the substitution of a

continuous engagement in process” (Cuddy-Keane 279). The failed performances in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* render extemporaneity inherent to this process, and unequivocally illustrate that surrendering to it constitutes the only feasible means of securing a sustainable self. To this end, the open-ended quality of the final words of *Mrs. Dalloway*: “For there she was” (Woolf 194) and *Between the Acts*, “The curtain rose. They spoke” (219) strategically demand the reader’s engagement with the questions of identity, performance, and fate. Impelling her reader to subjectively forge meaning out of these narrative silences, attests not to Woolf’s total surrender to the inevitable destruction of war, but to her enduring belief that the individual possesses the capacity to dictate the course of his or her identity.

Chapter 3

“You have seen for yourself”: Subjectivity, Recovery, and Identity in H.D.’s *Within the Walls* (1941), *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (1946-47), and *Compassionate Friendship* (1955)

As an American expatriate living in London throughout World War II, enduring relentless bombings and air-raids, as well as the threat of instant death, H.D. harbors a dangerously close physical proximity to war trauma. Her textual representations of non-combatant trauma, and attempts to reassemble selfhood in its aftermath, build upon the efforts of Woolf and Warner by strengthening the connection between textual artistry and psychological healing that their works establish. H.D.’s aim to represent female identity in a manner that accounts for its indelible impact upon the psyche commences from a series of intensely personal traumas; broadens at moments to theorize recovery in collective terms; and ultimately returns to the personal. In particular, H.D.’s writing composed over the course of the fifteen years spanning 1940 to 1955—much of which she never intended for publication—employs performance as a mode of re-conceptualizing female postwar identity in pluralized terms, and attributes woman’s capacity to withstand the trauma of war to the exercise of her multiplicity.

As her biographers and critics discuss, the advent of World War II catalyzes latent traumas of loss that H.D. suffered decades earlier, including: the stillbirth of her first child in May 1915; the death of her brother, Gilbert, on the frontlines in France in September 1918; her father's stroke and subsequent death in 1919; the dissolution of her marriage to Richard Aldington, also in 1919; and finally, an abortion in 1928.⁴⁴ Because cultural narratives of the World War I era and its aftermath made little provision for traumas of this magnitude, and especially for traumas unique to women—stillbirth, near-fatal illness during pregnancy, and abortion—the page becomes a canvas upon which H.D. inscribes and strives to negotiate the emotional and psychological effects of her personal trauma within the cultural upheaval unearthed by the Second World War.

Begun in the 1930s as she underwent psychotherapy with Sigmund Freud, H.D.'s ongoing effort to forge a sustainable narrative of self materializes throughout the World War II era and its aftermath as a series of experimental texts, including *Within the Walls* (1940-1), *The Sword Went Out to Sea (Synthesis of a Dream)* (1946-7), and *Compassionate Friendship* (1955). Although none has been the subject of extensive critical discussion to date, all showcase H.D.'s will to testify to personal and public trauma, and to comprehend how these experiences have indelibly shaped but not altogether shattered her identity. As the following discussion will illustrate, each text offers a slightly different response to the questions that informed H.D.'s earlier writing about war and female identity: how to negotiate war trauma in a way that authorizes and accounts for female non-combatant experience; how to meaningfully integrate personal

⁴⁴ Information about H.D.'s biography abounds. Though somewhat dated, two of the hallmark studies pertaining to this series of events, and their effect upon her creativity and psychological health are: Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (New York: Doubleday, 1984) and Susan Stanford Friedman's *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, and H.D.'s Fiction* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990).

trauma into that identity; and most importantly, how to use textual artistry as a mode to achieve, enact, and uphold these aims.

Tracing the emergence of a coterie of women writers, including H.D., Marianne Moore, and Djuna Barnes, and others, into the modernist public sphere, critic Georgina Taylor employs the term “psychic reality” to describe a component of the specifically modern, female subjectivity that their works create and develop. Particular to H.D., however, Taylor argues, “...such an understanding of woman’s subjectivity required a situating of the female subject against a background of a male literary tradition and male-dominated history, and a seeking out of new ways of understanding and conveying the specificity of women’s experiences, as opposed to those of a ‘universal’ subject” (Taylor 52). In light of the enormous impact of war upon this subjectivity, the oppositional stance forged by H.D.’s works of the forties and fifties thus emerges from the intersection of trauma, subjectivity, and narrative. This matrix takes shape in several of her earlier works, especially: *Notes on Thought and Vision* (1919); her famous vision in Corfu, which she transcribes into “Writing on the Wall,” an essay later published as part of *Tribute to Freud* (1944), an account of her sessions with Freud that took place in 1933-34, widely regarded as testimony to her belief that writing could similarly facilitate the therapeutic goals originally sought through psychoanalysis. Borne out of this context, her works composed between 1940 and 1955 thus constitute a return to the intersection of trauma, subjectivity, and narrative in an attempt to represent the varied nuances of female postwar identity.

Not insignificantly, H.D.’s aim to represent this shifting, subjective psychic reality also foregrounds her interest in spiritualism, which enables her to translate and

interpret her visions. Adalaide Morris uses the term “projection” to describe H.D.’s early mode of externalizing the workings of her psyche. She explains, “From the verb meaning to *throw forward*, projection is the thrust that bridges two worlds...Its operations connect the material, mental, and mystical realms and enact her belief that there is no physical reality that is not also psychic and spiritual” (Morris 95-6). Given its aim to work through the implications of the vision H.D. had while in Corfu in April 1920, “Writing on the Wall” poignantly captures the performative essence of projection, insofar as H.D. strives to textually project the traumatic past in order to reinvent self. Joseph Roach echoes the emphasis upon transmission and forward motion that characterize Morris’s description of projection: “To perform means to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit. To perform also means, though often more secretly, to reinvent” (Roach xi). Together, Morris’s and Roach’s claims underscore the performative underpinnings inherent to H.D.’s visionary capacity, and suggest as well that she viewed writing as the principal mode through which to map the pluralized subjectivity that manifests through her foray into realms beyond lived, material reality.

While I will revisit “Writing on the Wall” in a section that follows, beyond the innate performativity of H.D.’s visions, remain the political aims that they evince. To this end, the elements of spiritualism that inform *Notes on Thought and Vision* and *Tribute to Freud* separately forge a definitive break from patriarchal tradition by, to borrow Taylor’s phrase, tapping into an alternative psychic reality in order to represent womanhood as a complex, subjective identity, interminably subject to revision. Accordingly, Lisa Rado’s analysis of the female subjectivity constructed throughout

Notes, which H.D. labels “over-mind,” elucidates its transgressive, performative elements, as it espouses the clear rupture that it incites upon masculine tradition:

Using the language of hypsos, height, and transcendence, she wants to construct or imagine an imagination that can burst upward through blockages, transgress boundaries, and authorize itself by ‘over’coming the paralyzing power of literary fathers such as Pound, Freud, Aldington, and Lawrence by incorporating it within herself, by creating an ‘over’mind and joining it to her womb. (Rado 66)

However, despite the fact that *Notes* “...not only defines a modernist gynopoetic; it also performs it,” as Susan Stanford Friedman explains, “Any impact it might have had on the theorization of modernism was aborted by Havelock Ellis’s negative response” (Friedman *Penelope* 11), which left H.D. crestfallen.⁴⁵ Thus, *Tribute to Freud*, written some twenty years after *Notes*, remains a seminal text in H.D. studies, for it does not simply catalogue her sessions with Freud, or even her explicit effort to derive meaning from her Corfu vision; rather, it represents a return, a second deliberate attempt to announce and secure her artistic individuality, apart from the masculine influence that threatened to squander it throughout her early writing career. Katherine Arens accordingly describes *Tribute* as, “...a narrative of resistance that calls the male-masculinist-misogynist analytic relationship of classical Freudianism systematically into question” (Arens 361). Composed a decade after the vision that prompted her analysis with Freud in the first place, *Tribute* becomes the textual space where H.D. facilitates

⁴⁵ Friedman elaborates on H.D.’s relationship with Ellis: “As the distinguished essayist and sexologist most associated with ‘modern’ ideas about the body in the early twentieth century, Ellis was the man to whom H.D. had turned eagerly for help during the traumatic months of her pregnancy, illness, and postpartum recovery. Much a member of her intimate circle in 1919 and 1920, Ellis accompanied H.D. and Bryher on their healing trip to Greece. But when H.D. showed him the manuscript of *Notes on Thought and Vision*, he disapproved, much to her surprise and pain...Perhaps because of his response and the authority with which she had invested him, H.D. left the manuscript unpublished and never again tried to write an essay like *Notes on Thought and Vision*” (Friedman 11-12). *Notes* was published posthumously in 1982.

narrative consciousness, which in turn enables her to harness the therapeutic capacity of writing.

The three texts considered in this chapter—*Within the Walls*, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, and *Compassionate Friendship*—enact and develop this therapeutic capacity; and by explicitly linking writing, war, and its traumatic aftermath, they elucidate the personal dimensions of this shifting category of womanhood. In fact, in their foray into female non-combatant recovery, H.D.'s works of this period stand apart from Woolf and Warner, insofar as they forthrightly assert an autobiographical subject. Especially as they evoke the conventions of diary and memoir, these texts locate this subject in a specific time and place. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain, establishing a concrete connection to external circumstances becomes a platform that facilitates the emergence of the autobiographical subject, and the ability to reconcile past and present. They write: "...situated in a specific time and place, the autobiographical subject is in dialogue with her own processes and archives of memory. The past is not a static repository of experience, but always engaged from a present moment, itself ever-changing" (Smith and Watson 9). As all three narratives will illustrate, for H.D., recovery entails an ongoing, textual confrontation with the past as a way of making sense of the present, and by extension, the future.

In this vein, it becomes clear that *Tribute to Freud* constitutes the site in which H.D. announces her autobiographical subjectivity, yet does so specifically as an *author*, not as a victim of trauma. The critical discourse surrounding her work, as well as H.D. herself, substantiate this claim. Dianne Chisholm writes, "H.D...applies certain analytic skills that she acquires *through writing* in order to expand her autobiography and to

displace the dissatisfying and disabling normative life story by which she had come to know and judge herself” (Chisholm 5). In so doing, *Tribute* reveals H.D.’s struggle to reconcile her personal traumas with the cultural trauma of war. Beyond “expand[ing] her autobiography,” H.D. declares herself as author and arbiter of that narrative. As her sessions with Freud draw to an abrupt end, she details the inextricable collusion of public and private, particularly evident through the repetition of the singular pronouns “I” and “my”:

The war closed on us, before I had time to sort out, relive, and reassemble the singular series of events and dreams that belonged in historical time to the 1914-1919 period. I wanted to dig down and dig out, root out my personal weeds, strengthen my purpose, reaffirm my beliefs, canalize my energies, and I seized on the unexpected chance of working with Professor Freud himself. (*Tribute* 91)

Smith and Watson explain how the speaking “I” can therefore be read as a textual enactment of the performative dimensions of recovery: “In effect, autobiographical telling is performative; it enacts the ‘self’ that it claims has given rise to an ‘I.’ And that ‘I’ is neither unified nor stable—it is fragmented, provisional, multiple, in process” (Smith and Watson 9). By juxtaposing writing and talk therapy, H.D. denotes writing as the mode that yields the clearest articulation of her postwar pluralized subjectivity. In so doing, she establishes writing as a deliberate, textual performance of self. As such, the performative underpinnings of *Within the Walls*, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, and *Compassionate Friendship* continue to complicate the relationship between trauma, subjectivity, and narrative apparent in H.D.’s early poetry and prose, as well as her experience as Freud’s analysand.

Although she composes them over the course of fifteen years, considering the three texts concurrently reveals a noteworthy progression in H.D.’s ability—or perhaps

willingness—to write subjectively, by embracing the indelible imprint that trauma and loss leave upon her narrative of self. To illustrate, the speaker of *Within the Walls* remains unnamed, yet endures war in a manner that closely reflects H.D.’s own biography. In this series of “sketches,” H.D. grapples with the challenges and ramifications of textually representing the horrific magnitude of war from the non-combatant vantage point. In its bold display of the psychological terror of war, it ultimately becomes a celebration of the possibility that woman can reclaim and assert artistic creativity amidst war. In *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, H.D. grapples with the tremendous sense of emotional, psychological, and even existential instability that remain in the wake of trauma, yet does so through Delia Alton, her fictional embodiment, who appears relatively often throughout her prose oeuvre.⁴⁶ Finally, in her diary-memoir, *Compassionate Friendship*, H.D. forges an unprecedented level of transparency, insofar as she writes not from a projected or fictionalized subjectivity, but simply from her own. With the concept of friendship as its unifying metaphor, H.D.’s interest in the connection between performance and recovery escalates, as she textually dismantles the complicated matrix of friendship, betrayal, and recovery.

Each in their own way, these works enact the very hybridity that they deem central to female postwar subjectivity. H.D.’s approach to theorizing recovery acknowledges but ultimately diverges from prevailing clinical and medical discourses on

⁴⁶ In *Penelope’s Web*, Susan Stanford Friedman explains the various autobiographical parallels between Hilda Doolittle and Delia Alton: “In the 1940s and 1950s, she settled on one prose name—Delia Alton—as the author of her fiction, a total of six novels: *Magic Ring*, *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (*Synthesis of a Dream*, *White Rose and the Red*, *The Mystery*, *Magic Mirror*, and *Bid Me to Live (A Madrigal)*” (43). She continues, “Alton is clearly an abbreviated form of Aldington, H.D.’s married name...Almost an anagram for Hilda, Delia may also encode a layered identity—overtly feminine in its onomatopoeic seductions of dahlias, Delilahs; but also covertly androgynous in its austere etymological meaning...” (44). I will provide additional discussion of the resonance between Delia Alton and H.D. in my discussion of *The Sword Went Out to Sea*.

the subject; instead, she forges her own approach by seamlessly interweaving the conventions of fiction, memoir, diary, and essay. Accordingly, these texts do not merely map non-combatant trauma, but showcase its effects in all of their complexity. For example, the absence of linear progression and use of abstract images and symbols throughout, mirrors the very existential confusion and uncertainty that H.D., and by extension, countless other non-combatants, were likewise forced to confront in order to work through and surpass their trauma.

Each text assumes, after having physically survived the atrocity of World War II, that claiming a singular, unified self is impractical and likely impossible. As such, they are not narratives of trauma, but narratives of selves-in-trauma. Together they explore the possibilities for recovery that manifest by redefining female identity in pluralized, instead of holistic terms. Doing so lends the non-combatant the freedom to exercise various components of her selfhood, sometimes simultaneously, without forcing her to artificially integrate them into a singular, unified identity. Creating space for woman to harness disparate elements of her identity, which can include, but are not limited to: personal interests, religious belief, sexual orientation, career, and family—alleviates much of the burden that might otherwise exacerbate her psychological and emotional traumas. By examining the implications of defining womanhood as multiple subjectivity, these texts facilitate recovery as they imagine and enact the potential for woman to not only map her trauma, but also to assign meaning to it, and to overcome it by artistically transforming it into *part* of her life experience, yet not the sole determinant of her identity.

Performance therefore proves central to the recovery process for H.D. as well as for Woolf and Warner, for it is the vehicle that enables the female non-combatant to explore and nurture the various facets of her identity that remain in the wake of trauma. While we witness female protagonists engaging in performative acts, the true significance of performance to this project lies in the extra-textual agency it promotes. For writing itself constitutes a performative act, wherein the text is akin to the stage. It becomes an organic canvas upon which the author (re)writes her identity, either through a fictional protagonist, or from the vantage point of a transparent, autobiographical “I”. The works examined here are particularly compelling, for they catalogue a series of experiments that H.D. conducts with the speaking “I”, enabling the reader to chart the progression of H.D.’s own reclamation of a sustainable narrative of self.

As the most transparent representations of H.D.’s own experiences and existential anxiety, *Within the Walls* and *Compassionate Friendship* strive to assign value to subjective representations of trauma sustained by women. As Judith Herman explains, “No two people have identical reactions, even to the same event. The traumatic syndrome, despite its many constant features, is not the same for everyone” (Herman 58). Although Herman writes outside of the context of war trauma, her comment nonetheless proves relevant because it calls attention to an often ignored, yet crucial difference between approaches to treating combatant versus non-combatant trauma. Because the body makes physical trauma visible, and by this time, “shell shock” had been legitimized as a known consequence of combat, doctors and clinicians had systematized the treatment of soldiers and veterans. Yet non-combatant traumas, rarely physical in nature, are far more disparate in effect. While combatant traumas certainly harbor subjective

components, the three texts discussed here illustrate H.D.'s insistence that by comparison, the traumas women endure because of war should not only be regarded as distinct from those sustained by soldiers; but most importantly, a traumatized woman should be encouraged and empowered to "do the work of working through" on her own terms. Restoring recovery to its subjective roots helps to ensure that the patient can actually sustain the self that the process of recovery seeks to remake. To this end, while her extensive series of sessions with Freud, Schmeideberg, Heydt, and other analysts challenged her to confront and mitigate her trauma, H.D. ultimately deems the talking cure, when elected as the sole mode of treatment, to be insufficient. Coupling it with writing is essential. Accordingly, these texts attest to the increasing sense of agency that writing affords H.D. Of the three, only her diary-memoir, *Compassionate Friendship*, invests the "I" with complete transparency; therein, H.D. asserts confidence in her ability to direct the course of her life from that moment forward.

Collectively, these narratives also regard multiple subjectivity as a fundamental component of female non-combatant postwar identity; yet they build upon the projects of Woolf and Warner by rendering it essential to the ability of the female non-combatant to reconcile traumatic memory with lived experience. They engage the matrix of performance, history, recovery, and identity, as they anticipate the collusion of these threads as an inevitable outcome of war, and a remarkable source of hope and creativity. In so doing, *Within the Walls*, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, and *Compassionate Friendship* attest to the challenges that the female non-combatant will encounter as she strives to preserve extant facets of self that survive war, while simultaneously rebuilding her shattered narrative in the postwar moment.

I. *Within the Walls*: Pluralized Subjectivity through a Semi-Transparent “I”

“The effects, it was scientifically stated, of war-shock were not at once, registered. You stiffened, you endured, you waited for the next bout of bombing. Were bombs reality? If so, were the realists, who theorized about the new Britain, the new England, the new World, in this thick of it? Whose fault was it? And if yours and theirs, in what way would they, would you, record it?”

-*Within the Walls* (1941)

Composed prior to *Tribute to Freud*, *Within the Walls* is a collection of fourteen textual “sketches”⁴⁷ that remained unpublished until 1990, and has surprisingly garnered little critical attention to date. Each sketch reads as a loosely-structured diary—all but two are dated—locating its textual representation of female psychic interiority within a fairly specific temporal frame. Although *Tribute to Freud* follows a similar organizing principle, *Within the Walls* carries out an altogether different type of project: divorced entirely from masculine discourse, it delves explicitly into female psychic interiority, exposing the fragility of that space, yet gradually garners the determination to maintain sanity in spite of the imminent threat of death posed by air combat during World War II.

Yet the identity that *Within the Walls* ultimately forges for the female non-combatant is neither straightforward nor transparent. As will prove true in the following discussion of *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, this text maps a pluralized female subjectivity, but does so by subtly obscuring the identity of the speaking “I” herself. Thus, while we can safely presume that the speaking “I” is *likely* that of H.D. herself, to read solely through this lens would eclipse the breadth of her endeavor. In this text, she seeks to not only confront the emotional and psychological impact of war as it bears upon her identity as a writer; but on numerous occasions, she writes from the third-person, depersonalizing the “I,” in an effort to see herself generically: as a female non-combatant. By

⁴⁷ The term “collection of sketches” is that used by Susan Stanford Friedman to denote the genre of *Within the Walls*. For this and other approaches to discussing the hybridity of H.D.’s writing, consult Friedman’s chapter “Chronology: Dating H.D.’s Writing,” published at the end of *Penelope’s Web*, as well as Chapter 5 of *Signets: Reading H.D.* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990).

intentionally forging this distance between “I” and author, H.D. is afforded the ability to write simultaneously through subjective and objective lenses. This simultaneity becomes a strategy of achieving vision and clarity, and as well typifies *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, H.D.’s re-examination of the material reality of war, through the thinly-shrouded, fictional purview of her protagonist, Delia Alton.

In addition to its consideration of the intersection of war and female identity, this subjective/objective simultaneity throughout *Within the Walls* fuels its representations of cultural as well as individual recovery. As such, vivid descriptions of violence and ruin provide evidence to explain the utter upheaval of both individual and collective identity brought about by war. As the following passage illustrates, including herself among a collective of terrorized citizens textually enacts the speaker’s⁴⁸ emotional and psychological confrontation with her trauma; yet depicting it through the lens of “we” makes the encounter possible by at once creating objective clarity and safe distance from the trauma. She can essentially retreat into “we” at any moment in which the enormity of extant war and trauma overwhelm her. The speaker describes the regularity of the air-raid attacks with a disturbing mix of desensitization and resolve:

It is pretty false to exaggerate. Yet almost, the only real thing now, is the buzz-zz-zz of the enemy wings overhead. We miss them if they don’t come; stare at the ceiling and wonder, who is getting it now? If they rain fire and bombs on us, at least, they are here, we know where they are. This is perhaps an externalization of hidden inner terrors; a terror rationalized. It brings a sort of peace and the enemy now seem the only reality.
Perhaps they are the only reality.
We can’t stand it anymore. But we do stand it. This is what is interesting.
(*WW* 13)

⁴⁸ Because the speaking “I” of the text remains unnamed for the majority of the text, I refer to her throughout simply as the “speaker.”

Although the matter-of-fact, journalistic quality to this passage nearly succeeds at minimizing the psychic terror of war, it actually achieves quite the opposite: the admission that these civilians cannot withstand further trauma, but do so anyway positions them on the edge of their ability to cope. With no end to combat in sight, they remain utterly susceptible to the machinations of war. Having exhausted their psychological and emotional endurance, these civilians teeter on the brink of physical collapse or nervous breakdown. Yet at the same time, the passage conveys determination, reminding us that they are not helpless: as a community, their sense of control over the situation rests on their full acknowledgement of enemy presence, and their resolve to withstand the next round of attacks. In the series of three startlingly uncomplicated sentences quoted above, the speaker aptly conveys the inmitigable existential quandary that becomes a trademark of non-combatant identity.

In her examination of the psychological impact of Zeppelin air raids on the home front during WWI, critic Ariela Freedman explains the irony surrounding the fact that these instruments of death at once elicited fascination and terror among the citizenry. Although she refers to an earlier historical moment, her claim nonetheless proves relevant in the WWII context. After detailing the bird-like appearance of the bombs, Freedman contends, “An uncanny mix of machine and natural entity, bridging the sublime and the grotesque, the awe-inspiring and the monstrous, the Zeppelins detach themselves from their ostensible purpose and ownership and appear to possess their own will-to-power” (Freedman “Zeppelin” 51). Aside from bridging these dualities, this claim magnifies the power dynamic that air-raids emblemize: they are tangible manifestations of battle between nations, but also of the intangible psychological and emotional battles that

citizens must wage in order to preserve their sanity. By privileging the perspective of the female non-combatant, *Within the Walls* ardently rejects the cultural silencing of these private battles.

Yet by coupling the metaphors of “walls” with “bodies,” the text links physical and psychological survival, and enacts the framework of the layered body found in narratives of war trauma authored by women modernists. To illustrate, H.D.’s speaker likens physical survival to the fleeting essence of each passing moment: “As our personal house of life is threatened, we appreciate each hour... Within the walls, we are within the walls of our own bodies, for the time being. This is a notable experience” (*WW* 2). As in Woolf’s novels, the passing of time produces trepidation, for death’s inevitability encroaches; but H.D.’s speaker derives comfort from the idea that the literal walls of her home shelter her physical body. In collapsing the literal body and home, the text underscores the significance of sheltering the psyche from attack. But because avoiding attack is futile, this text should be read as a creative space that enables the speaker to focus on security and survival.

Perhaps to minimize the overwhelming vulnerability of the physical body, in a later passage, the speaker reduces it to purely scientific function: “It was important that this doll, this dummy, this recording instrument that received, through delicate sets of receiving stations, wave-lengths of sound, vibrations of light, should not be broken. Ironically she thought...it would be a pity if it were lost. It had endured fifty odd years, a half century and it was not yet worn out” (39). In addition to emphasizing her passivity, the images “doll,” “dummy,” and “recording instrument” strategically depict the body as vacant and artificial: without the capacity for artistry, the body is a mere scientific

instrument. Imagination is the source of life; and by extension, a gateway to survival. Thus, the interrelationship the text forges between physical and psychological survival, secured through writing and artistry, attests to the veracity of body as its governing metaphor. With organicism at its core, the active, performing body asserts life and survival, and functions as an antidote to the ongoing threat of death and destruction.

Although bodily survival must be left to chance, together, Woolf, Warner, and H.D. claim that non-combatants possess the ability to mitigate the psychological impact of war by employing artistic expression, creative thinking, and especially writing as modes of self-preservation. As the following discussion of *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and *Compassionate Friendship* will show, for H.D., reclaiming a narrative of self through writing entails that she deeply reflect on her myriad interpersonal relationships, especially those of an intimate, familial, or professional nature, not merely to reconnect with the communities that have shaped her sense of self, but more importantly, to consider how she might theorize modes of self re-definition that embrace her history, while at the same time enabling her to define self on her own terms.

Written roughly during the period from 1941-44, two of H.D.'s widely regarded literary forays into the effects of war upon individual and cultural identity, *The Gift* and *Trilogy*, assume precisely this challenge. In each of these texts, H.D. announces her selfhood, emerging out of the shadow of a larger familial, cultural, or historical narrative that encompasses and threatens to consume her. In *The Gift*, she embraces yet distances herself from the Doolittle family, particularly with respect to their strict Moravian heritage. On the other hand, *Trilogy* is multi-directional in scope: this three-part poem endeavors to not only break the silence that has become culturally synonymous with

female non-combatant subjectivity, but in her rewriting of Christian tradition through the figures of Mary and Kaspar, the poem showcases the extent to which women's voices have been systematically silenced by patriarchy, and argues for their centrality. Yet as Claire Buck points out, "The way in which the poem establishes the value and significance of individual experience defines the knowledge produced by that experience in opposition to representation" (Buck 139). H.D.'s struggle with representing self—arguably initiated in *Notes*, heightened by the Corfu vision, and taken up in *Tribute*—should therefore also be traced not only to *Trilogy*, but to *Within the Walls* as well, given that it is comprised of textual as well as visual sketches.⁴⁹

In a sense, *Within the Walls* asks a set of questions similar to those that govern the aforementioned texts, but provides a slightly different response. To some extent, one might argue that H.D.'s entire oeuvre is rooted in this concept of a pluralized female subjectivity; yet the response posed here—or the method by which woman might claim and secure this subjectivity—differs insofar as it showcases the intersection of performance and recovery as a means of postulating a sustainable narrative of self. As Smith and Watson argue, performance is the element that gives rise to the autobiographical subject. Writing is thus the performative process that allows H.D. to enact her complicated subjectivity, while upholding her ongoing commitment to examine it as objectively as possible.

⁴⁹ Although the issue of visual representation exceeds the scope of this project, the sketches throughout *Within the Walls* are worthy of consideration; at the very least, they represent a second experimental mode through which to represent the upheaval of identity as endured by non-combatants, especially those living amidst the Second World War. However, it is important to note that the visual sketches published alongside (and in some cases across the margins) of the text, were *not* done by H.D. Instead, the title page denotes them as "wood engravings," and attributes them to artist Dallas Henke. At any rate, the sketches themselves seem to insist that the complexity of female non-combatant identity eclipses the parameters of text alone, therefore demanding hybrid representation.

For all of the complicated uses of temporality in texts mentioned earlier—*The Gift, Tribute to Freud* and especially *Trilogy—Within the Walls* remains fairly definitively focused throughout on its present: 1941. Here, the speaker casts her life as eerily tentative:

My chief concern and worry is about my writing. I try to go over the stacks and heaps of old MSS I have collected and put aside, but I can not work any of it into shape; it is to me deadwood. If I am not blitzed, of course it may be interesting, in some years time, to shape some of the old stuff, but now it is, as I say, perfectly dead. I can not decently bury it; I destroy certain papers, but then I say to myself, after all, if I am blitzed, the house will go with me and the stack of papers will go, too. This, that I now write will go with it, and why does one type pages that only have the slightest chance of survival? I asked myself that, last night, with that acute sense of silence. (6-7)

Even in silence, the speaker acknowledges the significance of process: writing affords her stability and clarity to consider her fate, especially in the moments at which it seems most uncertain. Moreover, the very act of writing emblemizes her will to preserve her psychological stability, exercise her artistry, and ostensibly, to survive. She continues, “I must let go of my critical faculty, I can not afford to criticize or re-consider these words. They are the words of the spell, no matter how haphazard, how apparently unrelated, how profuse, how illogical, they are the words that in a sense—this is what it is—*keep me alive*” (8).

H.D.’s pointed focus on psychological self-preservation leads to a consideration of pluralized subjectivity as a framework for analyzing the extent to which trauma has altered her identity, for, identifying remaining fragments of self requires H.D.’s unabashed acknowledgement of what has perished. In a section entitled “She is Dead,” the speaker considers the possibility that her traumatized self has died:

I wonder who that was? Myself? Is it myself? Have I really at last died or has that part of me which was dead and frozen been at last projected, symbol of life and death? Is this an infantile death-wish, residue of a child death-wish? Is this some friend? Is this the whole era, the whole age? Is this a symbol of the past? Who is this lady? Yes, it is part of myself, I conclude, that has died, but now it is projected out. Maybe, after all, I will survive this war. It seems to me that I have been dead for many years. That must have been myself. (28)

References here to “part” and “whole” prove crucial, for they not only cast the speaker’s sense of self as disintegrated, but more importantly, they refocus this disintegration as an opportunity to restore selfhood. Trauma survivor Susan Brison distinguishes between “dead” and “surviving” selves: “Since the earlier self died, the surviving self needs to be known and acknowledged in order to exist” (Brison 62). Moreover, the repeated use of the interrogative posits the conclusion drawn as a realization borne out of writing: the complex, psychic wound inflicted by war trauma has irreparably damaged pieces of the speaker’s identity, but has not entirely shattered her.

In addition, these questions catalogue the various strategies that the speaker has employed in order to work-through her trauma. For example, H.D.’s use of the phrase “infantile death-wish” directly hearkens Freud; and, considering “projected out” in the context of Morris’s discussion of “projection,” cited earlier in relationship to H.D.’s famous Corfu vision, posits the deceased self as another manifestation of projection. In one sense, the act of writing facilitates an objective distinction between the deceased and surviving selves; and in another, as Morris suggests, projection enables H.D. to imaginatively traverse these conflicting subjectivities. Of projection, Morris writes: “It is the movement across a borderline: between the mind and the wall, between the brain and the page, between inner and outer, between me and you, between states of being, across dimensions of time and space” (Morris 96). That the speaker embodies a subjectivity that

can traverse states of being at will, perhaps constitutes the finest example of the multiple subjectivity that *Within the Walls* artistically enacts, and that H.D. deemed critical to woman's potential to withstand the emotional and psychological trauma of war.

Given that this non-singular subjectivity accordingly suspends identity within a state of flux, at times, the speaker depicts self in the conditional tense. For instance, the conditional statement—"Maybe, after all, I will survive this war"—indeed stands out among a battery of questions; still, the speaker's ability to imagine life beyond war should be attributed to her plurality. The death of the former self is likewise liberating: "I have only to think 'she is dead' and a wave of joy and hope sustains me. I have carried her with me, I think, almost my whole life" (28). This pivotal moment signifies the speaker's realization that in spite of its challenges, recovery is indeed worthwhile; but more importantly, it casts healing not in terms of reclaiming facets of a pre-trauma identity, but instead as the process by which the speaker will forge an altogether new sense of self.

Still, *Within the Walls* does not confine itself to representing recovery solely with respect to the individual. A later sketch, entitled "The Ghost (Spring 1941), illustrates the text's consideration of the overlap between individual and collective recovery. Standing before a mirror, the speaker's depiction of her physicality in the following passage bespeaks the the fact that her sense of self worth is irrevocably determined through the gendered lenses of history and domesticity, which make little provision for individual self-definition. As such, her sense of self-worth seems to occupy the space between identity and its representation:

She would see the face, angular, and not so much chizzled as worn away, whittled away or gnawed into by fatigue. Or not. She would see a skull;

that stone skull, crowned with heavy raw un-cut priceless jewels in the Hradcany on the hill in Prague, was the one of which she now thought, standing on the strip of carpet before the Venetian glass that was not broken but fitted in two sections; the lower one was about a third or a quarter of the upper... But for almost an infinitesimal segment of a second, as she stood on the carpet and heard the voice going on, she knew that the black line would dissolve, that she would stand there and turn and answer the voice or that she would step slightly to the right and face the glass; she would face the glass and she would or she would not see the direct reflection, through the long narrow window at her back, of the meticulously outlined branches of the beech-trees. (36-7)

That her yearning for physical beauty and status through references to facial features and jewelry, respectively, is interrupted by a disembodied voice suggests that the speaker's domestic obligation—ostensibly to a child or husband—thwarts her capacity to define selfhood on her own terms. Left up to her, the passage suggests, this narrative would be far more nuanced, intimated here by the staggered arrangement of the shards of Venetian glass that she imagines, not uniform and unchanging as the “long narrow window at her back.” Once the black line dissolves, the exoticized alternatives to lived reality—denoted here through references to Prague, Venice, and priceless jewels—dissolve as well. Through its focus on the speaker's artistic imagination, *Within the Walls* highlights that beyond the obvious trauma of war, the suppression of female agency, or autobiographical subjectivity, to borrow Smith and Watson's phrase, itself constitutes a crucial facet of female non-combatant trauma; however, it tends to be overlooked in the name of physical survival.

Furthermore, as Marvin Carlson's concept of “ghosting” suggests, the desire to physically or psychologically escape the material reality of war, conveyed through the mirror scene and elsewhere, impels the *traumatic* acknowledgement that patriarchal authority has historically determined woman's fate, and continues to threaten it. Carlson

writes: “The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection” (Carlson 2). As a corollary to Morris’ concept of “projection,” ghosting underscores H.D.’s interest in memory and identity as sites of trauma.⁵⁰ To distinguish, “ghosts” signal latent traumas—perhaps in H.D.’s own life—and projection becomes the performative process by which she strives to assuage them. To this end, the preceding discussion of the speaker’s deceased self exemplifies the personal dimensions of ghosting, confined to the speaker’s psyche. However, the mirror passage imparts the broader aim of *Within the Walls*: to represent recovery in a specifically feminist framework, by unveiling the ghosts that categorically haunt women. Foremost among these is the systematic erasure of woman’s individuality in the name of upholding patriarchal order. In order for woman to exist apart from her socially prescribed role in this historical moment, her subjectivity must be defined in plural terms. Through its performative underpinnings, projection enables her to facilitate this plurality.

Multiple subjectivity allows for individuality, creativity, talent, and passion, in ways that the social dictates of womanhood simply obfuscate or silence. However, these innumerable strands must be exercised, or they risk erasure, particularly in an era overwrought by war and loss. Elements of performance in H.D.’s writing, as well as in Warner and Woolf, become the spaces in which individuality reemerges and is upheld. It is for this reason that performance is so crucial to recovery; for without these unique elements of selfhood, there may be little worth recovering. When we encounter

⁵⁰ It should be noted that the work of theorists Marvin Carlson and Joseph Roach pertains specifically to ghosting in the context of the theater. However, the connection between “ghosting” and performance proves a valuable framework through which to consider H.D.’s textual remaking of selfhood in the texts discussed here.

protagonists who perform in order to channel their individuality, when we identify fictional characters who are to be read as performative embodiments of the author herself, we witness active, artistic attempts at recovery. For each of the three authors examined here, the focus becomes less about the trauma that brought her to this moment, and centers instead on the creative, performative process that can bring her out of it.

Indeed, each gradually broadens the link between performance and recovery as it applies to their own subjectivities, in order to consider the possibilities it creates for female non-combatants in general. As stated earlier, implicit references to shared experience become powerful and effective coping mechanisms, for they allow the individual to see herself as part of a larger collective, and they provide assurance that she does not struggle alone. Consistent with this idea, several moments of *Within the Walls* embody this movement from the individual to the communal, and are accordingly depicted in performative terms. Returning once more to the speaker's self-examination in the mirror, H.D. writes:

She did not step to the right; she did not test the mirror. She did not test herself; it was all a charade, a masque here. Here, it was more than a game of keeping one's head up, it was more than a trial of unrecorded endurance. There was no note-book, no text-book, no religious manual, no prayer-book to show them here how to direct knees, how to correlate elbows. The whole skeleton had become alive, a skeleton in a cupboard; everyone in London had it. (38)

This passage posits recovery as a highly subjective process, for which no manual can be written. In the wake of each triumph lies an obstacle. Most importantly, it uses the terms "masque" and "charade" to convey the plausibility of recovery, marking the text's insistence that recovery be considered a performance of a role that has yet to be written. Likening this process to a "charade" or "masque" suggests that the victim figuratively

writes the role as she moves through life. It is for this reason that *Compassionate Friendship* proves so integral to this study, for it details H.D.'s reflections concerning the writing and publication of some of her most widely regarded literary works; and the extent to which each facilitates self-knowledge.

Examining *Within the Walls* in the context of *The Sword Went to Sea* and *Compassionate Friendship* reinforces the idea that H.D.'s writing during the 1940s forwards a project of recovery decidedly grounded in the feminine. All three privilege non-combatant subjectivity, and in different ways, showcase women's resolve to secure not only their individual physical and psychological survival, but that of their fellow non-combatants as well. The passage quoted below applauds woman's adaptability in dire circumstances; without inciting panic or terror, the women respond to the threat of air attack by carrying out their daily activities to the best of their ability. Here, the speaker describes having tea with her friend, Jo, in the basement of a nearby store. The opportunity to actually enjoy their tea, however, is contingent upon receiving the 'all-clear' signal at street level. She describes:

Streams of shop-assistants, girls and women and backstage work-women in coarse aprons make a stage-set or film-set of this small somewhat shabby Edwardian dining room. As the all-clear goes, they all stream out again, from the shelter behind the restaurant. The all-clear is soon followed by another alarm or alert, as we say, and down they come again. This goes on; it gives an odd sense of unreality, as if these were really suppers, called for duty in a crowd scene, dismissed, recalled. (23)

It becomes clear that these women have attempted to convert the equivalent of a fallout shelter into a pseudo-Edwardian dining room: they strive to assuage the sheer terror of the bombings overhead by making their safe space feel like home. Somewhat artificial in its 'unreality,' this routine transforms an actual escape from the threat of war into a

psychological one as well, for even in its feigned likeness to familiar domestic surroundings, their underground retreat provides shelter, and a temporary sense of security. The speaker later comments on the implications of this practice: “The details one feels are cleverly worked out. We ourselves are in and of this. It is like this all the time; we are all actors, all the time” (24). By performing normalcy and domestic propriety amidst war, these non-combatant women suspend its gruesome reality, and reject the threat of psychological paralysis.

As this sketch, entitled “The Last Day (January 1941)” draws to a close, the speaker recounts a dream she had several nights prior. In addition to imagining one side of her room “sliced off,” creating an opening to the outside world, where she is met by “...a pleasant intermediate crowd, [of] undefined old friends,” the speaker summarizes: “It is a dream of peace and hope. It seems to indicate that though our houses and our minds have been sliced open by the attacks of the enemy overhead, that, overhead is as well, the great drift of stars, and those stars found entrance into the shattered house of life” (25). By virtue of her dream, the speaker envisions recovery as an existence beyond war, where the sky once again comes to represent a space of human potential and possibility, not the imminent threat of death by bombing. Yet most significantly, she conveys her willingness to part with the physical body, and even the textual body as well: what remains in the wake of utter devastation is the psychological self, which manifests here in the form of a dream.

Consistent with a philosophy set forth in her earlier works, H.D.’s dreams and visions enable her to strengthen her grip on reality, and empower her to transcend it. The text’s final sentence, “This war is over, I tell you” (58) artfully compacts the breadth of

the project carried out therein, for the “war” referred to is at once a major historical event and the speaker’s private battle for psychological stability, replete with the intent to continue her quest to reclaim her selfhood. Even more telling, however, is the “you” to whom the statement is directed. “You” functions as an acknowledgement of the fact that this text has an audience: H.D. announces her ability to bear witness through writing, and to engage in *textual* dialogue about her experiences with an outside reader. The “you” therefore transcends the talking cure, ultimately signifying the marriage of self-examination and textual artistry as H.D.’s chief and preferred methods of recovery.

II. *The Sword Went Out to Sea*: Re-Visioning Self via Narrative

“A barrier had been broken. The debris that cluttered the streets of London, sometimes left of half-house open, like a doll-house or stage-set. One looked into rooms in another dimension. So I think this externalization of people’s private lives, somehow in the end, sliced open one’s own house. One looked into one’s own private life, a life shut off until now, even to oneself.”

-*The Sword Went Out to Sea* (1946-7)

The year 1945 was for H.D. a time of *apotheosis*, or rebirth, which she describes in *Compassionate Friendship*: “I was born in 1886—and in 1945, my own apotheosis or re-birth took place. That is a long, long story, and my Sword tried to tell it” (CF 7). If the traumas of war and subsequent breakdowns she suffered can be said to have a positive outcome, it is that they catalyze H.D.’s process of rebirth, initiated and sustained through textual artistry and experimentation. As *Within the Walls* demonstrates through its intense portrayal of female postwar subjectivity, the decade of the 1940s is the period in which the issues central to her oeuvre—recovery, writing, and selfhood—meaningfully coalesce, and enable H.D. to textually reconstruct a sustainable identity.

Read in the context of the framework of trauma, subjectivity, and narrative as established in her earlier writings and *Within the Walls*, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, and particularly its first book, *Wintersleep*, the focus of this discussion, should be read as the

culmination of H.D.'s effort to reclaim a sustainable narrative of self in the aftermath of two devastating world wars. As its textual predecessors, including *The Gift, Trilogy*, and to some extent, *Tribute to Freud, Sword* likewise contends that for H.D., physical and psychological survival entail that she be able to meaningfully reconcile her inherited, collective history, as woman, mother, and non-combatant, with the numerous trials of her personal life—including bisexuality, motherhood, divorce, grief and loss, stillbirth, and abortion—that irrevocably inform her sense of identity during this period. The speaker's latent visionary capacity exercised in *Within the Walls* might thus be considered a precursor to her more nuanced, symbol-laden examination of these threads of her personal history throughout *The Sword Went Out to Sea*. As such, the novel constitutes her most explicit, yet also most complicated, experimental attempt to forge a viable narrative of self. Despite biographer Barbara Guest's cynical depiction of the novel as, "Nearly impossible to decipher, it is an upsetting book, as everywhere there is evidence of a disturbed consciousness" (Guest 278), H.D. held it in much higher regard. Composed from December 1946 to July 1947, H.D. would later characterize it as the "'crown of all my effort,' and the single work that brought her 'intellectual and emotional life...to its fulfillment'" (Hogue and Vandivere xviii).

Where H.D. never explicitly assigns the "speaker" of *Within the Walls* a proper name, in *Sword*, she employs her fictional construct, Delia Alton, as a mechanism through which to (re)authorize self. As a fictional extrapolation of H.D., Delia too lived in Europe amidst World War II, and has likewise sustained psychological and emotional trauma, shattering her sense of purpose and meaning in the world. The notion that performance affords one the objectivity and clarity to map and subsequently confront

trauma is perhaps nowhere more evident in H.D.'s oeuvre than in *Sword*. Here, she not only employs Delia as her own fictional parallel; but creates parallels for many who play or have played a formative role in her identity. Indeed, they are or were H.D.'s actual lovers, friends, and associates: namely, Richard Aldington (Geoffrey Alton), Ezra Pound (Allen Flint), Bryher (Gareth), Sigmund Freud (Frederick von Alten), Norman Holmes Pearson (Howard Wilton Dean), and of greatest significance to *Wintersleep*, Lord Hugh Dowding (Lord John Howell).

In the text that facilitates her apotheosis, H.D. rewrites her narrative of war trauma from Delia's perspective, while also at times engaging that of these central figures. *Sword* thereby enacts the delicate interplay between subjectivity and objectivity that *Within the Walls* sets forth, yet complicates the notion of pluralized female subjectivity: beyond investing a single subject with a multitude of vantage points, this text examines a series of events from the perspectives of multiple subjects. Although this approach contributes to the novel's obscurity, it also illustrates the coalescence and breadth of H.D.'s attempt to re-imagine and rewrite individual and collective narratives of survival following World War II. And by unequivocally privileging female non-combatant subjectivity, the text enacts the pursuit of feminist recovery.

In denoting Delia as the author of the novel, as well as quite deliberately including the phrase "*by Delia Alton*" on the front cover, H.D. prefigures the comingling of textual and extra-textual reality that ensues, and evokes the framework of the tri-layered body governing this project. As an intermediary between imagined, fictional events and lived experience, Delia Alton becomes a textual extrapolation of H.D.'s psychological self. As her fictional creation, Delia enables H.D. to (re)present her

memories of war and her traumatic losses, refiguring them through a subjective vantage point that is not necessarily her own. More specifically, as a quasi-fictional author-surrogate, Delia becomes a figurative canvas upon which H.D. writes through the traumas of war and identity, which culminate in the aftermath of World War II. H.D.'s strategy of offering readers Delia's perspective—not her own—positions the text at a double-remove from the trauma itself: H.D. writes Delia, and Delia writes the trauma.

Privileging the fictional author over the real also foreshadows the larger complexities H.D. had by this time identified between writing and recovery; her questioning of what it means to own a narrative of trauma; as well as her apparent reservations pertaining to what extent the textual body itself becomes a performing body capable of facilitating the recovery of a self whose identity seems, at the novel's outset, to be located somewhere in the discursive space between Delia and H.D. Therefore, Delia allows a crucial distance that lends H.D. objective clarity and the artistic flexibility necessary to represent and reconfigure the fragmented narrative of self that survived the war. This distance enables H.D. to catalyze recovery by performing her self-in-process. Of the many fictional parallels that Woolf, Warner, and H.D. each create, Delia Alton constitutes the fullest and most transparent performative embodiment of the interrelationship of text, psyche, and biography.

As such, Delia compromises the boundary between the lived reality of war and the act of bearing witness to it. Through Delia, H.D. rethinks the modes of representation appropriate to non-combatant experience. In fact, she becomes more than a mere fictive *extrapolation* of H.D.: she is at once author and arbiter of her own (fictional) recovery, and a performative embodiment of H.D.'s. This duality renders Delia an organic canvas

upon which H.D. might artistically map—and thereby, work through—the extent to which living through two world wars has irrevocably shattered and subsequently reshaped her identity and sense of purpose. At moments, however, Delia’s inner workings render the boundary separating H.D. from Delia on the verge of collapse:

Why did I stay? My devoted friends urged me to accept the first offer of lecturing in America. “The whole place is bound to go up in smoke, at any moment,” they said. I confess that I felt trapped, suffocated and in hourly terror...It is true, I was neither audience nor actor. I was doubly protected and I was doubly vulnerable. But sometimes, I had a curious premonition, some streak or freak of perception, apprehension, even a minor sort of prophecy. Mine was not the wailing of Cassandra nor the drugged utterance of the Sybil, but I felt that I was watching an old play.

I had read this story somewhere. The characters were familiar to me.
(*Sword* 105)

In this moment, what Delia describes as her “curious premonition, some streak or freak of perception...even a minor sort of prophecy” constitutes an admission that she is haunted, or to borrow Carlson’s term, ghosted, by her traumatic past. By putting this admission in writing, she projects it, effectively externalizing her psychic interiority. In so doing, the reader becomes privy to her struggle to repress her trauma versus making herself vulnerable—by acknowledging it as such—in order to overcome it. Carlson highlights the impact that ghosting can have upon identity formation: “...ghosting presents the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context. Thus a recognition not of similarity, as in genre, but of identity becomes a part of the reception process, with results that can complicate this process considerably” (Carlson 7). In this vein, *Sword* enables H.D. to confront the “old play” that is her own narrative identity; that she does so only through Delia attests to the complications that Carlson points out. Still, confronting trauma at a remove alleviates some of the

vulnerability inherent to recounting it, especially insofar as the failure of Delia's recovery does not intrinsically constitute H.D.'s own. As Friedman notes, "Delia Alton's defining characteristic, however, is that she was *not* 'H.D.'" (*Penelope* 44).

Moreover, the use of performative language is a tactic that enables Delia to gauge the extent to which she can actually assert agency in the wake of war trauma. Defining herself as "neither audience nor actor" reinforces the challenge that the female non-combatant faces in attempting to reclaim authority over her narrative, for her role remains suspended somewhere between audience and actor: she is neither fully active nor entirely passive. Delia, however, refuses to retreat from the horror of war: "It was a passionate devotion to the drama that held me there in London, as well as a curious foretaste of inevitable disaster" (*Sword* 105). As her thoughts make clear, she operates on the suspicion that she has faced this decision before. For this reason, coupled with her compulsion to assert vulnerability in the name of achieving agency, Delia resolves to continue to work through her anxieties and contradictory emotions by writing.

Like *Within the Walls*, *Sword* grapples with the tenuous link between writing and recovery, evident from the text's outset, as Delia insists: "I did not want to talk about my writing, but I felt frustrated when I looked back and recalled the number of times I had re-written that novel of myself and Peter von Eck,⁵¹ after the last war" (7). She continues, "I began to feel uneasy. I particularly wanted to get away from that time. I had lived too much with the memory of Karnak. I had tried to write about it, but the writing wouldn't come true" (7). She then says to Ben Manisi, the fictional parallel to Arthur Badhuri, her

⁵¹ The man Delia refers to here is Peter Rodeck, an archaeologist who also used a *nom de guerre*, Peter van Eck. H.D. and Bryher met Rodeck on their way to Athens, Greece in the Spring of 1920. H.D. had a "brief, unconsummated fling" with him. For further discussion of Rodeck, consult *Penelope's Web*, 228-30.

spiritualist medium, “‘It’s not the person, it’s the story. The person went out of my life years ago. I hate to leave things unfinished. I wrote a sort of—a sort of novel. I wrote it over and over. I can’t finish it and I can’t destroy it. What shall I do?’” (7). These remarks reveal the text’s overt concern with investigating the correlation between writing and recovery; as the speaking “I,” Delia positions female non-combatant identity as its locus.

Yet *Sword* complicates the relationship between writing and recovery as forged in *Within the Walls* by intrinsically linking it to Delia’s spiritualist capacity. *Within the Walls* is punctuated with references to dreams and visions; yet in *Sword*, they become key textual markers, evident in the parenthetical subtitle, “(Synthesis of a Dream).” Although Book I of *Wintersleep* is situated in the present moment of 1946, it is actually Delia’s textual recounting of a dream. As a gateway to her psychic interiority, dreams become the medium through which the novel strives to reconcile lived reality with its shattering psychological and emotional impact. Guest addresses H.D.’s burgeoning interest in spiritualism during World War II, terming it, “...a wave of esoteric research, of magic, of spiritualism, that would engulf H.D. during the war” (Guest 260). She continues, “The blitzed houses of London—silent, dead—would provoke this. Ghosts were everywhere. The world was a place where there were only the ghosts and the living, and the distinction between the two must have been close” (260). To cite just one example, such a remark intensifies the significance of the “deceased self” of *Within the Walls*, for it renders the diminishing boundary between death and life—and the need to comprehend it—as not unique to H.D., but culturally pervasive.

As a mode of extracting oneself from lived reality, the series of séances detailed throughout *Wintersleep* also become a means by which it broadens contemporary, conventional approaches to recovery. In the passage that follows, Delia casts repetition—the ongoing attempt to represent the trauma, either verbally or in writing, as a means of claiming control over it—as largely unproductive. Using her hallmark image of the shell-fish, H.D. argues for the need to attain a new way of conceptualizing identity and progression:

They say we make the pattern or spiral of our life, as a shell-fish does. We go round and round. Yes, I do think I was getting somewhere, all those years, but it may have been rather a large shell for the fish inside it. I may have put too much of myself into making a shell that would permit me to spiral ahead, without coming back to the exact point I started from, when the door shut...I would always get so far with everything, then simply leave it and leap over an obstacle and begin again. I don't know how many times I had done this. (*Sword* 41)

Here, Delia gives credence to the effectiveness of repetition, but suggests that it cannot be deemed the primary, and certainly not the sole means of confronting and mapping trauma. Considering this passage in light of that quoted earlier, in which Delia registers her anxiety surrounding the fact that she can neither ‘finish nor destroy’ her narrative of she and Peter von Eck, indicates the text’s argument that approaches to recovery be expanded beyond conventional modes such as the talking cure, by exploring viable alternatives to facilitate self-expression and working through.

In *Wintersleep*, séances become the preeminent “alternative” mode of mitigating war trauma. Throughout, Delia, Gareth and her friends attend and conduct a series of spiritualist séances, in which they strive to communicate with four Royal Air Force pilots who had actually perished in combat during World War II under the command of Lord Hugh Dowding. Delia rationalizes her interest in the séances: “Probably it was the

struggle to comprehend the incomprehensible actions that were taking place outside, that forced me by a law of compensation, to try to grapple with the forces inside myself, or outside the material world” (67). On one hand, spiritualist communication might be considered an exercise in vulnerability, implicit to the process of externalizing trauma. Yet on the other, not unlike the bomb shelter decorated to simulate an Edwardian dining room, described in *Within the Walls*, spiritualism becomes a mode of escape from what Delia terms “incomprehensible actions,” while at the same time constituting a tacit acknowledgement of the non-combatant’s utter powerlessness to intervene.

Yet engaging in spiritualism is not without risk, for the communicative exchanges generated in séances tend to expose information that would otherwise remain private, even in a therapy session. For this reason, in writing through Delia, H.D. assumes very little of this risk, projecting it instead onto her fictional construct. That Delia is the only member of the group who possesses the ability to receive messages from the deceased airmen exhibits H.D.’s aim to negotiate the figurative paralysis inherent to non-combatant status. Therefore, as she “translates” the pilots’ messages to Howell and to those present at the séances, Delia becomes a dualistic site of non-combatant and combatant trauma, an intermediary between these two opposing wartime roles. She conveys her discontent with non-combatant passivity:

I didn’t actually think it out clearly, but the first war had taken my child and my husband from me. We had known for so long, that another war was coming. The only thing that had reconciled me to both wars, was the thought that these young, vital beings might work rationally. If this was the case, then their premature loss was a gain to the whole world. But my picture of them was the very antithesis of Lord Howell’s. They would go on and ‘finish their education,’ he had said or written somewhere. It wasn’t their education that needed to be finished. It was ours. (35)

In its desire to assuage the burden of passivity that plagues women on the home front, this passage enacts the interrelationship between the individual and communal, insofar as it begins as an intensely personal recounting of the impact of war on selfhood, and then almost unconsciously evolves into a broader consideration of the responsibility borne by non-combatants: to ‘educate’ themselves, ostensibly about the grim reality and wide scale outcomes of combat. Considering this remark in light of H.D.’s visions as recorded in *Tribute to Freud* not only substantiates the idea that she grappled with this overwhelming sense of passivity for quite some time, but it also crystallizes the significance of vision and dream states throughout her oeuvre. As alternatives to lived experience, visions and dream states prove crucial to her recovery, for they enable her to project haunting traumatic memories, affording the clarity that fosters her plural, autobiographical subjectivity.

Reexamining H.D.’s now famous vision, “Writing on the Wall,” which she experienced in 1920 while traveling in Corfu with Bryher, in light of Delia’s visionary ‘gift’ in *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, points toward H.D.’s growing interest in exploring selfhood as objectively as possible. Moreover, it casts her aim to textually reconcile the divide between the combatant and non-combatant experiences of war as an echo of this much earlier vision. For even in the aftermath of World War I, H.D. yearned to grasp the totality of war from the perspective of her male combatant counterparts. She contextualizes the vision, “The Professor translated the pictures on the wall, or the picture-writing on the wall of a hotel bedroom in Corfu, the Greek Ionian island, that I saw projected there in the spring of 1920, as a desire for union with my mother” (*TF* 44). Yet her articulation of the vision in *Tribute to Freud* carries a striking militaristic, not

maternal, connotation that reveals her compulsion to empathize with, or somehow relate to, the enormous burden borne by soldiers:

The pictures on the wall were like colorless transfers or 'calcomanias, as we pretentiously called them as children. The first was head and shoulders, three-quarter face, no marked features, a stencil or stamp of a soldier or airman, but the figure was dim light on shadow, not shadow on light. It was a silhouette cut of light, not shadow, and so impersonal it might have been anyone, of almost any country. And yet there was a distinctly familiar line about the head with the visored cap; immediately it was *somebody*, unidentified indeed, yet suggesting a question—dead brother? lost friend? (*TF* 45)

Up until the final sentence quoted above, this depiction conveys H.D.'s detachment from the soldier; it is as though his individuality has been subsumed by his military role and wartime responsibilities. Yet the final line undercuts this sense of detachment, positing a link between she and the soldier, insofar as the silhouette *is* that of her brother Gilbert, who died in battle just two years earlier.

The significance of the vision, however, lies not in its specific content, but in the manner in which H.D. describes it: the fact that she espouses a deeply personal connection between herself and the soldier—yet does so indirectly—attests to the paradox of claiming agency from visionary experience. On one hand, her articulation emphasizes the non-combatant's inability to definitively portray the image: while it is clear that the image is that of "a soldier or airman," his identity remains unknown. Yet on the other, given the likelihood that the silhouette is that of her brother, Gilbert, the vision triggers H.D.'s very vivid traumatic memory of his tragic and untimely death. Therefore, the competing senses of clarity and obscurity that characterize this depiction suggest that visionary, dream states (and by extension, séances), can function as gateways

to reimagining identity, but one must dismantle and confront the full import of their origin.

Beyond merely connoting the death of her brother, a trauma that clearly remains unresolved, in positing her brother as its subject, through the possibilities of “dead brother?” and “lost friend?”, H.D. illustrates the extent to which projecting haunting traumatic memory or experience—verbally, to Freud; and then textually, to her reader—can enable one to overcome it. The suspicion registered here—that the psychological and emotional paralysis that trauma leaves in its wake can be mitigated artistically—manifests distinctly in *Within the Walls*, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, and *Compassionate Friendship*. As this chapter has argued thus far, H.D.’s process of artistic self-(re)definition carried out in these texts insists upon multiple subjectivity as the hallmark of female identity, particularly at mid-century. In striving to textually map this self, *Sword* further abstracts the representation of the psychological self, the third and most obscure of the three bodies that this study deems integral to the representation of trauma.

Expanding upon the terms of multiple subjectivity as established throughout *Within the Walls*, Delia too forces the distinction between the physical and psychological bodies. In part, such distinction calls attention to the depth of non-combatant trauma, for unlike those fighting on the frontlines, non-combatant trauma is almost purely psychological and emotional in nature: its marks are not visible on the physical body. Accordingly, the texts H.D. authored during the 1940s and early 1950s reveal tremendous anxiety concerning physical survival, but even at its most severe, it is always superseded by an insistence on the fragility of the psyche, denoted throughout her oeuvre, and particularly in *Within the Walls*, via the susceptibility of the body to attack. For H.D.

perhaps even more than for Woolf or Warner, this is how writing simultaneously becomes a form of escape and survival: as *Within the Walls* illustrates, woman can position herself in physical approximation to war, but she must write in order to preserve her emotional and psychological stability.

Delia authorizes the crucial distinction between the physical and psychological bodies by confessing the ease with which the physical body can be “cast off,” especially during the dire time of war. In the second book of *Wintersleep*, she writes of four men who had irrevocably complicated her life (Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, Peter Rodeck, and J.J. van der Leeuw),⁵² who symbolically parallel the four deceased airmen with whom Delia had been corresponding through her series of séances. She writes:

I don't know about Lord Howell but running across the desert of the war years, like the bomber he wrote about, I had thrown away at least four bodies. I felt stripped and bare and rather cold. The bodies were not cluttering up the desert. I had collected them and labelled [*sic*] them carefully and laid them away. I did not lay them in white linen but between the pages of a book. There was the Allen Flint body, the Geoffrey Alton body, the Peter van Eck, and the Jan Verstigen... But there was a fifth body that I had not recognized—my own. I still had a body. We do not have to wait until we are dead, to cast off our various bodies like old clothes. (*Sword* 81)

Beyond representing the survival of the psyche, this passage renders writing as a form of figurative burial. Delia essentially dismisses the hold that the four aforementioned men had on her life by writing about them. In fact, writing invests her with the ability to conceptualize these “bodies” or figures in her life, organically: she determines to what extent, if any, they will continue to impact her life, and subsequently dismisses them from her narrative. Moreover, by figuring the bodies in organic terms, Delia is able to

⁵² J.J. van der Leeuw was the analysand and theosophist whose appointment with Freud took place immediately prior to H.D.'s. In *Sword*, his fictional parallel is named Jan Verstigen. For a more in-depth description of van der Leeuw, consult “Writing on the Wall,” the opening section of *Tribute to Freud*.

seamlessly shift from the physical to the psychological as she considers herself. Her realization that “I still had a body” refers in one sense to the physical body, yet when she pluralizes that body in the statement that follows, she likewise pluralizes its subjectivity.

This plurality is crucial to Delia, for in the final lines of Book I of *Wintersleep*, she confesses, “But I had lived with the story too long. Although I threw away the story, it came back. It is the same story” (69). These remarks constitute deliberate references to Delia’s (as well as H.D.’s) ongoing narrative of self, which she ardently seeks to stabilize and control through writing. Moreover, the fact that the story “came back” despite Delia’s having thrown it away points to the likelihood that she will continue to be ghosted by her traumatic past. Her attempt at complete erasure of the various “bodies” who haunt or distract her is futile: she may exclude them from her future, but she cannot altogether omit them from her past. Yet her concern with her own fate is decidedly recursive, appearing again in Book II of *Wintersleep*, as she remarks, “I had read this story somewhere. The characters were familiar to me” (105). Delia’s recovery thus entails that she find a way to subvert the cyclical nature of this narrative, and redirect it in a manner that is self-determined.

Conceptualizing her identity in pluralized terms thus affords her a sense of possibility: she need not claim a singular identity; she need not limit her purview to a single vantage point. Her earlier comment, “But at this moment, I am looking at myself with my own eyes” (74) connotes the promise of her endeavor, for unlike the speaker of *Within the Walls* who falls prey to distraction while attempting self-examination, Delia does so successfully, by virtue of her pluralized subjectivity. Enacting multiplicity also allows her to give voice to the many facets of her complicated identity, thereby

alleviating the compulsion to repress. Delia becomes H.D.'s artistic assertion of agency and a gateway to reclaiming selfhood: both are the bedrock of recovery.

Writing is its correlative. Throughout *Sword*, writing simultaneously functions as a form of burial and a mode of survival. Regardless of whether she dismisses certain figures from her narrative of self, or textually confronts the destructive, terrorizing trauma of war, central to both approaches is *action*: through Delia, H.D. becomes author and arbiter of her recovery, as she assumes responsibility for the direction that her narrative will take. In some ways, then, the process of writing, and the emphasis that *Within the Walls* and *Sword* place upon its performative underpinnings, echoes as it transforms the delicate dialectic between analyst and analysand that she and Freud fostered throughout their sessions in the 1930s. Under the guise of an unnamed speaker and Delia Alton, respectively, H.D. textually replicates the recuperative facets of the talking cure; yet performance enables her to broaden its applicability to her recovery, and to some degree, to that undertaken by other female non-combatants as well.

Although the fictional unnamed speaker of *Within the Walls* and Delia Alton are both obviously and deeply rooted in H.D.'s own biography, their presence continually reminds readers that the lens we read through belongs to one of these fictive constructs, not H.D. herself. As this chapter has discussed, during the 1940s, H.D. relied upon the distance that these figures afforded, for they enabled her to think and write objectively about her trauma, to escape the confines of her own subjectivity, and to acknowledge that recovery does not entail the seamless continuation of some artificial, singular notion of self. As the span of time following the official end of World War II lengthens, however, H.D. gradually loosens her grip on these fictional embodiments, and writes much more

stably and transparently, such that the speaking “I” of *Compassionate Friendship* can and should be read as the author herself.

III. *Compassionate Friendship*: Textual Selves, Narrative Survival, and the Triumph of Self-Representation

“But there is a stranger wave of reality, all the dim, rain-washed world outside, the grey lake, dripping branches, give me the impression that that outside exists in a secondary dimension, but a fountain (we pass it) becomes a classic feature on a stage, set for a just-caught perception; everything outside can be lighted, renewed by this within.”

-*Compassionate Friendship* (1955)

Insofar as *Sword* might be considered H.D.’s textual confrontation with war and identity trauma, *Compassionate Friendship* is foremost a text about the experience of writing through it. Written from February to September 1955, while recuperating in a clinic in Küsnacht, Switzerland, following a nervous breakdown, H.D. reflects upon pivotal periods in her life and their influence on her writing, focusing particularly on the extent to which her late, experimental works, including *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and *Helen in Egypt* express her lived experience of war, loss, and ensuing trauma.⁵³ Given these wide-ranging public and private influences, *Compassionate Friendship* likewise assumes a corresponding, hybrid form. It blends the conventions of the journal, diary, and essay, without settling into any one.

While hospitalized, H.D. embarks upon a series of psychotherapy sessions with existential analyst, Erich Heydt,⁵⁴ and the text cites these sessions as her impetus to

⁵³ *Compassionate Friendship* discusses *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt* most often, but also includes intriguing reflections on other texts as well, including: *Magic Ring*, *Palimpsest*, *Trilogy*, and the *Madrigals*.

⁵⁴ In the footnotes to *Penelope’s Web*, Friedman explains, “H.D. resumed analysis when she suffered first a physical, then a mental, breakdown at the end of World War II. In May of 1946, Schimberg and Bryher arranged for H.D. to fly to *Klinik Brunner* in Küsnacht, Switzerland, where she recovered by October 1946. She returned to Küsnacht in 1953 for an operation and began informal “tea sessions” in 1954 with the existential analyst Erich Heydt, who regarded her as a “colleague.” Their sessions continued off and on until H.D.’s death in September 1961. Heydt figures prominently in *End to Torment*, in fictional form in *Magic Mirror*, and in *Sagesse*” (410n12). The composition of the text is commensurate with their “tea

attempt to “think through” her earlier published works—specifically as trauma testimonies—once more. In this way, *Compassionate Friendship* enacts the therapeutic potential of repetition that her psychoanalysis with Freud insinuated. However, by situating repetition—the deliberate re(confrontation) with trauma, in text, speech, or some other form—within a performative context, Roach elucidates the connection that this text implicitly forges between narrative, performance, and recovery. Roach writes, “The paradox of the restoration of behavior resides in the phenomenon of repetition itself: no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice; they must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance” (Roach 29). His use of the terms ‘restoration,’ ‘reinvented,’ and ‘recreated’ indeed substantiate the therapeutic underpinnings of repetition; but more importantly, they coincide with H.D.’s own view of writing as an ongoing endeavor that actively facilitates rebirth, a philosophy articulated most compellingly in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, but one that traverses her entire oeuvre.

Part of the power of *Compassionate Friendship* thus lies in its conceptualization of this oeuvre, particularly her postwar writings, as a massive textual body capable of facilitating individual recovery from the traumas of war and loss. In so doing, it attests to the ways in which many of H.D.’s literary works collectively forge an interrelationship among writing, subjectivity, and recovery. Although it remains largely absent from mainstream critical discourses surrounding H.D., as this discussion will illustrate,

sessions,” as H.D. remarks: “Anyhow, we are back in late summer, 1953, when Erich went off, leaving a question un-answered and a possible compassionate friendship un-resolved” (*CF* 79). For a more detailed overview of the clinical rationale for her stay at Küsnacht, consult Chapter 27 of Barbara Guest’s *Herself Defined*.

Compassionate Friendship proves significant to this study, and to the evolving field of H.D. studies, because it establishes and announces her autobiographical subjectivity.

Accordingly, *Compassionate Friendship* enacts the claim that of the three bodies that emerge in the process of narrative recovery—the physical, textual, and psychological—the textual body functions foremost as the site that sustains recovery. As previously discussed, *Within the Walls* and *Sword* illustrate separate, respective functions and processes of the physical and psychological bodies. Yet unlike *Tribute to Freud*, *Compassionate Friendship* does not simply catalogue H.D.’s therapy sessions with Heydt; rather, by honing the conventions of diary and memoir, it becomes a convincing meta-narrative of the extent to which the process of writing has been integral to H.D.’s survival and recovery. Still, as her therapist, mentor, and friend, Heydt unequivocally plays a crucial role in H.D.’s recovery. That she acknowledges him in overtly performative terms, as “a very subtle actor or play actor” (*CF* 32), concretizes the connection *Compassionate Friendship* identifies between performance, narrative, and recovery, and one that H.D. traces as she reflects upon her writing.

The hybridity of its form allows for a different kind of working through than *Within the Walls* or *Sword*, however. What *Compassionate Friendships* forges much more decisively than these is a commitment to questioning the extent to which H.D.’s experiments with narrative across genres, and especially her use of fictional characters, has actually restored her clarity and sense of purpose. H.D. consciously espouses this as its aim: “There is so much else, there is everything. But I like to feel that I have the courage to re-assemble and at least, catalogue my MSS and books” (82). Coupling that process with reflections on her myriad discussions with Heydt, H.D. weighs the

effectiveness of writing and talking as separate, yet interrelated modes of therapy. Of her sessions, she comments, “But through Erich, as I have written, I live back through past anxieties and past—initiations, shall I say?” (122). Writing solely for herself, H.D. becomes her own audience. Unencumbered by the artifice of fiction, she writes with more bravery and abandon, candidly confronting the depth and effect of trauma and loss upon her sense of self.

Operating from the subjectivity of a transparent “I,” H.D. gradually reclaims the autobiographical subjectivity that narrative recovery facilitates. By explicitly identifying herself as the speaking “I,” she accepts the challenge of confronting her traumatic past, and implicitly announces that she no longer requires the protective distance afforded by an unnamed speaker or Delia Alton. In literary terms, H.D. essentially becomes the protagonist of her own non-fiction narrative account of trauma and identity. By virtue of this transparency, she reaches a closer sense of herself in *Compassionate Friendship* than she had in other texts. Smith and Watson call attention to the performative dimensions of this process: “...situated within a specific time and place, the autobiographical subject is in dialogue with her own processes and archives of memory...In effect, autobiographical telling is performative; it enacts the self that gives rise to an ‘I.’ And that ‘I’ is neither unified nor stable—it is fragmented, provisional, multiple, in process” (Smith and Watson 9). As a meta-narrative, H.D.’s reflections on her literary output and her interactions with Heydt incite the emergence of this ‘I’, while *Compassionate Friendship* enacts and actuates it.

This objective clarity—largely afforded by the hybrid form of diary, essay, and memoir—evinces the performative underpinnings of self-presentation. Particularly in

light of Smith's and Watson's suggestion that neither the 'I,' nor the past from which it emerges are stable categories, as an active endeavor, performance thus enables the plurality that proves central to non-combatant identity throughout *Within the Walls and Sword*. Here, reflecting upon *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. asserts that the exercise of her multiple subjectivity—which enables her to understand and appreciate the complicated nuances of her identity as author and survivor—crystallizes in *Helen*. She emphasizes the performative dimensions of her representation of Helen: “I think the Helen has two god-fathers, for when Erich sat behind my right shoulder at the second reading, I seemed to lose myself, to be myself, as hardly ever in my life before. It seemed that I had missed my vocation. This is what I would like to have done—always and always. It wasn't singing, it wasn't acting but it was both” (CF 16). Beyond pairing talk therapy with writing to facilitate recovery, *Compassionate Friendship* authorizes writing as a form of performative hybridity, enabling H.D. to deliberately reconnect with her traumatic past, while simultaneously forging a recovered identity.

Thus, despite her early claim that, “My work is really finished,” (18) *Compassionate Friendship* ultimately attests to quite the contrary. For in admitting that, “I was alone and felt that I had an alter-ego, this *Helen*, speaking with my own voice, but with a self-assurance that I generally lack in everyday life” (15), H.D. reveals the extent to which her present, in 1955, continues to be haunted by the ghosts of her traumatic past. In Morris' and Carlson's terms, then, her textual confrontations with this past—of which *Within the Walls* and *The Sword Went Out to Sea* function as noteworthy examples—represent her continued effort to textually project her latent trauma. As Smith and Watson affirm, “The past is not a static repository of experience, but always engaged in

the present moment, itself ever-changing” (Smith and Watson 9). Evincing her ongoing effort to access and mitigate her traumatic past, *Compassionate Friendship* posits friendship as a framework through which to gauge the authenticity, and therefore the usefulness, of her personal and professional relationships to her recovery. Following the literal account of war on the home front and its psychological impact upon non-combatants in *Within the Walls*, and the use of visionary, dream-states as modes of accessing self in *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, friendship becomes a third, compelling strategy of self-presentation in memoir form.

For although the friendship denoted in the title is in one sense that between H.D. and Heydt, through this framework, H.D. complicates the connection that earlier narrative presentations of the traumatized self, including: *Tribute to Freud*, *The Gift*, *Trilogy*, *Within the Walls*, and *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, forged between multiple subjectivity and recovery. In so doing, *Compassionate Friendship* uniquely seeks to gauge its applicability beyond the boundaries of the textual canvas, and within the context of lived human interaction.

For example, although the performative exercise of plurality largely implies that the subject secure agency through action, as H.D. discovers, the reciprocal nature of friendship cleverly entails that she also exercise passivity. On occasion, enacting a passive subjectivity enables H.D. to recognize how her pronouncements of self (textual and otherwise) have been received; and to then determine the extent to which such reception has influenced her development as a writer, as well as several of her personal decisions. For example, she writes, “All the time I was writing, but seldom satisfied—the Greek story was waiting. Perhaps, all this work through the years, was preparing me for

that and for the final series, Sword, Rose, and Mystery” (89). Operating at times from a passive subjectivity, H.D. implicitly sets aside her agency, positioning herself as secondary to her writing process and textual output.

Still, at a more literal level, H.D. employs friendship as a framework for confronting her numerous personal and professional relationships, and the bearing that they have (had) on her selfhood. Thus, as governing textual metaphor, friendship aptly underscores interaction as crucial to sustaining recovery. Examining her interactions with others thereby exhibits its individual and communal dimensions: and, like recovery, it is an intensely personal process; yet requires the intercession of one’s family, friends, and associates. Attributing this dualism to the nature of trauma itself, Kai Erikson explains, “So trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back” (Erikson 186). In journaling about her personal and professional interactions, H.D. reveals a range of emotional responses, including apathy, compassion, and anger. Delving into the circumstances that provoke them often prompts a reencounter with her trauma; however, the balance that *Compassionate Friendship* forges between subjectivity and objectivity enables her to assess the stability of the recovering self.

H.D. invokes precisely this balance in her descriptions of her lover, Bryher, and daughter, Perdita. Although we might expect the two women who are ostensibly closest to her to figure centrally in these reflections, Bryher and Perdita materialize only peripherally; yet the authenticity of their respective bonds with H.D. is not in question. Still, her depictions of them prove somewhat troubling, for they rarely exhibit emotional

intimacy or connection. H.D. reflects on a time when Bryher and Perdita were essentially her *raison d'être*:

There was beauty and companionship and a sort of strength that I needed in my relationship with Bryher and Perdita. Kenneth [Macpherson] took over responsibility, then seemed to have failed us—but in the light of much later events and through Erich's serene human understanding, I am able to happily re-live those years, the late twenties and the early thirties, before I went to Professor Freud in Vienna. (CF 83)

Even more telling, references to the two are altogether devoid of allusions to the maternal, and often to love on any level; yet this emotional distance is likely indicative of H.D.'s need to see herself *outside* of her roles as mother and lover.⁵⁵ For example, the most detailed discussion of Perdita is abstract and depersonalized:

March 31. Perdita's birthday. I left a little shopping-bag that I treasure, over at the House at lunch-time. I was so afraid that I might have mislaid it, it had some bunny Easter cards in it that I had bought before lunch. But I found the bag and the bunnies and Perdita again. (63)

Adalaide Morris speaks to the complex nature of the relationship between mother and daughter: "H.D.'s treatment of Perdita was neither abusive nor neglectful, but its departures from a prescribed or expected norm suggest that here as elsewhere H.D. was operating within a different system of values" (Morris 125). And while H.D. often notes her desire to confide in Bryher, *Compassionate Friendship* generally seems to retreat from the depth of their relationship, relegating and confining it safely in the past: "May 4. But more of Bryher...though Bryher remains herself and there is no need of a reliquary to contain the memories. They are there now, in life" (CF 86). Later, she collapses Bryher with Erich, further revealing the degree to which their relationship shifts during her

⁵⁵ To this end, recall H.D.'s description of the shell-fish quoted in the preceding discussion of *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, which introduces her interest in securing alternative modes of self-(re)definition in the aftermath of trauma. Note as well that the images of the shell-fish and cocoon are central to the philosophy of selfhood, and especially gender identity, that governs H.D.'s literary oeuvre. For a detailed explication, consult *Notes on Thought and Vision* (1919).

hospitalization: “Bryher will fortify me and I will confide in her, relating my distress and bewilderment as to Erich or his Boss” (115). As these passages suggest, Bryher continues to play an integral role in H.D.’s emotional and psychological stability. Guest’s characterization certainly privileges the platonic aspects of their relationship over the intimate: “She relied on Bryher during her numerous breakdowns...She wrapped Bryher in an aura of ‘sharing’ the most important—to them—act in the world, far more than the sexual one, the creation of literature. Bryher was pupil, H.D. was teacher” (Guest 114-5). Even so, other manifestations of friendship throughout the text exhibit the ways in which H.D. derives stability and companionship from others during her hospitalization.

Accordingly, the text explores female friendship as a source of revitalization, reward, and even self-knowledge, principally through H.D.’s burgeoning friendship with Joan Leader Waluga, a fellow patient. Arriving in a fragile, suicidal state, Joan begins treatment for emotional shock sustained when her husband fails to meet her in Naples, presumably leaving her for his mistress. Beyond compassion, the friendship that develops between H.D. and Joan also subtly incites H.D.’s maternal tendencies. She remarks, “Certainly, I was prepared to mother her in a distant way. She is so reserved, I did not kiss her at the air-port. ‘Did her mother ever kiss her?’ Erich asks” (*CF* 46). Likewise, H.D.’s reluctance to travel with Bryher over the Easter holiday should be attributed to her concern that Joan would be left alone. Because she has sustained trauma and undergone psychotherapy, H.D. deems herself qualified to meaningfully intervene in Joan’s recovery, for she can approach her in a manner distinct from Heydt, as well as other clinicians and medical personnel. Therefore, shortly after they meet, H.D. attempts

to ease the challenge of recovery by presenting Joan with a typewriter and books—the means most useful to her in mitigating mental illness. This gesture reinforces the necessity of writing as a mode of working through psychological and emotional trauma; in providing Joan with these “tools,” H.D. urges her to couple her therapy sessions with independent thought, writing, and revision.

As the text implicitly reveals, however, their friendship bears reciprocal outcomes: not only do they show compassion to one another, but each facilitates the recovery of the other. H.D. naturally begins to compare Joan’s trauma to her own, concluding, “I have not been really ill” (34). Not unlike Delia, Joan affords H.D. the ability to gauge her psychological and physical wellness objectively, which in turn compels her to see herself as not only ahead of Joan in the recovery process, but healthier indeed. In this way, *Compassionate Friendship* subtly yet decisively underscores recovery as a process, and conveys H.D.’s belief that she is indeed progressing. In addition to fostering positive self-assessment, her friendship with Joan brings H.D. intellectual reciprocity as well. She remarks, “We talked all the time about writing and writers, I have not had such an intelligent contact for many years” (56). Apart from Bryher and her daughter, Perdita, the bond that H.D. develops with Joan as represented in *Compassionate Friendship* thus proves crucial to her recovery because it is forged on the shared experience of trauma, loss, mental instability, and the resolve to go on.

Yet the text quickly retreats from the idea that H.D.’s own recovery is somehow complete. Indeed, at moments, H.D. admits to her own reluctance to be alone, which suggests that she too gradually comes to rely upon Joan for companionship: “Meanwhile, I hope that Joan consents to stay on, at least until Bryher comes, about the fifth of April”

(55). One may infer that Bryher, the “silent” partner in this process, recognizes the need for H.D. to continue her sessions. Although references to Bryher are sporadic, H.D. expresses her gratitude to Bryher for her financial support, which makes her extended stay possible. Recall that Bryher arranged for and funded H.D.’s sessions with Freud as well. However, that Bryher *also* makes allotments for Joan’s treatment and expenses serves as her acknowledgement that friendship with Joan is fulfilling, and perhaps even recuperative for H.D.⁵⁶ She writes:

Bryher has been very generous with Joan; the expenses at Küsnacht are considerable, plus the extras and her psycho-analysis. Joan had spoken of not wanting to take the extra weekly allowance that Bryher had left with Miss Raber in the office. I wrote out two American Express cheques for Joan, ‘this is for summer clothes, don’t thank me. I want to do something for you. And don’t speak of it.’ (132)

It is Bryher’s willingness to prolong H.D.’s stay, and by extension, to allow her friendship with Joan to deepen, that perhaps constitutes the truest act of compassion in the text. Still, Bryher’s compassion toward Joan is secondary to her interest in ensuring that H.D.’s stay in Küsnacht is productive and restorative.

Beyond her friendship with Joan, which is rooted in compassion and reciprocation, the writing process also leads H.D. to consider unexpected reversals and permutations in her interactions with other friends and associates. Her relationships with Bryher and Erich evolve rather drastically over the course of her hospitalization: Erich is first a friend to H.D., then a doctor; and similarly, during this period, Bryher plays a

⁵⁶ While the text emphasizes Joan’s positive influence on H.D.’s recovery as Bryher’s primary rationale for offering Joan financial assistance, it bears noting as well a personal connection between Bryher and Joan that is not mentioned therein. According to Barbara Guest, Bryher co-owned a farm in Cornwall, called Trenoweth, with Joan’s aunt, Doris Banfield. She writes, “‘Co-owner’ may have been a euphemism, as Bryher probably owned the farm, but Doris ran it” (Guest 311). Moreover, the connection between Joan and Bryher also calls attention to the stark difference in age between H.D. and Joan, to which little attention is paid in *Compassionate Friendship*. Guest simply notes that, “Their age difference was no obstacle” (312).

much more maternal than intimate role in H.D.'s life. Instead of demanding physical or emotional reciprocation from H.D., Bryher exercises compassion, selflessly giving of her energy (and money) in the interest of preserving her partner's sanity, even if it means that greater emotional intimacy exists between H.D. and Joan at this time than between she and H.D. In both of these dynamics, H.D. unexpectedly benefits, for the shifts in Erich's and Bryher's respective roles occur with H.D.'s interests in mind. H.D. implicitly recognizes that she is the recipient of true compassion. Still, her re-actions to others remain vitally important: for example, her unpleasant encounter with an editor, Stephen Guest, dispels the sense of comfort that characterizes her relationships with Erich and Bryher, reminding her of the necessity to continue to exercise caution and suspicion, especially where her career and reputation are concerned.

In particular, H.D.'s interactions with Stephen Guest as discussed in *Compassionate Friendship* illustrate the negative permutation of friendship: wherein one party employs it as a guise to intentionally manipulate or take advantage of the other. The clearest manner in which H.D. stands to be exploited naturally occurs with regard to the circulation of her writing, and this risk heightens during her hospitalization. Yet Guest is not the only person to deceive her. Prior to explicitly stating that she intends to appoint Bryher and Norman Holmes Pearson her literary executors, "tak[ing] charge of all MSS and papers" (41), H.D. registers profound anger and betrayal at the idea that D.H. Lawrence printed one of his letters to her without permission. She registers her disgust with the idea that her writing has increasingly become a commodity:

It was something of a shock to find a letter of his to me printed in the book. How did that letter come to be at large—who found, or who stole it, and who sold it and to whom and for how much?

This sort of thing works destruction. Both Horace Gregory and Norman Pearson have asked me to confirm or qualify certain statements in this book, regarding Amy Lowell and H.D. This would waste hours and hours and would take me away from myself—jerk me out of my own radius. (35-6)

At this early moment in the text, these remarks not only make it clear that H.D. takes the work of recovery and her related responsibilities very seriously, but that she resents distractions created by the duplicitous actions of others, especially given the turmoil from which she is trying to recover. Lawrence's betrayal incites H.D.'s concern and suspicion regarding the fate of some experimental, unpublished writing she entrusted to Stephen Guest. Her anxiety in the passage below is almost palpable:

I have never recovered that rough story—and rough it was, in a sort of sub-psycho-analytical dimension. It was a sketch... Stephen was very odd, threatening. He is by nature, a charming person—a duality, I presume. But where and how will those pages turn up, sold where and how and to whom and for how much? (42)

Uncomfortable with her own increasing popularity as a writer, and especially as a poet,⁵⁷ H.D. enters the clinic not as an esteemed author, but as a woman traumatized by the onslaught of war, seeking to reclaim control over the direction of her life. The utter loss of control precipitated by war is exacerbated here by her impression that others—namely Lawrence and Guest—presented themselves as trustworthy, yet took advantage of an opportunity to turn a profit from her name and work.

Given these opposing manifestations of friendship—two authentic, and two that have deteriorated to betrayal—beyond H.D.'s exploration and critique of the very idea of “compassionate friendship,” we witness as well her consideration of performance in terms of trustworthiness, revealing once more the flipside of its libratory potential. As

⁵⁷ One example of such anxiety occurs when Heydt offers to find a quiet place for H.D. to work, and she refuses, replying, “It is charming of you to think of it, but I can't live up to the idea of being that important as a poet” (65).

theorist Dominick LaCapra contends, “Simply attaining a voice able to bear witness or give testimony—to express certain unspeakable injuries, insults, and forms of abjection—is itself a remarkable accomplishment” (LaCapra *Writing History* 211). Although H.D. does not indicate whether the content of these documents referred explicitly to her personal affairs or traumatic past, the fact that her work had been reproduced without her consent on two separate occasions is unequivocally problematic. These acts compromise H.D.’s sense of control over her story—frightfully echoing that registered by Delia—and inherently undermine her efforts at recovery by threatening her inclination to continue to externalize and bear witness.

More importantly, these separate instances of deception at the hands of Lawrence and Guest function as additional manifestations of ghosting, for the anxieties H.D. expresses here seem to be triggered by memories of the former claims that Pound, Freud, and Aldington, among other “literary forefathers,” laid to her work and identity throughout the early stages of her career, which she subsequently devoted a great deal of creative energy to dismantling. By deliberately misleading H.D., Lawrence and Guest arouse her susceptibility to her traumatic past; yet as LaCapra reminds us, the fact that she intercedes by re-asserting her claim to her work signifies her refusal to be consumed by that past. These scenarios demonstrate that although trauma can never be completely erased, recovery does equip the individual with the capacity to silence it at will.

Strategically rendered in contrast to figures like Lawrence and Guest, Erich and Joan meet H.D.’s vulnerability with validation instead of betrayal. As a result, she gradually secures a clearer sense of self through her friendships with them. At one point, she groups herself amongst them thusly: “April 6. Joan, Erich, and I seem to form the

almost mythical or antique (his word) Elusinian circle, Demeter, Persephone and Dionysus” (CF 70). A hallmark of H.D.’s literary opus, here she employs Greek mythology, and specifically the matriarchal Eleusinian mysteries, to theorize interrelationship. Therein, Demeter is mother to Persphone; and Dionysus is a dying god reborn. Reductively speaking, this remark reinforces the deep, almost metaphysical sense of interconnectedness she feels with Erich and Joan. Through her relationships with them, H.D. unleashes her potential to be reborn out of trauma.

Still, situated among other influential male figures in her life, including her father and brother (also named Erich), as well as Pound, Aldington, Lawrence, Guest, Howell, and of course, Freud,⁵⁸ *Compassionate Friendship* constructs Heydt in an altogether distinct fashion. Although she never states as much outright, it seems as though Heydt best enables H.D. to bridge the disparate aspects of her selfhood, and particularly her roles as traumatized non-combatant, woman, and author. In their sessions, he facilitates her recovery by challenging her to work through traumatic memories; yet as he befriends her, he becomes a trusted confidante, and even provides feedback on her writing. H.D. attributes her restored mental clarity and authorial confidence to Heydt:

There was something constructive in the references to my writing, though actually, I do not think he had read the books and MSS that I lent him. I was being restored, in some way, logically, restored to a place, a pedestal, almost. It should be enough and is enough that by some psychic method of association, I was given a place or given back a place among the writers that I had known in the old days. Nor was I being dragged back to the past, I was being fortified for the future. The future? That is the reason for this reassessment. (114-5)

⁵⁸ It bears noting here the absence of Norman Holmes Pearson from this list. H.D. indeed trusted Pearson; their relationship was characterized by a level of authenticity that could feasibly rival her bond with Heydt. Recall that she entrusts he and Bryher as her literary executors. He has been excluded here on the basis of his financial and legal obligation to her.

Heydt's feedback restores H.D.'s sense of self-confidence—but in a way that is realistic and therefore believable to her. That she values his opinion in spite of her suspicion that he may not have even read her work reinforces the element of authenticity in their bond. Consideration for her future, as the passage describes, proves crucial to the sustainability of H.D.'s recovery, for it is a testament to her potential to assert agency and independence. She is gradually coming to acknowledge herself as sole determinant of her self-worth.

The entire duration of H.D.'s seven-month hospitalization at *Klinik Brunner* represents one stage of her journey toward selfhood in the aftermath of two world wars. The bonds that she forged with Joan and Erich are not only central to this text, but also key to grasping the progression of her recovery from the traumas of war, loss, and identity, which had begun decades earlier. Thus, in spite of her rather calm remark in *Tribute to Freud*—"We are all haunted houses" (*TF* 146)—in this text, H.D. strives to overcome the ghosts of her traumatic past; and does so, insofar as it becomes a narrative of friendship punctuated by trauma, not the opposite. *Compassionate Friendship* represents H.D.'s acknowledgment of the centrality of meaningful connection with others to forge a stable and sustainable sense of self. At the same time, of the three texts examined here, the representation of self that emerges at its conclusion is H.D.'s most transparent, for she alone authors it, attributing it not to Delia Alton, nor operating from the abstract subjectivity of an unnamed speaker. H.D. espouses agency through her insistence that, "I am to make a work of art of my impressions, my notes. I am in this story—I can not detach myself" (*CF* 136). By comingling her public role as author with

her private traumas of war and loss, H.D. decisively asserts her autobiographical subjectivity.

Being discharged from *Klinik Brunner* in October 1946, however, does not signify the end of her recovery. Beyond her sessions with Heydt, to varying degrees, H.D. would continue to textually examine her life and work up until the time of her death. Many of her publications following the composition of *Compassionate Friendship* (recall that it was never published in her lifetime) earned her impressive critical acclaim. They include: a volume of *Selected Poems*; a four-part series of journals, entitled the *Hirslanden Notebooks*; as well as *End to Torment* and *Hermetic Definition*, among others. As Smith and Watson point out, “Sequential self presentation enables women artists to propose subjectivity as processural rather than static and to insist that identity is performative, not essentialized” (Smith and Watson 34). To the degree that these texts engage in self-examination and facilitate self (re) discovery, they stand as testimony to the restorative power that writing held for H.D. throughout her life, and as her definitive acknowledgement of recovery as an active, ongoing process. Writing to her executor, Norman Holmes Pearson, several years prior to her death—“I think I did get what I was looking for from life and art” (qtd. in Guest 333)—H.D. ultimately retreats from characterizing her narrative of self in any single way, conveying instead her enduring commitment to the power of textual artistry to facilitate self-(re)presentation.

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