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The Poet's Corpus: Memory and Monumentality in Wilfred Owen's "The Show"

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THE POET'S CORPUS: MEMORY AND MONUMENTALITY
IN WILFRED OWEN'S "THE SHOW"

by

Charles Hunter Joplin

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of English
at The University of Southern Mississippi
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for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

THE POET'S CORPUS: MEMORY AND MONUMENTALITY

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by Charles Hunter Joplin

August 2016

Wilfred Owen is widely recognized to be the greatest English "trench poet" of the First World War. His posthumously published war poems sculpt a nightmarish vision of trench warfare, one which enables Western audiences to consider the suffering of the English soldiers and the brutality of modern warfare nearly a century after the armistice. However, critical readings of Owen's canonized corpus, including "The Show" (1917, 1918), only focus on their hellish imagery. I will add to these readings by demonstrating that "The Show" is primarily concerned with the limitations of lyric poetry, the monumentality of poetic composition, and the difficulties of representing one's traumatized memory. I will bolster this reading with a comparative study of the poem's manuscripts that interprets the rough and fair copies of Owen's late poem as monuments which he sculpted, fashioned, and redesigned to commemorate his past and investigate the visual possibilities of lyric poetry. This reading is significant because, in the same way that the grotesqueries of war and trauma are concealed for the sake of public commemoration, so too are the ugliness and near-incomprehensibility of Owen's manuscripts concealed by the anthologized poem. I propose that the anthologized poem helps us better understand the manuscripts and vice versa, and both the manuscripts and anthologized poem are both crucial to our continued understanding of English poetry and soldierly psychology in the First World War.

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To all those who work at The University of Southern Mississippi in any capacity, thank you for providing me with such a wonderful place to read, write, and research.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father, Karen and Randy Joplin, and to my late grandfather, PFC Harold “Ed” Akridge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	iv
CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II – THE ANTHOLOGIZED POEM	9
CHAPTER III - THE SCARBOROUGH DRAFT	17
CHAPTER IV – THE RIPON DRAFT	28
CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION.....	37
WORKS CITED	39

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

The treatment worked: to use one of his favorite metaphors, [Owen] looked into the eyes of the Gorgon and was not turned to stone. In due course the nightmares that might have destroyed him were turned into poetry.

—Dominic Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography*

As the sun broke through the clouds above Edinburgh on June 27, 1917, Captain Arthur Brock and his patient, Second Lieutenant Wilfred Edward Salter Owen, neared a breakthrough of monumental proportions. After a harrowing winter and spring in St. Quentin, the patient had been removed from the frontlines and admitted to Craiglockhart War Hospital for Neurasthenic Officers. The doctor had seen plenty of similar case studies, but no patient was as sympathetic and receptive to his methods as Owen. Brock believed that the only cure for Owen's neurasthenia, which we now call shell shock, was for him "to grasp [his] environment mentally and then to work on it, studying [the] landscape, towns and language," a method of treatment known as the work-cure, or as he called it, ergotherapy" (Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen* 254). To illustrate his point, Brock gave Owen a sculpture to study: his framed engraving of Palazzo Medici's "Hercules and Antaeus" (Hibberd 254). In Roman mythology, Antaeus was an invincible giant who drew his power from the earth and sea; Antaeus could not be killed as long as he kept two feet on the ground. Unfortunately, Hercules realized Antaeus' secret, lifted him off the ground, and crushed him to death in midair. Brock presented the statue to Owen as a metaphor for ergotherapy: Hercules represented the war machine and Antaeus the neurasthenic, and Owen would likewise "be crushed to death by the war machine unless

he could quickly reconnect himself to his environment” (Hibberd 254). According to the biographer Dominic Hibberd, Owen renewed his body and mind, established new relationships with doctors and comrades, gained a fresh appreciation for nature, and reinvented his poetic craft. In five months, Owen turned Brock’s statue on its head: trauma was his Antaeus, and he lifted the giant off the ground. In an ironic twist, the traumatized poet was only able to lift up his metaphorical giant by bringing his poetic craft back to earth.

As Owen recovered in Craiglockhart hospital and gradually returned to the front, he wrote several dozen war poems that were never published in his lifetime.¹ He died on November 8, 1918, in the Sambre-Oise Canal, just a few weeks before the war’s conclusion. Owen’s body of work was collected by his mother and seven of those poems were edited by Edith Sitwell and published in a special edition of the avant-garde art magazine *Wheels* (1919),² which was dedicated to the memory of Wilfred Owen, M.C.³ Following the *Wheels* edition, Owen’s war poetry, and his tragic reputation, spread quickly throughout the Western world. His work was published in two separate collections in 1920 and 1931, saw widespread circulation during World War II, formed the basis for Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* in 1962,⁴ was published in two more collections in 1963 and 1983, and has become a staple of twentieth century poetry anthologies.⁵ Although there are other “trench poets” who have achieved notoriety after the end of the war, Owen’s corpus has become monumentalized by decades of

¹ Five of Owen’s war poems were published in his lifetime: “‘Song of Songs’ in *The Hydra/Journal of the Craiglockhart War Hospital* and *The Bookman*; ‘The Next War’ in *The Hydra*; and ‘Miners’, ‘Futility’, and ‘Hospital Barge’ in the *Nation*” (Stallworthy 81).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Wheels: 1919*, v.

⁴ Stallworthy 81.

⁵ *Ibid.*

publication and circulation; his presence in the Western imagination is so imposing that it is difficult to think of war literature without him.⁶ The poems evoke for their readers Owen's experiences of shell shock and bodily trauma. In particular, he was thrown high up in the air by a massive shell explosion "just a few yards from his head" and trapped in a hole "just big enough to lie in, and covered with corrugated iron" near the grisly pieces of his "brother officer," 2/Lt Gaukroger (Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen* 240). His body and mind bore the scars of his traumatic experience, and his poems express those memories both physically and textually.

Owen's personal and public histories enable scholarship to question the representative power of monuments⁷ and the pervasive problems of trauma and experience.⁸ To that end, I propose that we may understand the complexities of Owen's trauma by reading the poet's published work—his monumentalized work—in concert with his manuscripts—his physical body of work. In the previous paragraph, I mentioned that the first posthumous appearance of Owen's poetry was a 1919 issue of *Wheels*. Although this magazine did not make Owen a household name per se, the magazine honored his death and gave his editors a starting point from which to publish successive volumes of his war poetry.⁹ "The Show" was the first entry in his section of the table of

⁶ See Lorrie Goldensohn's "The Dignities of Danger" in *Dismantling Glory: Twentieth Century Soldier Poetry*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003. 1-41.

⁷ It is worth noting that Owen never wrote an ekphrastic poem about a specific monument. For ekphrastic poems about WWI monuments, read Charlotte Mew's "The Cenotaph" (1919) and Siegfried Sassoon's "On Passing the New Menin Gate" (1928), both of which can be found in *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*.

⁸ For more information on trauma in the First World War, see Peter Leese's "'Why are They Not Cured?' British Shellshock Treatment During the Great War," in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, eds. Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 205-21.

⁹ Ledbetter, "Battle for Modernism and 'Wheels'" 326.

contents,¹⁰ and would therefore be the first poem that Wheels' readers would have seen. Therefore, "The Show" is an especially monumental poem in Owen's corpus and can be a useful text for discussing Owen's legacy as a canonical English poet of the First World War. Although most critics discuss the poem's themes of hellishness and guilt, I will demonstrate that "The Show" is primarily concerned with the limitations of lyric poetry, the monumentality of poetic composition, and the difficulties of representing one's traumatized memory. I will bolster this reading with a comparative study of the poem's manuscripts. Informed by recent work in textual studies, my method interprets the rough and fair copies of Owen's late poem as monuments which he sculpted, fashioned, and redesigned to commemorate his past and investigate the visual possibilities of lyric poetry. My reading of the poem's manuscripts is significant because, in the same way that the grotesqueries of war and trauma are concealed for the sake of public commemoration, so too are the ugliness and near-incomprehensibility of Owen's manuscripts concealed by the anthologized version. I propose that the anthologized poem helps us to better understand the manuscripts and vice versa, and they are both crucial to our continued understanding of English poetry and soldierly psychology in the First World War. Indeed, when we look on Owen's corpus with fresh eyes, it enables us to see the soldiers' corpses with an alarmingly new perspective.

English prosodic theory in the Edwardian period stressed the idea that hearing is a natural talent to Englishmen and that the iambic pentameter is a bodily force. Meredith Martin's excellent study of prosodic history, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930*, reveals that there was no standardized "English

¹⁰ *Wheels: 1919*, 52-53.

meter” for most of the country’s history; classical forms were still the primary reference point in schools and prosody manuals. However, beginning in the eighteenth century and moving into the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras, iambic pentameter and the concept of an “English ear” became standardized in public discourse and the public school system. According to George Saintsbury, one of its primary practitioners, Englishmen are endowed with an “English ear” that enables them to detect “a certain kind of pronunciation coupled with refined hearing” that can detect “true *English* meter” (Martin 101). Saintsbury’s theory of prosodic hearing privileges iambic pentameters as “the most definitely English” of all forms and imagines them as “‘vast armies’ that English citizens, future armies, are conditioned to hear ‘naturally.’ It is a matter of national pride that English readers should, can, and do cultivate their faculties in order to correctly appreciate poetry” (101). Significantly, the ability to hear and feel iambic pentameter is inextricably linked to militaristic movement, a theory which was carried out most successfully by the immensely popular Henry Newbolt who imagined the iambic foot as a drum beat. Newbolt’s poetry troped “the drum and a natural ability to hear and follow rhythm as an essential aspects of English military history, glory, and sacrifice; thus reading and ‘feeling’ English poetry through its rhythm... was conceived of, by Newbolt and others, as an essential aspect of English citizenship” (126). In this view, English meter is the intangible fighting spirit of Englishmen made audible, a force so powerful that it can propel soldierly bodies without their mental recognition and revive the pulses of dead men.¹¹ In the hands of Newbolt and fellow poets and prosodists, this nationalistic conception of an English meter and bodily rhythm created what Martin calls

¹¹ Newbolt 184.

the “military-metrical complex,” a term which refers to the widespread proliferation and circulation of propagandistic, easily digestible drum-verse in the public school system and the press (130). English meter in the early twentieth century was considered to be a physical force that could be heard in the ears, recited by mouth, and was essential to the strength of English bodies and the body politic.

In order to understand how a war poem affects a culture’s collective memory of individual wartime experience, we require a working definition of war monuments and monumentality. At its core, a monument functions as a *memory site* which, in Pierre Nora’s definition, is able “to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial” (19). In this sense, a single poet may use the language of monumentality in order to crystallize a moment in time, keep hold of his memories, make a deliberate statement about those memories, deal with the real and figurative aspects of death, and materialize his immaterial trauma in powerfully meaningful ways.¹² However individualized a monument might be, all monuments are public spaces that rely on communal participation to maintain significance. Monuments are public not merely because of their placement in public areas, but because they are “‘abstract’ in the sense of being impersonal,” contain an “austere permanence” not present in other forms of visual art, and make “the transmission of culture possible” by reinforcing “all that is stable, all that is common” in its external permanence (Materer 47; North 116, 115; Lewis 181). To quote Kirk Savage, monuments are physical sculptures that perpetuate memory in external deposits “located not within

¹² For more on monuments in the poetic tradition, see Guy Rotella’s Introduction to *Castings: Monuments and Monumentality in Poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004. 1-16.

the people but within its shared public space...to anchor collective remembering, a process dispersed, ever changing, and ultimately intangible, in highly condensed, fixed, and tangible sites” (Savage 130). War monuments are especially interesting because they attempt to publicly sanctify a community’s private grief while simultaneously solidifying that community’s patriotic pride in their contribution to the war effort.¹³ Consider, for example, “the figure of the common [deceased] soldier, who is always erect and unwounded” cast in bronze and placed on a thick marble base. Although this monument may serve as a site for personal remembrance and communal grieving, it also negates the individuality of that community’s soldiers, conflates them all into one body, and presents it as “an image of bodily continuity that seeks to displace or overcome the memory of bodies violated and destroyed, even though such violence to the body is the defining premise of warfare” (Savage 131). A war monument is a visual, sculpted representation of individual experiences presented to the public as representative of ideals that transcend (and frequently hide) the violence endured by those very individuals.

How do the historically contingent ideas of an audible English meter and communally representative war monuments relate to Wilfred Owen and his poetry? As school boys, Owen and his classmates acquired normalized English values through the reading, recitation, and recreation of English meter.¹⁴ Many of those same school boys would become soldiers on the front lines of the First World War and would be sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital to recover from shell shock. As Martin aptly describes, whether those men considered themselves poets or not, reading and writing English

¹³ Moriarty, 138 and 135.

¹⁴ See Paul Fussell’s chapter on the literary education/indoctrination of Englishmen in the fifth chapter of his classic study *The Great War and Modern Memory*: “Oh What a Literary War.” New York and London: Oxford UP, 1975. 155-190.

poetry “not only provided comfort but...in some cases, directly assisted them in recovering from psychological trauma” (“Therapeutic Measures” 36). Owen was no exception: under Dr. Brock’s direction, he “took up issues of feet, rhythm, music, and sound as primary and secondary themes, especially in the war poems” (Martin, *Rise and Fall* 164). However, as I will soon demonstrate, Owen’s best work deliberately subverts normalized concepts of meter and sound in favor of more highly visual, deliberately sculpted forms. I have already described what Owen learned from the statue of Hercules and Antaeus, but he may have also known that, following the War Office’s decision to ban the repatriation of the families of fallen soldiers, the English public had begun clamoring for war monuments as early as 1915.¹⁵ Furthermore, Owen would have known that photographs of dead soldiers and ruined trenches had begun to circulate to the military censor’s dismay¹⁶; the realism of those photographs inspired him to craft poetry that could serve the same purpose. However, “The Show” does more than present mere colors and lines on paper—I suggest that it presents memory and trauma as a physical, bodily issue in a three-dimension space on the page itself.

¹⁵ Moriarty, 126.

¹⁶ Hibberd, *Owen the Poet*, 129.

CHAPTER II – THE ANTHOLOGIZED POEM

“The Show” dramatizes the hellishness of war and the terror of memory. It is set in the aftermath of a battle wherein the soldier-poet, who cannot remember how he died and for what reason, stands on the precipice of a large cliff in Hell. He surveys the landscape and sees a cold, moon-like terrain that is wracked with plague and flecked with dull shades of blue, green, brown and gray. Thousands of caterpillars slowly cover the ground, plug themselves inside of holes, and eat each other. The soldier-poet watches these creatures with rapt fascination until he realizes something terrible about their presence and falls to the ground in shock. Although he does not explain his thoughts, the reader may infer two possibilities: that the caterpillars will be his only company in the afterlife and that he is, in fact, one of those slimy creatures. Death confirms the soldier-poet’s fears by kneeling down and showing him a headless caterpillar. The speaker interprets the caterpillar’s legs to be his fallen battalion and, in the final line, realizes that he is the creature’s rotten head. The poem’s surface-level is obvious: war is hell.¹⁷

Dominic Hibberd calls the poem “a ‘photographic representation’ of war’s horrors” and affirms that “[n]othing before [Henri Barbusse’s] *Le Feu* had given such an appallingly vivid description of trench warfare or combined it with such passionate political conviction” (129, 128). Focusing on the image of “the Romantic bird in flight,” Patrick Jackson observes that Owen “looks into war’s terrifying sublimity and sees base materiality and death, a world feeding on itself” (297, 299). Douglas Kerr suggests that Owen’s nightmare vision portrays an officer’s repressed guilt for losing his nerve on the frontlines and consequently failing to protect his men’s bodies from the terror that

¹⁷ To quote Tim O’Brien: “As a moral declaration the old truism [“war is hell”] seems perfectly true, and yet because it abstracts, because it generalizes, I can’t believe it with my stomach” (78).

claimed his mind.¹⁸ What these readings do not mention, however, is the poem's union of sight and sound, a union which is necessary to both lyric poetry and traumatic memory. In regards to the latter, I find that Sassoon's definition of trauma is instructive: despite the best efforts of his "listening doctor," his experiences and those of his shell shocked comrades were "involuntarily 'reenacted' for the now livid audience of the dead and are, through their haunting recurrence, performed nightly on the stage of the patient's neurasthenic psyche" (Martin, *Rise and Fall* 161). This definition supposes that sight is more important to the experience of trauma than sound, but those sights are nightmarish and deeply confusing, thus complicating the victim's ability to represent his memories. With this in mind, I add to these previously mentioned critical readings an explanation of the poem's utter silence, obsession with sight and knowledge, and monumental imagery.

As previously mentioned, when Owen wrote this poem he was an experienced lyric poet who practiced English meter as a means of rehabilitation, but Owen subverts his training to demonstrate the terror of war through a unique combination of form and content. Most of the poem reads in iambic pentameter, but that meter is frequently interrupted by lines that exceed the established form. The first line, for example, establishes the poem's iambic pentameter but the second line's "unremembering" includes an extra syllable; the second line scans as pentameter-and-a-half. In total, lines 2, 7, 11, 16, 20-25, and 27 all break the "English meter" with an extra syllable. The poem's English rhythm is further distorted by lines 17 and 26, which scan as hexameter and hexameter-and-a-half, respectively. As a consequence, the English drum-beat is interrupted almost immediately and can never move for long enough to establish forward

¹⁸ *Wilfred Owen's Voices*, 210.

momentum. The poem's broken drums bolster the poem's central image of butchered English soldiers: their bodies can never be raised because their *heartbeat* has been silenced. The proud drum-beat they learned in school, the very same that propelled them onto the battlefield, ironically drove them to their deaths; no relief will ever come for them, nor will their rest be a nine-days [sic] rest.¹⁹ "The Show" further subverts his audience's prosodic expectations by silencing the battlefield and everyone in it. Consider first the title: "The Show" is a reference to the fact that British soldiers called trench raids "shows" and would congratulate each other with a hearty "Good show!"²⁰ From the title, the audience expects theatricality and liveliness, but the poem's content quickly subverts these expectations. The first mention of sound (not counting the sighing gods in the epigraph) is in line 15, which describes a smell that arises from the earth "As out of mouths." These mouths are silent, however, and only chthonic odors and dead air comes out, as if the body's lungs have begun to decay. The second mention can be found in the penultimate stanza, in which the soldier-poet's body falls as silent as "a feather" (24). The third is the most significant: after the soldier-poet falls, Death, in turn, falls "like a deepening moan" (25). This action could be said to have a sound, but a deepening moan has no perceptible pitch, just an endlessly reverberating bass. "The Show" contains absolutely nothing audible: no heartbeats, drumbeats, iambic beats, or anything else that could be said to contain spirit or liveliness. The poem's utter stifling silence suggests that, for Owen, the "English beat" that propels Englishmen to the front cannot withstand the horrors of trench warfare, and that metaphors of spectacle and showmanship are

¹⁹ Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen* 240.

²⁰ Fussell, "Theater of War" 198.

insufficient means of describing the phenomenological experience of warfare, thus negating the most essential aspect of lyric poetry: the lyric itself.

In the failure of sound, the poem continually emphasizes sight as a better, yet ultimately flawed, means to truth. The epigraph attributed to W. B. Yeats compares human existence to fog on a mirror, which the gods must clear away to view their own reflection. Owen opens his poem with this epigraph as a direct call to his audience for attention and pity, drawing a difference of opinion the apathetic gods and the clear vision that he needs his audience to have: if they look down upon the suffering of the soldiers and can muster only a sigh, then he is failing as a poet. The poem's first stanza further establishes its central motif of sight (and lack of sound) by describing the landscape as being "gray" and "cratered like the moon" (4). This comparison is significant because the silence of the moon is much like that of the battlefield in the aftermath of bloodshed. It is unearthly and indescribable, "the abode of madness" and a place of utter darkness (qtd. Lewis 51). Paradoxically, although the moon can be *seen* from afar, because no one in Owen's time had ever set foot on the surface, it can never truly be *known*. Likewise, although Owen's audience may be able to see the ruined battlefield through Owen's poetic imagination, they are too far away to ever truly know it. When the soldier-poet states that the caterpillars "vanished out of dawn down hidden holes," he juxtaposes the clear light of morning with the darkness and secrecy of the caterpillars' hidden holes. Along those same lines, he notes that the caterpillars "seemed" to push themselves, but he does not make himself clear. In so doing, Owen places limits on his soldier-poet's knowledge and juxtaposes the soldier poet's testimony with his lack of perfect understanding; his audience shares this same sense of ominous uncertainty. In the penultimate stanza, the

soldier-poet insists on the authority of his witness even as his uncertainty clouds his vision. The first two lines of this stanza enforce his testimony in equal measure: he “saw” the caterpillars’ bitten backs and he “watched” their bodies move (21, 22). He reels in terror at “that sight” and falls to earth “like a feather” (23, 24). That simile is particularly interesting because, when a feather falls to the ground, it rocks slowly back and forth and lands without a sound. There is no life or force to the soldier-poet’s fall, no tragic melodrama or bombastic chaos. By using the image of a falling feather, the soldier poet successfully conveys the stifling silence of the battlefield and the frailty of his battered body. However, the soldier-poet cannot describe what was so horrifying about the caterpillars and why they caused him to fall—he can only mention “what that sight *might* mean” (emphasis mine, 23). “The Show” compares the tenuousness of the soldier-poet’s traumatized psyche and his audience’s inability to understand what truly happened to him on the battlefield. As a consequence, the poem can *show* what the war was like but can never bridge the vast gap between comparison and experience.

Because “The Show” is deeply concerned with the ambiguities of sight and physical presence, I would highlight the poem’s monumentality and its subtle examples of monumental imagery. Much like a sculptor, Owen sculpts his landscape into a physical manifestation of his psychological violence. However, he does not use verbs like “chisel” or “carve,” as one might expect. Rather, he uses “pitted” and “scraped,” which allude to the damage sustained by Owen’s body and mind and are provide a physical referent to the damage sustained by soldierly bodies (5, 10). The earth’s face, with its “beard, that horror of harsh wire,” is a sculpted representation of war’s damaging toll on both the body and how the traumatized mind perceives itself. Wyndham Lewis claimed in 1918

that “[d]eadness...is the first condition of art” and the necessary prerequisite of the powerful monument.²¹ These words take on a disturbing irony in Owen’s poem, for his images are still and resolute precisely *because* they are dead. The soldier-poet is standing upright, but he cannot remember how he rose and never moves from that spot; he stands rigid and upright like a statue. The land is “weak with sweats of dearth” and is completely devoid of life (3). No flowers will ever bloom there again, no animals will roam its fields, and no rivers or rain will move the earth from its place. The caterpillars seem to be active, but they move so slowly as to be almost imperceptible: they uncoil, writhe, shrivel, creep, bristle, and eat each other at a glacier’s pace. The caterpillars of lines 8 and 9 plug the ditches so as to prevent any water from filling the trench; nothing will ever fill that ground again. The “deep wounds” deepen, but nothing spills out of them (15). The caterpillars stand on “dithering feet” and move towards “mire,” where they shall plant themselves and rot with all their brethren. The soldier-poet watches them move in the penultimate stanza, but they merely slither into stasis: they curve, loop, and *straighten*” and “curl, lift, and *flatten*” (emphasis mine 21, 22). The caterpillars eat each other in a continuous cycle and nowhere in the poem do they breed new species. Eventually, the very last caterpillar will ingest the last of his kind and die shortly thereafter in a ditch or swamp. Finally, in the poem’s finale, the soldier-poet sees his soul as a headless “manner of worm” with feet that “crawled no further” (26, 27). With these images, Owen turns his landscape and all its creatures into a war monument. It is gray and cold, static and silent, and stands both inside and apart from the rest of the world. It cannot be weathered by time because it is already hideous, it will outlast the

²¹ Tarr, 279.

author's death because it was never alive to start with, and its physical form enables its viewers to visualize the horrors it attempts to convey.

“The Show” can be read as a sculptural representation of the horrors of war, the death of English bodies, and the insufficiency of poetry to convey lived experience. However, the poem's manuscripts can bolster this analysis of the anthologized poem. To begin, the manuscripts are the physical memory sites in which Owen worked through his trauma and his poetic craft; they are sculpted objects that convey both personal and public significance. Although they may be viewed online and in facsimile print, Owen's manuscripts are not in the public eye—that honor goes to the anthologized poem. The poem's concerns with memory and monumentality are visible from the poem's manuscripts as well as the anthologized version.²² A theoretically-informed reading of “The Show's” manuscripts enables us to reconsider Owen's traumatic experiences, the butchery of soldierly bodies, and the haunting silence of modern warfare.²³ Finally, to read the manuscripts of the poem enables readers to observe Owen's experimentation with content and form and to wrestle with the complicated problem of traumatic experience and artistic representation. Dominic Hibberd claims that Owen accomplishes his “vision” by enabling the reader to view the battlefield “from the air like an aviator and [by] using images he had tried out in letters from the front” (*Wilfred Owen* 290). I add to Hibberd's claim by arguing that the poet's aerial perspective applies to the manuscripts as well as the content. If we read each stanza from an aerial perspective and then drop into

²² A particularly useful example of my kind of work is Matt Miller's “How Whitman Used His Early Notebooks” in *Collage of Myself: Walt Whitman and the Making of Leaves of Grass*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2010. 1-47.

²³ To quote Wim Van Mierlo: “[t]he flow of the writing, the vigour of the pen, the boldness of the cancellations, the position of the writing on the page all inform us about not only the circumstances in which the writing took place, but also the characteristic habits (or *usus scribendi*) of the individual writer” (17).

the text, we can see that the manuscripts' stanzas have visible features which recall Owen's memories of the battlefield, complicating the referential capacities of memory and monumentality.²⁴

²⁴ Not all manuscripts have a visible form which complements their thematic content but, at least in this instance, I argue that they do.

CHAPTER III - THE SCARBOROUGH DRAFT

The first rough draft, currently in the possession of the English Faculty Library in Oxford, is written in rough handwriting and has no title, though Owen initially referred to it as “Vision” (*Wilfred Owen* 290).²⁵ It begins as follows:

He looked down, from the great height of death,

Having forgotten ~~I had died, and why.~~

how he died, and why. (Stallworthy 316)

If we examine this one section of the draft, it seems fairly straightforward. Starting from the top of the draft, Owen lays down a base for his monument: “He looked down, from the great height of death.” This line functions as a base because Owen’s usage of height and death carries over in both versions of the poem. Furthermore, this line creates an aerial view of the terrain and establishes a motif of discomfoting distance that carries through both drafts of the poem. In his second line, he merely strikes out half of the line and then replaces it as one would replace a brick in a wall. Notice that the speaker of this poem is currently not present nor is he the subject. Instead, the subject is an anonymous “He,” some nameless soul; indeed, when the subjective “I” creeps into the poem, Owen subsequently omits it. At this moment, the speaker is merely an objective observer, perhaps even Death himself, and the subject is a character. The speaker is distanced from the horrors below his feet; likewise, in this stage of composition, Owen cannot see and feel his way around his words, and he cannot fully articulate his vision.

²⁵ Owen’s initial title was “The Vision,” or simply “Vision,” which refers to both the content of his work (a personal view of war from above the land) and to Henri Barbusse’s *Under Fire* (1917).

Although there is no clear break between the first two lines and the subsequent section, to make my study easier to follow, I will break them up into different parts. This, then, is the second section:

I
~~And saw this planet~~
is
~~th continent~~
e
~~champain — cratered like the moon~~
~~And pitted with the poek marks of stark~~
poeks shrink
He sees sick
~~And saw the long plain grey and black with~~
earth face shrunk
dearth
And p pitted like cruel
cratered like the moon's with hollow
woe, (Stallworthy 316)

From an aerial perspective, this section resembles a battlefield. The top half of this section has seven lines which are mostly or completely crossed out. Because the lines are drawn straight across and structured in succession, they can be read as abstract

representations of trench lines on the battlefield. There are also three gaping holes in the center of the draft, which resemble the moon's craters. Owen's craters refer to the fact that mortar fire and trip mines would destroy large sections of terrain, which would make craters in the earth like those on the moon.²⁶ This section also resembles a building torn to pieces by gunfire and explosives. The top left-hand corner of the section leans over without its accompanying right-hand corner, pieces of the walls on the left and right side are blown out, and there are three gaping holes in the middle of the section. In other words, many of Owen's revisions create monumental reminders of his battlefield experiences and, paradoxically, challenge our ability to understand those memories.

If we read these lines without the marks, they would read as follows: "I saw the earth face grey and shrunk with dearth / And cratered like the moon's with hollow woe." Instead of proceeding directly from the "He" of the first two lines Owen crosses out the "And" in favor of the "I." His "I," however, has not yet been established and it takes the focus away from the subject who "looked down" in favor of a new subject: the speaker. We should also notice that Owen's description of the landscape becomes less and less abstract with each revision, going from "planet" to "continent" and then to "champain." Owen ultimately chooses to describe the landscape as "earth's face," which personifies the landscape while also giving it the appearance of a corpse, denuding it of light by comparing it to the moon and denuding it of life by describing it as being dearthed and hollow. As this section of the draft shows, even in the early stages of writing, Owen is concerned with the human aspect of war and how best to reveal its face to the world. However, the text has no apparent lyrical structure and features conflicting images—

²⁶ See Tony Ashworth's *Trench Warfare 1914-18: The Live and Let Live System*, London: Pan, 2000.

If we choose to ignore the corrections, the draft reads clearly up until the fourth line: “All pitted with great pocks and scabs of plague. / And caterpillars crawled and swarmed and curled / Thousands on thousands, and these plug [the ditches].” If we include the corrections in our aerial perspective, this stanza resembles a monument in-construction. The four legible lines stack on top of each other in a consistent manner and the caterpillars’ actions on the terrain are easy enough to follow. However, the first line is distanced from the following three by several strikes that curve away from the rest of the text. Owen deliberates between several possibilities: “of her disease,” “some old shame,” “her disease,” and “old disgrace” before he finally chooses “and scabs of plague.” As the poem attempts to describe the hellish landscape’s great pocks, the structure bulges outwards. As a result, the clear connections between the four lines are interrupted and their attempt at cohesive signification is delayed. We should also notice four words—cold, recalled, sweat, and swart—sitting off to the side like blocks of stone at a construction site. These words are never used in the final version, but they stand as visible reminders that Owen was building his poem as a means of working through his trauma.

The curve of the lines between stanzas one and two reflects the manner in which Owen continues to move *around* a precise articulation of his testimony and illustrates the difficulties of artistic representation. If we examine the bulge, we notice that he keeps trying to use the words “disease” and “shame,” but those words are unspecific and do not describe the exact nature of his landscape. After four failed attempts, Owen finally decides on “scabs of plague,” which offers more specificity and recalls the blistering

~~and green; some gb blue, some grey.~~

~~And as it seems the grey~~

~~Now the blue eat up~~

~~And all the grey for the~~

~~Leaving the green parts, of the earth for mud,~~

~~of the land~~

~~And those live creatures that were grey~~

~~Made war upon the rest, and dro~~

~~Warred with the rest, and eat them~~

~~and were we~~

~~eaten (Stallworthy 317)~~

The fourth section's lines are more difficult to parse than the others, but here is a rough approximation of what they say sans marks:

where they writhe, and break up,

But long slow bristling [creepers swarm the] more

[some brownish;] some blue, [many] grey.

Leaving the green parts, [of the land] mud,

And those live creatures that were grey

Warred with the rest, and eat them

and were eaten.

In this stanza, as in the ones before it, Owen deliberates between several possible descriptions and several possible words; he strikes out eighteen lines and leaves four words on the side. He crosses out “other caterpillars” and “Made war upon the rest” in favor of the direct depiction: the caterpillars “writhe” and they “Warred with the rest.” He goes through several color possibilities—“as it seems the grey,” “Now the blue,” “And all the grey”—and chooses the exact colors he needs. Owen’s marks create multiple trenches on the page in a haphazard, inconsistent fashion, thus replicating the placement of trenches on the battlefield. Owen’s caterpillars are brown, blue, and grey, and they leave “the green parts, of the land” to make war upon their brethren. By painting the caterpillars as blue, brown, and grey, Owen draws comparisons to soldiers’ uniforms on all sides of the war.²⁸ Their departure from “the green parts, of the land” is analogous to a notion commonly held among soldiers that they have left their pastoral homes to go fight in hellish, foreign lands.²⁹ As we can see, Owen steadily attempts to articulate an evocative perspective on his past and the meaning of war, but he can only articulate that vision by destroying lines and phrases.

Although Owen’s monument is well under way, the exact nature of his speaker has not yet been established. We should note that the word “thought” is written off to the side, a word which has no place in the draft and is unused in the fair copy. However, the fact that Owen considered using this word suggests that he was concerned with memory and the ability of the mind to recreate imagery. It would have likely belonged to the speaker of the poem, perhaps in a line where he imagines seeing something that is not

²⁸ See Laura Ugolini’s “War-stained: British Combatants and Uniform, 1914-18.” *War & Society*. 33.3 (2014): 155-171. *Taylor and Francis*.

²⁹ See Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975.

there. The speaker's dual role as witness and victim³⁰ has not yet been established, however, so this would be the first time that the readers see any workings of the character's mind. As it stands, this poem is still merely a narration of some nameless character's vision.

At this stage of the drafting process, Owen has been working out his memories and struggling to place his speaker into the poem's narrative. The final stanza provides us one last look into the poet's thought process:

ate
Warred on the rest and them, and were eaten
ea
Death had
For yet yet even
now
I saw not nearer. ~~It was yet~~ forgiven me
was
those worming
To watch ~~the living~~ creatures torn and smitten
And know the feet of one that crawled no more,
For ~~my own men~~
men, my men. Whose head lay by them rotten. (Stallworthy 317)

³⁰ Winter 7.

Owen's marks are not as extensive as they are in the previous stanzas, although we should notice that he chooses not to describe the caterpillar's feet as "my own men" but, rather, "my men. Whose head lay by them rotten." This line positions the poem's protagonist as the captain of a battalion that was slaughtered in combat and burdens him with the guilt of their failure. It also references Owen's position as "Major Domo" at Scarborough: "I boss cooks, housemaids, charwomen, chamber-maids, mess orderlies – and drummers... I'll mind my business, I'm a good worm" (Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen* 286). Although Owen had not yet become captain of his battalion, he already had an inkling of what it was like to be a leader of men and tried to dramatize that role in the rough copy. The next aspect of this draft that we should notice is that, in the first line, Owen returns to the image of the soldier-caterpillars warring on and eating each other. Interestingly, Owen brings a new character into the narrative: Death. Although Death is a primary character in the fair copy, we can see in the rough copy that Owen could not decide whether he wanted the viewer of Hell to be a character or the speaker. Although the "I" has not figured prominently in the draft, it returns in this stanza: "I saw not nearer. Death had forgiven me." The speaker's place is not as centralized as it is in the final version, however, because the final lines say that he is allowed "[t]o watch those worming creatures torn and smitten / And know the feet of one that crawled no more, / For men, my men. Whose head lay by them rotten." By describing the men as his own he implies that he is the rotten head, but this is not as explicit as the fair copy's final lines, where Death picks up the worm and shows him "its feet, the feet of many men, / And the fresh-severed head of it, my head" (Stallworthy 156). The perspective of the speaker and his relationship with his audience is disorienting because the phenomenon of battlefield

experience and memory is itself disorienting. Likewise, the manuscript's myriad images reflect the confusing nature of memory and the commensurate difficulties of artistic representation.

In the final version of the poem there is no doubt as to whom the speaker is, what the caterpillar symbolizes, and what the war has done to him. Owen's trauma, the near-impossibility of articulating his experiences, and the horror of that trauma all contribute to the rough copy's anti-monumental quality. In the rough draft, however, this connection is left ambiguous and the speaker is detached from the poem's ultimate image of the headless caterpillar. It is also worth noting that this is the only line of the poem in which a reader can draw an explicit connection to soldiers and war, whereas in the fair copy that connection can be made by the sixth line. At this state of production, the poem's speaker is merely a participant in the action and its concern with presenting war as hell remains unfulfilled. Nevertheless, the rough copy's marks are significant because they resist signification and recall Owen's mental wounds. The "vision" proves fragmented and would remain so until Owen performed his final revisions at the Northern Command Depot at Ripon, England, in May of 1918.

CHAPTER IV – THE RIPON DRAFT

In my reading of the Scarborough draft, I examined line-by-line and structural revisions of the poem in order to demonstrate how the manuscript's materiality unsettles representation. With the fair copy written at Ripon, however, there are only four marks on the page, making Owen's trauma less visible than in the preceding draft. Even so, the fact that Owen's scars are hidden from sight is precisely what makes the fair copy so intriguing in light of the rough copy. Consider the appearance of the fair copy: it is much cleaner and more visually appealing than the rough copy because it features neat, well-written lines on white paper. Furthermore, the fair copy comes in three parts: a modest title page, the epigraph on a separate page, and the poem itself on two pages, split between the fifth and sixth stanzas. In other words, the fair copy looks far more cohesive and well thought out than the rough copy. While the rough copy recalls and challenges monumentality in its shapes and inscriptions, the fair copy not only looks like a monument—consider its pristine marble color and clear, black typeface—but was also intended to be presented to the public as the definitive work.³¹ Formally and structurally, the fair copy is thus presented to the reader as the authoritative representation of Owen's memories and beliefs, just like a monument. Despite this monumental gloss, the content of the fair copy continues to challenge representation by resisting the glory and deification of war, by bearing Owen's presence as victim and witness, and by keeping the audience at a necessary distance.

³¹ Hibberd, *Owen the Poet* 146

The most significant correction to the fair copy is the elimination of the poem's subtitle, "as seen from heaven."³² There are at least two ways to read the possibilities inherent in this rejected subtitle. One would be to connect the motif of intractable distance (alluded to in the Yeats epigraph and the opening line's "vague height") with the implied distance between the home front and the war front. Owen's was not always an expressly political poet, but his war poetry bears a deep fascination with public negligence.³³ For example, his late poem "Smile, Smile, Smile," which was heavily induced by the liberal cynicism of comrade Siegfried Sassoon, paints a satirical sketch of England as a "dystopia." As Douglas Kerr describes it, the poem portrays England as "the cheap home of cynicism, greed, indifference" (181). The English government would have liked the home front to be content with the lie that all was well in France, but Owen was one of several writers who not only disagreed with their misrepresentation of the facts, but who actively sought to demonstrate the distance between the English media's comfortable lies and the facts on the ground. Owen's belief that "The Show" could "shock civilians out of callousness into recognition of actuality" suggests a symbolic distance between England and France as wide as the gap between Heaven and Hell; those in Heaven cannot comprehend how bad Hell is without a witness (Hibberd, *Owen the Poet*, 128). Thus, in order to facilitate England's memories, Owen builds "The Show" as a new kind monument, one which can unite the populace without concealing the ugliness of war.

³² Stallworthy's *CPF Vol. II* includes this correction, but it is not clear from the facsimile that it was intended as a subtitle. One must survey the handwritten fair copy to see the correct placement.

³³ Kerr, "Wilfred Owen's England," 169.

The title of the poem bears at least three possible meanings which can be used to understand the poem's anti-monumentality. On the one hand, "The Show" could refer to the political nature of Owen's intentions, as discussed in the previous paragraph; he has a particular perspective on the war that he wants to show his audience and his poem is his means. A second reading is that the poem dramatizes Owen's experiences, which in turn places the action on a stage and positions the audience at both a vertical and horizontal distance from that stage. The English people are distanced from the horror of the frontlines and they are likewise distanced from the action of Owen's symbolic show. That notion of distance is confirmed by the basic structure of the fair copy, which begins at "a vague height" and compares the landscape to "the moon," placing the reader at a vast distance from the surface of the Earth (Owen 1, 4). As soon as we are placed at a safe distance, however, Owen grabs the reader by the throat and hurtles downward into the earth. We see caterpillars acting like "plugs / of ditches," down "slimy paths," through "gloom's last dregs" into "hidden holes," into "foul openings / As out of mouths, or deep wounds deepening," into miry "green fields," and the poet shivers "earthward like a feather" (8-9, 10, 12, 13, 14-15, 18, 24). In the final stanza, Death falls "like a deepening moan" and shows Owen a caterpillar "which half had hid / Its bruises in the earth" (25, 26-27). By bringing the audience down into the battlefield, into the very mouth of Hell, the fair copy hurtles the reader into the poem's third and ultimate show: the pivotal moment when Death shows Owen the head of the caterpillar and the audience beholds the terrible inhumanity of war. Such a sheer drop is a direct comparison between "going over the top at Savy Wood" and Owen's recurring "dreams of falling over a precipice, when you see the rocks at the bottom surging up to you" (Hibberd, *Owen the*

Poet 191; Owen, *Collected Letters* 458). The audience's violent movement from lofty height to filthy dirt explains why Owen abandoned "The Vision" as a title and crossed out his initial subtitle. From heaven or the home front, a vision of war can allow readers to view Owen's experiences, but only the man himself can experience the trauma of that perspective directly. Therefore, Owen uses his corrective marks to enable his audience to imagine his experiences and, paradoxically, to remind them that they will always be distanced from the direct experience of violence and trauma.

Before we see the poem's official title and canceled subtitle, Owen includes an epigraph which foregrounds his central theme of distance and pity. The slightly misquoted epigraph comes from Foragel's speech in W. B. Yeats' "The Shadow Waters": "We have fallen in the dreams the ever-living / Breathe on the tarnished mirror of the world, / And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh" (Stallworthy 152). Owen says that *we* have fallen into the dreams, which means that *we* are about to enter this strange vision of Hell through the poet's memory. This vision of the world is "tarnished," which is either an unintentional or deliberate change from Yeats' original "burnished mirror" (152). Those ever-living fates, whatever they may be, watch the world from an unfathomable distance with a bored expression on their face, so utterly disinterested in the wriggling, squirming people down below that they can do naught but sigh. Owen opens his poem with this epigraph as a direct call to his audience for attention and pity, drawing a difference of opinion between the apathetic gods and the passionate interest that he needs his audience to have; if they look down upon the suffering of the soldiers and can muster only a sigh, he is failing as a poet. Thus, as the crossed out subtitle and

the action of the poem suggest, Owen must bring his audience down from the heights of safety into the Hell of Flanders through violent revisions and hellish visions.

While the formal and material revisions of the fair copy hide the rough copy's, the visual chaos of the poem's content can be found in the poet's pronouns, landscape, and perspective. Although the archetypal war monument hides its creator(s), Owen's monumental poem clearly bears the presence of its creator and foregrounds the difficulties of understanding one's individual experience. Owen references his life and his body by establishing his poetic "I" in the final third of the poem. He declares that "I saw their bitten backs curve, loop, and straighten. / I watched those agonies curl, lift, and flatten...I reeled and shivered earthward like a feather" (21-22, 24). These declarations are much more definitive and absolute than any statement that can be found in the rough copy. Owen is much more assertive of his position, more deliberate and exclamatory. In the rough copy, the poet was only marginally present, hesitant to insert himself into the show and flaky on his authority to tell the tale. Now the poet completely asserts himself and tells the reader directly that he alone saw the terrible sights and he alone can speak truthfully of them. I am reminded of the thirteenth stanza of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"—written less than two years after Owen wrote the fair copy of "The Show"—wherein the eponymous worrywart contemplates a violent break from his complacency by squeezing the universe into a ball and loudly announcing, "I am Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all" (94-95). In the same way, the voice of Owen also seems to emerge from a metaphorical grave of silence and uncertainty, loudly declaring its presence as the speaker for the horrors of the Great War, a flesh-and-blood witness of history's dead.

Although the poem foregrounds Owen's experience, the landscape paradoxically prevents the reader from truly understanding the physical and mental horror that Owen endured. Following the epigraph, the poem begins in earnest: "My soul looked down from a vague height with Death, / As unremembering how I rose or why, / And saw a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth" (Owen 1-3). The "sad land" is anthropomorphized, described in the next two lines as having "hollow woe / And (being) pitted with great pocks and scabs of plagues" (4-5). In the rough copy, these human characteristics rang hollow because the speaker was detached from the action. However, Owen's marks remind us that a real, flesh and blood human being is involved in the action of the poem and is building a monument from his own memories. Thus, the human characteristics of the landscape are allowed a deeper sense of gravitas because, in the same manner that the manuscript's physicality recalls Owen's traumatic experiences, the landscape recalls the poet's battered body. This same idea is true of Owen's next two lines: "Across its beard, that horror of harsh wire, / There moved thin caterpillars, slowly uncoiled" (6-7). By attributing a face to the voice, the person seemingly becomes real, his visage becoming more and more visible in the gray moonlight. Owen continues to anthropomorphize the landscape and its creatures, revealing his physical reflection: "warts that might be hills," "smell came up from those foul openings / As out of mouths, or deep wounds deepening," and "[o]n dithering feet upgathered (caterpillars), more and more" (11, 14-15, 16). Nothing in the landscape is left without human characteristics, and everything we see alludes to the soldier's body. The fact that we cannot actually see Owen, however, coupled with the notion that the English populace could not see what was happening to the soldiers in the battlefields, complicates the poem's proposed ability to represent the

soldier. Although we can see the human aspects of the landscape, the landscape's horrific features remind us that we cannot truly understand the soldier and his trauma.

Unlike the archetypal war monument, then, which codifies problematic ideals about warfare, Owen's monumental poem resists the glorification of warfare by revealing its brute ugliness. The presence of Death is the poem's clearest indicator of the futility of war. Although Death was present in the rough copy, he appeared distant or abstract. In the fair copy, however, he joins the poet: "And Death fell with me, like a deepening moan" (25). Death's "deepening moan" echoes the holes in the landscape which Owen described earlier as "deep wounds deepening," which suggests that Death owns the land (25, 15). In the rough copy, Death's single action—his forgiveness—was in the past, something that happened some time ago. In the fair copy, however, Death does not forgive him nor does he express sympathy. Instead, the reaper shows the poet a *monument*: the headless worm which half had hid / Its bruises in the earth, but crawled no further" (26-27). This worm—which seems more like a caterpillar in his description—is Owen's textual anti-monument to the horrors of war, for in these lines he symbolizes himself and the members of his battalion as a severed head with many legs. The fact that they hide their bruises in the earth refers to journalists' lack of accurate coverage of the war and that the worm crawls "no further" references both the deaths suffered by the battalion, as well as the fact that the Great War was largely a static war.³⁴ The rough copy also contains worm imagery, but the connection between the worm-as-symbol and the poet himself is much more detached; Owen's speaker only watches the creature crawling, recognizes the feet as his men, and he sees the head lay rotting by the body. In the fair

³⁴ Puissant 14, 149

copy, however, Death shows Owen the worm as a clear indicator that the worm is a symbol of death's power over himself and the soldiers. Death's role grounds the poet as the orator and owner of his memories rather than some detached, abstract intonation, some anonymous "he." The headless caterpillar can thus be read as the poem's definitive war monument because it denies the glory and decorum that monuments are supposed to represent and instead foregrounds the mutability of monuments and the impossibility of glory.

A war monument can seem powerful and imposing from afar, but all manmade creations bear the scars of their creation and the ravages of time; this is true of Owen's manuscript anti-monuments. The fair copy hides the violence that went into its creation behind a bright, monumental sheen. Monuments, likewise, are typically designed to hide the terror and banalities of warfare behind a glossy sheen of decorum, marble, and bronze. All a viewer sees from a distance is the bright sheen of the obelisk and the statue's glossy bronze, precisely because the finished product hides the girders, mortars, and tools that were used to build the structure, allowing viewers to forget the fact that monuments are both physical and social constructs. Many have noted that "The Show" decries war's brutality and grotesqueries, but the manuscript's materiality also calls attention to the way that monuments gloss over the past by hiding the process that created it. Likewise, the actual facts of the conflict a monument represents are sanitized and distorted by symbolism and decorum. For this reason, "The Show's" manuscripts are anti-monumental insofar as they simultaneously perform monumentality and criticize monuments' complicity in promoting ignorance and bloodshed. Finally, the fair copy's central motif of insurmountable distance, faraway landscapes, and its emphasis on

showing keeps the audience distanced from Owen's true experiences and his individual trauma. The scars and content allow us to see the poet's trauma and recall his past, but to see something is not the same as to live it. The fair copy may gloss over Owen's lived experiences, but the manuscript's scars remind us that trauma cannot be hidden away—it always resurfaces and it is always under revision.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

My reading of Owen's poetry complicates monumental claims to truth and signification. However, ironically, my reading also positions Owen's poetic craft as a precursor for the "anti-monument mood" of English authors in the aftermath of the First World War.³⁵ Owen's acerbic critiques of decorum and his struggles to represent trauma is reflected in the later works of contemporaries such as Robert Graves, Vera Brittain, and David Jones.³⁶ Although Owen was not a modernist, authors such as T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and W. H. Auden used his anti-monumental language to both entrench the horrors of the First World War in the modern consciousness and to investigate the degradation of contemporary society.³⁷ Postmodern poets such as Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney all use anti-monumental language to consider "the relations of those who are vested in a culture's ideology and those who are not, art's capacities and limitations...and the competing pleas of change and persistence, meaninglessness and meaning, the self and society, and the relative and the absolute" (Rotella 14-15). The ugliness of warfare and violence, their effect on the consciousness, and the profound difficulties of artistic representation are all major facets of how we imagine and discuss the Vietnam War, which often draws comparisons to the First World War.³⁸ Lastly, Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy*—

³⁵ I refer here to the trope of the "broken man" ruined by war and forgotten by society, a trope popularized by Pat Barker, Jane Thynne, Richard Burns, and Siegfried Sassoon among others. See Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* and Jay Winter's *Remembering War. The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*.

³⁶ See Graves' *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), and Jones' *In Parenthesis* (1937).

³⁷ See Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and Auden's "The Shield of Achilles" (1952).

³⁸ See Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), Yusef Komunyakaa's "Facing It" (1988) and Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" (1990).

Regeneration (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), and *The Ghost Road* (1995)—reimagines Owen’s experiences in Craiglockhart as a way to investigate the intersection of lived experience and artistic representation. This succinct genealogy of literary successors suggests that readers cannot reckon with modern warfare and traumatic representation without considering the example that Owen left behind. Indeed, Owen’s corpus is a monument that questions the capacity of monumental representation and provides an example for authors who want to discuss war and trauma. Although a mere reader cannot possibly understand a traumatized poet’s experiences, the poet’s corpus can help us to isolate the intersection of memory and monumentality in their craft and content, which in turn can help us to better understand the problems of traumatic recollection and artistic representation.

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