Literary Graves: Archival Remains and Maternal Voices of the First World War

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Abstract

Scholarship on the First World War has traditionally centred on the soldier. Consequently, the mother's perspective has been underexplored. This thesis argues that the image of the maternal figure evoked feelings of honour and shame during the First World War. By using ideological representations of the patriotic or emotional mother within fiction and newspapers, the individual humanity of mothers was obscured. Maternal memoir, as a first-hand account of maternal mourning, provides greater insight into the experience of motherhood, trauma, and bereavement. Combining an analysis of archives, objects, and memoirs, this research advances our understanding of how post-war society grieved during a period of unprecedented loss. This thesis argues that memoir functions like an archive, holding evidence of life while allowing the bereaved to maintain a connection to the deceased. Through creating a substitute corpse from meaningful texts and objects, archives and memoirs preserve a tangible connection to the lost loved one. Focusing on the memoirs of Pamela Glenconner and Marie Leighton, alongside archival objects, this research identifies a pattern of forming substitute bodies which imaginatively return the deceased to the Home Front and attend to the mother's trauma.

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Introduction

This thesis argues that due to the non-return of the soldier's body during the First World War, civilians collected and created objects to form substitute bodies which imaginatively returned individuals to the Home Front. Furthermore, it aims to demonstrate how mothers participated in these processes by creating memoirs for their soldier-sons - a method of evidencing the individual's existence within a culture of mass memorialisation. The core claim is that maternal memoirs function like an archive, holding the symbolic material of the dead and allowing the bereaved to maintain a connection to the departed through the preservation of memories, texts (such as letters or poems), and material objects.

Existing literature regarding death and memorialisation after the First World War has identified the catastrophic cultural wounds left behind by the conflict. For example, Jay Winter has discussed the "cultural consequences" of the mass death and cruelty ushered in during the war.[1] Winter suggests that "Europeans imagined the postwar world as composed of survivors perched on a mountain of corpses".[2] To illustrate this, Winter uses a selection of sources ranging from film, letters, and monuments. The argument of this project aligns with Winter's core claim that there was a desire to "bring the dead home, to put the dead to rest, symbolically or physically".[3] Whilst Winter uses varying accounts of bereavement, he does not provide extensive analysis of the maternal experience specifically. Contrastingly, in her examination of military farewell letters throughout history, Siân Price gestures to the experience of mothers, arguing that the physical letter acted as a connection to the soldier

[1] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 17-18.
[2] Ibid, p. 17.
[3] Ibid, p. 28.

themselves.[4] In touching the page their loved one touched, the recipient was brought closer to them. However, her argument does not extend to how mothers specifically grieved and processed this loss, focusing instead on the soldier's need to say goodbye. Whilst Price's argument for the connection provided in the materiality of letters is pertinent, the breadth of her research (spanning farewell letters throughout military history) and the familiar focus upon primarily the male soldier's experience, does not address in detail the emotional impact upon mothers during the First World War. Joanna Bourke also discusses the male body, particularly the ways in which battlefield corpses invite reconstruction through the memory of their friends and families.[5] Bourke notes that to counteract the putrefaction and indignity of military burial, an emphasis on purification emerged within funeral rites and rituals – identified through the change in rhetoric surrounding cremation, which turned to the language of sanitation during the inter-war years.[6] Bourke's claims are echoed within this project's concern with the creation of substitute bodies which are distanced from the battlefield's horror. The arguments presented by these critics have contributed to the critical discussion surrounding the male body, death, and mourning during and after the First World War. All three critics demonstrate a keen sense of the love and loss experienced during the period: the desire to return the dead, the need to express a final declaration of love, and the desire to restore dignity to the dead with a 'purifying' burial, all demonstrate how love and loss impacted civilians. However, these arguments are predominantly framed through the male body. In doing so, a large sub-section of British society during the First World War has been

[4] Siân Price, *If You're Reading This…: Last Letters from the Front Line* (Yorkshire: Frontline Books, 2011), p. 5.
[5] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1996).
[6] Ibid, p. 223.

underexplored. By analysing the experience of mothers and their grief in this period, this project therefore addresses a gap within First World War research.

Furthermore, critics such as Paul Fussell and Michael Roper have discussed the role of letters within the First World War. Paul Fussell has remarked on the literary nature of the war, examining how letters sent to the Home Front were filled with "British Phlegm" in which soldiers would say 'nothing'.[7] However, his approach has been criticised for its limited focus on British middle-class officers. Addressing this critique, Santanu Das marks that "This bias has been challenged in recent years by the 'second wave' of war criticism" which focused on "interdisciplinarity and diversification of concern".[8] Michael Roper's work on emotional survival during the First World War begins this work of diversification through the examination of emotion and the mother-son relationship.[9] Much of Roper's work dwells on maintaining connection during active service through letters and parcels. However, the communication between mother and son is used primarily to suggest that "Despite their attempts at concealment, we can learn to read the emotions of sons between the lines of letters home".[10] Beyond an acknowledgment that mothers experienced anxiety, there is insufficient depth to Roper's exploration of the mother's emotional landscape. Through a focus on the mother figure, this research addresses the gaps within Fussell's and Roper's work, arguing that Fussell's identification of the literariness of war extends to many mothers on the Home Front in their times of grief. By analysing the memoirs of mothers grieving the death of their sons, we can examine how literary forms functioned as a method of navigating nuanced and

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[7] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 181.
[8] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 10.
[9] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).
[10] Ibid, p. 64.

extreme emotional landscapes, further diversifying Roper's exploration of emotion between mothers and soldiers.

Research on mothers during the First World War tends to feature some recurring themes: the mother's sacrificial role and isolation from her son, anxiety, and caregiving in the guise of letters, packages, and charity work. For example, Ellen Cresswell explores the anxiety of mothers awaiting news of their son, identifying a need to keep busy between letters by engaging in voluntary work.[11] However, anecdotal stories exist in which value is placed on the mother figure, such as Sylvia Townsend Warner's 'My Mother Won the War' (1936).[12] Warner remarks that she has "met any amount of families with the same belief […] The fact that people get the mother wrong does not invalidate the archetypal truth".[13] Through the label of an 'archetypal truth', Warner suggests that despite the mother's identity changing dependent on the teller, the story retains one unwavering 'truth' – mothers were integral to the war effort. Warner's truth is that many mothers won the war through their determination to do best by the soldiers. Yet even in this positive rendition, the mother's victory revolves around the design of a pyjama pattern whilst engaging in charity work with the Red Cross. The mother figure is clearly deeply involved in the war, from the birthing of soldiers-to-be and the sending of provisions, to mourning the casualties. Yet, despite their intimate involvement with the period of conflict, their experience has not been adequately examined. This project aims to address the imbalance of criticism within First World War literature through a pointed focus on the mother figure. To do this, this thesis will explore the role of objects such as personal effects, memoirs, and items damaged by warfare, suggesting that in examining these items a

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[11] Ellen Cresswell, '"Sunday Is the Hardest Day to Bear": Absence and Anxiety of Soldiers' Mothers During the Great War', *Journal of Australian Studies,* 43 (2019), 381-92.
[12] Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Scenes of Childhood: And Other Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981).
[13] Ibid, p. 125.

light is shed on the methods employed by mothers in their mourning processes and expressions of grief. To do this adequately, there are two concepts which require greater explanation before outlining the structure of this thesis: the non-return of the soldier's body, and the role of objects in forming a substitute corpse.

The Non-Return of the Soldier

The First World War resulted in an incomprehensible loss of life. It was a time of frequent, barbaric deaths where many bodies would remain where they had fallen. As a result of the British Government dictating that the soldier's body would remain overseas, burials and funerals on the Home Front were unfeasible and consequently, the experience of mourning was forced to adapt to these new circumstances. The memoirs of concern within this project are products and symbols of grief that form a substitute corpse for the absent body of the deceased. Allyson Booth, in her analysis of how death and the dead body was presented and experienced during the First World War, argues that the civilian population experienced death as "corpselessness".[14] Booth continues to suggest that this condition of corpselessness, strengthened by the censorship of death and corpses, generated artefacts: "official representations of war" such as telegrams, and "those invented by artists and architects" such as the novel and the war memorial.[15] Booth describes how these inventions

[14] Allyson Booth, 'Corpselessness', in *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism & the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 21-49 (p. 21).
[15] Ibid, p. 33.

> [P]ointed toward corpses buried elsewhere, providing proxies for those bodies that were simultaneously absent and present, physically gone but stunningly felt in psychological and emotional terms.[16]

Much like the official documents of telegrams and governmental documents, the collection of objects within archives, and the maternal memoir, form an alternative body over which to mourn. The memoir provides a physical space to locate the loved one whilst performing an act of cleansing – attempting to relieve the mother's grief and trauma by erasing the physical horror of the mud and blood covered body, thus "allowing them to verbalize a disembodied death".[17] This thesis argues that due to the experience of corpselessness, civilians on the Home Front sought alternative modes of mourning in the collection of objects and formation of archives. Furthermore, mothers found comfort in the collection of objects and material related to their lost son, forming these remnants into memoir. In the absence of the physical corpse, these tangible connections to the absent soldier become symbolic, forming a substitute corpse through which the soldier's loved ones could mourn and maintain a connection to the deceased.

The decision of what to do with the soldier's body was widely debated. Whilst many felt that the soldier should return home to receive the appropriate funereal process, this was a "task fraught with difficulty".[18] For many bereaved civilians, the corpse was inaccessible as "British policy dictated that the civilian bereaved would never have anything to bury".[19] The bereaved were left to negotiate how one can grieve a death without the presence of the

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Winter, p. 22.
[19] Booth, p. 21.

deceased. Furthermore, the absence of the soldier's body affected all participating countries. The decision of whether to return the bodies to their homelands was challenging:

> For different reasons, the decision to let the dead rest where they had fallen was taken by all participants. Having lost the war, the Germans were in no position to return to the areas they had occupied and exhume the remains of their fallen soldiers. The Americans were committed to the return of their dead soldiers, but the British ruled it out on grounds of expense and equality. So many men had no known grave that granting the privilege of bringing back only identified bodies would discriminate against about half the population.[20]

In some cases, a "clandestine traffic in bodies" emerged to meet the need to lay their loved ones to rest.[21] Finding a suitable resting place led some to financially compensate those willing to help locate, exhume, and rebury their dead. However, the issue was contentious, and some preferred the idea of leaving their loved one in the place they had fallen. Jay Winter cites a letter by Lady Cecil to illustrate this narrative in his examination of how memorial sites emerged through a need to mourn and come to terms with the reality of loss in the wake of corpselessness. Lady Cecil's letter expresses how she believes her son should remain with his comrades, "asleep in the soil of France, which will become dearer to [her] because [her] child is buried there".[22] The focus on remaining with his comrades creates an attempt to maintain the soldier's service, remaining with their men and watching over the land from the grave. Furthermore, the presence of the soldier's remains makes the soil itself increase in

[20] Winter, p. 27.
[21] Ibid, p. 25.
[22] Ibid.

value. The body transfers symbolic significance to the earth surrounding it, transferring the soldier's bodily sacrifice and the loss it represents into the soil itself. As the corpse decays and returns to the earth, the distinction between body and soil disintegrates and the two become intertwined. Lady Cecil's emotional attachment to the soil which cradles her son shows an impulse to find meaning in the physical objects and remains which both touch and touched the soldier's body. Due to the absent corpse, and the incomprehensible scale of loss, grieving loved ones sought to understand, express, and metaphorically touch their loss through the textual remains and objects that surrounded their beloved. Written texts and the places which preserved them became a physical marker of loss, acting as a substitute for the corpse they yearned to find and the grave they sought in order to memorialise their loss. This process allowed the bereaved to come to terms with their loss in a way that would conventionally be granted by the rituals of burial denied to them.

Corpselessness became subliminally encoded in how a soldier's death was presented in fiction. Exploring how women wrote experiences of war in Germany, Erika Quinn states that "the act of dying or dead bodies themselves were rarely portrayed" as the deaths were not seen by the protagonists or the narrator.[23] In these fictional worlds, Quinn posits that the "presence of a loved one was preserved through the possession of talismanic objects and the curation of sacred spaces", describing the act as a "private act of remembrance, depicted in a public form".[24] These fictional depictions of mourning mirror events in the real world. Family members attempted to create a marker of a lost life through collecting, maintaining, and preserving any physical markers of the deceased's existence. The maintenance of these items

[23] Erika Quinn, 'Writing and Reading Death: German Women's Novels of World War I', in *Women Writing War: From German Colonialism through World War I*, ed. by Katharina von Hammerstein, Barbara Kosta, and Julie Shoults (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), pp. 271-288 (p. 274).
[24] Ibid.

and spaces became a way for the bereaved to occupy their minds and manage their emotions. Ellen Cresswell has explored how mothers developed coping mechanisms to address their sense of longing and anxiety for their children fighting overseas.[25] Aligning with Quinn's identification of fictional mourners finding talismanic objects and sacred spaces, one of the coping mechanisms Cresswell identifies as part of the mother's effort to occupy their minds was the "careful maintenance of a son's room, clothing and treasured belongings [which] made mothers feel more connected to their soldier".[26] These objects take on a symbolic, metaphoric quality. In the absence of the soldier's corpse, the objects which he valued come to stand in for the physical body. They are cared for and cherished by the bereaved, so deeply embedded with the essence of their son, that to neglect them would be to neglect the individual. They preserve, collect, and maintain the objects, caring for their existence as they would care for their child.

Objects of Loss

The term 'object' can become complex due to the overlapping definitions and concepts which it relates to. An object is "a material thing that can be seen and touched", "a person or thing to which a specified action, thought, or feeling is directed", and (philosophically) an object is "a thing which is external to or distinct from the apprehending mind, subject, or self".[27] The objects within this thesis are *things* – a word which appears in all three definitions. In referring to objects, this thesis refers to *things* which our senses can interact with, yet it argues that through this interaction they become the *object* of emotion and thought. We direct our

[25] Cresswell, 'Absence and Anxiety of Soldiers' Mothers during the Great War'.
[26] Ibid, p. 390.
[27] Oxford English Dictionary, 'Object, N', in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2024)<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8291471287>[accessed 7th August 2024].

thoughts and emotions towards and into the object, embedding the thing before us with dual meanings. It is both thing and emotional recipient. When these objects are sentimentally or tragically charged with the weight of death and trauma, the object of loss emerges – a material object which is seen to hold the thought, emotion, and experience of grief.

Borrowing from actor-network-theory, this research suggests that non-human entities have a social role, in which the term 'social' comes to mean "a movement, a displacement, a transformation, a translation, an enrolment".[28] Under this definition, the objects and archives discussed within this thesis become social in their ability to form connections between objects and ideas which would otherwise go unnoticed. By placing maternal memoir alongside objects and archives and in viewing memoirs as object, the object's emotional significance emerges from "an association between entities which are in no way recognisable as being social in the ordinary manner, *except* during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together".[29] In viewing these items in this way, an assemblage is formed from "a concatenation of heterogeneous bodies and phenomena" in which human and non-human entities "are drawn into particular forms of relationality".[30] In these moments of relationality, the social role they play in processes of mourning aligns. In viewing the objects discussed in this project as part of an assemblage and by identifying how corpse, paper, author, and object interact with each other, the agency of these entities in processes of mourning and memorialisation is clarified. They provide a way to return and reanimate the dead through continued connections; a desire which emerges by viewing the disparate phenomena upon

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[28] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 64-65.
[29] Ibid, p. 65.
[30] Sidonie Smith, 'Autobiographical Inscription and the Identity Assemblage ', in *Inscribed Identities: Life Writing as Self-Realization*, ed. by Joan Ramon Resina (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 75-90 (p. 77).

which this research project focuses, as an assemblage. Furthermore, the memoir itself becomes its own assemblage in which objects come to have agency and effect. Sidonie Smith has examined how "Autobiographical texts themselves might be understood as assemblages of diverse identity ascriptions, claims, and relationships".[31] Not only can we view the collection of material within this thesis as an assemblage of grief and loss, but we can view the individual memoirs themselves as products of assemblage. Following Smith's claim, the act of placing material together within the memoir is an act of creating social meaning and identity. By incorporating memories and reproductions of personal items or letters, the memoir becomes an assemblage which is deeply rooted in the identity of the lost son. The process of creating this assemblage enables the production of a symbolic body through the affective quality of the material – in placing these entities together, an identity is formed, and a connection sustained. It suggests that when such memoirs are viewed through a lens which argues that matter '*matters'*, then the substitute corpse, and the maternal voice which formed it, may begin to emerge. This research project argues that the items and memoirs discussed perform a social role, facilitating mourning in a society from which the dead body was markedly absent.

Objects connected to the soldier, ranging from the textual to the material, are susceptible to both physical and emotional interactions. The setting in which the object has dwelled or been created has as much of an effect upon the materiality of the object as the emotion which drives the hands that touch it. A smear of ink, dirt, or water all attest to the lived experience of the soldier, pulling the thread between the Home Front and the world of the trench closer together – we can see and touch some of the actual environment where the soldier lived, an experience that would be otherwise inaccessible. Due to how objects pull

[31] Ibid, p. 76.

these two worlds together, they hold a prominent place in processes of grief. Erika Quinn states that "mourning is conducted alone, and often without words: […] through contact with familiar objects and spaces".[32] The familiarity of the objects holds particular importance. Everyday objects which came into frequent contact with the individual hold a heightened sense of emotional and sentimental value. Memory imparts images of the object in use and in proximity with the deceased, creating an illusion of continued connection, as though the object brings the individual back into the physical space as they hold, manipulate, and use the objects of their daily lives. The history and frequency of interaction with these everyday objects aids in the production of meaning. Sara Ahmed argues for affect theory, in which objects take on a 'stickiness' through their circulation, each interaction or impression upon an object increasing the "affective value" it holds.[33] Ahmed claims that "Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs […] the more signs circulate, the more affective they become".[34] The stickiness of the object emerges through the impressions made by those who interact with it, becoming "saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension".[35] In picking up and holding the item, we both effect and are affected by the material we hold. For the items associated with soldiering, the interactions and 'stickiness' are enhanced by the unavoidably visceral elements entrenched upon the item. Mud, water, dust, rust – these elements physically and psychologically stick to the artefacts of the soldier. Even when the soldier is not physically there, a psychic trace resides. In some letters the soldier may recount a tale of mud, food, or blood, and the psychic trace is imparted onto the paper itself and thus through to the reader. Ahmed focuses on how

[32] Quinn, p. 278.
[33] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 45.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, p. 11.

"words for feeling, and objects of feeling, circulate and generate effects: how they move, stick, and slide".[36] In telling the story of their existence, or holding their existence in the essence of their materiality, objects and letters allow emotions to move from the front lines to the Home Front, to stick within the fabric and persist for the reader, viewer, or future generation to witness and thus memorialise the memory of the individual or event. Throughout this thesis, the 'stickiness' or 'sticky' quality of items will be used to discuss these traces of emotion and the impact they have.

Similarly, Jane Bennett describes 'Thing-Power' as "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle".[37] Discussing the nature of material and 'matter', Bennett argues for vital materialism, suggesting that "If matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated".[38] One of the benefits of this approach for Bennett is an ethical stance, for if all matter is elevated in status then value is distributed "more generously, to bodies as such", providing a new way of viewing entities who "do not conform to a particular […] model of personhood".[39] Consequently, the matter which makes up human beings and the world around us take on equal importance – stress is placed upon the belief that "all bodies are kin […] enmeshed in a dense network of relations […] in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself".[40] The application of Thing-Power and vital materialism to the nature and value of bodies (both human and non-human) provides a way to discuss the interrelatedness of human

[36] Ibid, p. 14.
[37] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 6.
[38] Ibid, p. 13.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

and non-human bodies. Within the assemblage of loss found within this thesis, objects, memoir, archive, and human all have importance within the mourning process, and thus they all possess the capacity to create and transfer emotion (or stickiness) between bodies.

Combining this view with Sara Ahmed's concept of stickiness, the ability of objects to impress and be pressed upon, to take on and transfer meaning, emotion, and significance, allows us to consider what takes place between the matter in objects.[41] By enmeshing these objects together within a network, or assemblage, do these items leave traces of their interactions with other objects? If one were to repeatedly sit in a chair to the point that the cushions began to fade, the chair would retain the impression created by the body. It would retain this impression even if it were moved into another room with a different purpose. Despite its new role, the impression made previously remains – altering the matter which forms the object. Consequently, 'Thing-Power' and the knitting together of objects within a network allows a transference of meaning and significance between each part of the assemblage, enabling non-human bodies such as the maternal memoir to become receptive to imprints, sticky with both new and residual meanings. The maternal memoir can cause effects through its 'Thing-Power' and the rich emotional and symbolic meanings impressed upon it. By weaving sentimental objects into the material of the memoir such as handwritten poems or descriptions of childhood toys, the materiality of the text is enriched with these additional objects' meanings and emotional significances. Each page and image contributing to the overall impression of the object. In interacting with the memoir, we participate in the affective work and aid in the realisation of the memoir's emotional aims – to return and preserve the memory of the loved one through the transference of their impression and presence. The act

[41] Ahmed, p. 45.

of reading and touching the material text is an act of remembrance in which the memory of the deceased is reimagined and called forth to impress upon us once again.

Many items within the Imperial War Museum (IWM) are familiar items – items which retain their stickiness. For example, the IWM currently holds the personal artefacts belonging to Albert Tattersall, such as a tin containing his cigarettes (Figure 1), which were returned by the military and kept by his family after his death.[42] Cigarettes were issued as part of the standard rations given to soldiers and they were a "familiar pleasure that helped calm the nerves and boost morale", giving them a valuable status in the soldier's life.[43] Therefore, Tattersall's cigarette case potentially held immense psychological value to him as a means of bringing emotional calm and morale in physically and mentally difficult situations, becoming 'sticky' with emotion and the experience of the trenches. As Tattersall held the item, he impressed upon it not only the remnants of his touch and any dirt which lingered on his hands, but also his emotions. Cared for within the archives, the physical item stays unaffected – the contents and appearance unchanged apart from the physical markers of time. The tin is rusty, covered in small patches of corrosion. Yet eighteen cigarettes remain in the pack as though they had only just left Tattersall's pocket, ready for their next impression.

[42] London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, 'Tin, Containing Cigarettes', EPH 9795.
[43] Imperial War Museum, *Life at the front in 14 objects* (No date) <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/life-at-the-front-in-14-objects>[accessed 30th October 2023].

Figure 1 'Tin, Containing Cigarettes' © IWM (EPH 9795)

According to the IWM's description of the item, Tattersall's belongings were kept "lovingly as a symbol of their son's service".[44] This short phrase encapsulates another way in which objects became meaningful or were given new meanings during and after the First World War. The symbolic weight of objects from the front resonates with the notion of 'stickiness' suggested by Ahmed. Whilst Ahmed argues that the circulation and interaction with the object adds to the emotional affect of the item's materiality, objects can also become meaningful through the memories and symbolic attachments *to* the item in the form of memory and emotional, psychological connection. These perceptions create symbolic meaning, rather than the object itself retaining the meaning in or upon its materiality.

The absence of the physical body increased the need of the bereaved to find a connection to their deceased to aid the grieving process. The need for closure and to find

[44] Imperial War Museum, *Tin, containing cigarettes* (No date) <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30089553>[Accessed 30th October 2023].

traces of their loss gave rise to the impulse to materialise their grief. In doing so, objects became signifiers of the dead body and saturated with symbolism. In this view, Tattersall's cigarettes become a material representation of his physical body, symbolising his daily life and experience opposed to the object being sticky with the emotions Tattersall felt and imparted upon them with every touch and use. These theories about how meaning is made of and through objects intersect at one unique point - the attempt to find meaning in loss and grief when burials on the Home Front are denied. Both theories enact an attempt to find meaning in the otherwise meaningless, and in the case of the First World War, they allow us to understand the unexpected ways in which loved ones attempted to return the soldier to the Home Front.

Thesis Outline

Mothers, and their voicing of grief, are of crucial importance to this thesis. Chapter One, 'The Mother in First World War Narratives', examines how the mother figure is presented within fictional and non-fictional texts of the period. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the necessity of this research, suggesting that by examining existing presentations of mothers in isolation, rather than alongside objects such as memoir and personal artefacts, we cannot access the depth of the mother's emotional and psychological experience. It argues that the power of the maternal influence was recognised by governments, journalists, and propagandists during the period of the First World War and was consequently implemented to stir up emotion and action – encouraging recruitment and patriotism through evoking feelings of shame and honour. Simultaneously, these presentations belittled the maternal experience in favour of the 'more authentic' soldier's narrative. Representations of motherhood which provide an insight to the complex emotions of grief, pride, and love are challenging to find

within narratives written *about* mothers. Instead, we must seek a more intimate connection to the mother than those found within fiction and newspapers. This thesis argues that this connection can be sought in maternal memoir, the ultimate expression of the mother's motherhood and connection to the lost soldier-son, which will form the basis of Chapter Three.

Chapter Two, 'Objects and the Archive', explores how the archive can be viewed as a grave – a location in which we can find the deceased, allowing us to bring the dead into the present by connecting with the past. In collecting meaningful objects, the past and thus the individual is memorialised. Much like the maternal memoir, the archive is a site of connection to the deceased. This chapter aims to articulate the theories which underpin the archive, and how these theories reveal society's impulse to memorialise the past, suggesting that the archive and the maternal memoir have shared concerns in relation to memory and connection with the deceased. The need to bring the dead into the present through remembering and preserving the social body reflects the continuing bonds model of grief in which rather than severing all bonds with the dead to allow the bereaved to move forward in life, the bereaved instead "maintain a presence and connection with the deceased".[45] In collecting and storing meaningful objects, the bereaved create their own objects of loss in which they impress upon the material the weight of the life lost – forming a substitute corpse which allows for the presence of the individual to remain after death.

Throughout Chapter Three, 'Maternal Memoir: Mourning, Memorialisation, and Material Monument', an argument will be made that mothers create memoirs to imaginatively return their son to the Home Front and, in doing so, to confront their grief. This thesis will

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[45] *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief,* ed. by Dennis Klass, Steven L. Nickman, and Phyllis R. Silverman (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), p. 3.

focus on two maternal memoirs in particular: Marie Leighton's *Boy of My Heart* (1916),[46] and Pamela Glenconner's *Edward Wyndham Tennant: A Memoir by His Mother* (1919).[47] In forming these objects of grief, a connection to the deceased akin to that found within archives emerges. Therefore, like objects, these memoirs can be read as a symbolic form which substitutes the absent corpse, at once body and grave. By creating memoir, the mothers once again create and form the life of their son and reinstate their existence in the world. In interacting with the material of memoir, and the son's own writings which have been added to the fabric of the text, we witness what Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey have described as a destabilisation of "subject/object boundaries".[48] Discussing how "the social lives of persons might persist beyond biological death", Hallam and Hockey suggest that "Social interaction with and through material forms" leads to a destabilisation in which "material objects can become extensions of the body and therefore of personhood".[49] Maternal authors craft a personalised material environment which enables them to begin to process the trauma of their loss, whilst maintaining a connection to the deceased through the memoir as substitute body. However, the narration and processing of their loss may not always be successful, as the pain of their bereavement pushes at the boundaries of memoir and resists or challenges narration. Consequently, maternal authors must distance themselves through their narrative structuring and voice. Whilst the text continues to exist as both text and body, the efficacy of mourning and processing their grief can still be called into question. This chapter aims to evidence these claims, and to explore how mothers voiced and experienced loss.

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[46] Marie Leighton, *Boy of My Heart* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916).
[47] Pamela Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant: A Memoir by His Mother* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1919).
[48] Elizabeth Hallam, and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), p. 43.
[49] Ibid.

Both Leighton and Glenconner share a similar social and economic status. Consequently, the experiences and methods enacted by these families within their mourning rituals will naturally reflect the resources they had available. Pamela Glenconner, bearing the title of Lady Glenconner at the time of writing her memoir, was positioned within the aristocracy. Leighton, on the other hand, existed within the middle and upper classes through her success as a serial writer of melodramatic novels; a career which took a financial toll during the war.[50] However, despite their similar contexts and experiences of loss, the texts display vastly different perspectives on grief. Roland Leighton died of wounds on 23rd December 1915.[51] Edward Wyndham Tennant (affectionately known as Bim) died on 22nd September 1916, just under a year later.[52] Vera Brittain records how Marie Leighton began writing *Boy of My Heart* only "Two or three weeks after Roland's death", finishing the work "in three months".[53] Contrastingly, Glenconner's memoir was not published until 1919 – providing the space of several years between the news of Edward's death and the publication of the text. The differences in the publication history of these texts results in a core distinction. Whilst Leighton is writing in the immediacy of her grief, Glenconner is writing after a period of mourning. This results in two different styles of narration – Leighton's narrator dwells on memories and remains ignorant of her son's death, whilst Glenconner's narrator is informed from the outset. Both authors avoid death; Leighton cannot exist in the present with the knowledge that her son is no longer with her and so escapes from that present in memory, whereas Glenconner cannot imagine the future without her son – resulting in the

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[50] Bridget Clarke, 'Marie Leighton and Her Family in Abbey Road before World War 1', St John's Wood Memories, (2012) <https://www.stjohnswoodmemories.org.uk/content/arts/literature-writers/marie_leighton_and_her_family_in_abbey_road_before_world_war_1>[accessed 7th June 2024] (para. 5 of 8).
[51] Imperial War Museum, 'Life Story: Roland Aubrey Leighton' (No Date) <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk/lifestory/2630086>[Accessed 29th July 2024].
[52] Glenconner, p. viii.
[53] Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Virago Press, 2018), p. 224.

removal of her narrative voice after we reach the retelling of Edward's death. Therefore, whilst these memoirs are products of authors from similar backgrounds, they have different narrative styles and are intriguingly at odds in their navigation of trauma and grief. By comparing these texts, a greater understanding of the grief and trauma experienced by mothers than those offered within the fictional and non-fictional accounts explored in Chapter One is established, offering a valuable insight into the maternal experience of loss which has been comparatively underexplored within First World War research.

To conclude, this thesis aims to demonstrate how variously the bereaved attempted to return the deceased to the Home Front, with particular focus on the maternal experience and voice. Adopting a comparatively under-explored perspective, this project argues that our understanding of grief and loss within the context of post-war Britain can be enriched through the examination of the maternal voice. By investigating the assemblage of loss (archives, objects, and maternal memoir), a deep desire to maintain a connection to the deceased and to memorialise individual existence is unveiled. In doing so, the individual can live beyond the decay of the physical body – housed within the substitute corpses and graves of society's own creation.

Chapter One: The Mother in First World War Narratives

This chapter will set out how representations of mothers during the period of the First World War rely on ideologies such as the emotional and silent woman to further agendas of recruitment and patriotism by evoking feelings of honour and shame. Furthermore, negative presentations of mothers emphasise the lack of understanding and distance mothers had from the reality of war experienced by soldiers. In doing this, the experience of the mother figure is overlooked by modern-day critics in favour of combatant narratives. This chapter aims to demonstrate the necessity for this research's intervention, suggesting that without an approach which includes objects within the research design, scholarship cannot do justice to the mother's emotional and psychological experience of loss. By relying on accounts of motherhood in isolation, our ability to grasp the complexity of the mother's grief is limited. Whilst accounts of motherhood are not wholly unrepresentative – there were indeed mothers eager to sacrifice their sons, mothers willing to encourage enlistment, and mothers who felt their losses deeply – representations of mothers lean heavily on these ideas to create emotive responses which perpetuated underlying ideologies. In articles from the time which depict real events, the language and selection of material obscures the individuality of the mother, encouraging us to view the mother's depiction uncritically. Consequently, to engage in critical readings of the mother's experience, we must look to the writing and accounts provided directly by mothers – we must listen to the maternal voice. This chapter will provide a close reading of narratives produced about mothers within First World War-era newspapers and fiction, arguing that they categorise the maternal figure as emotional and isolated, sacrificial, or patriotic and proud. In portraying mothers in this way, the complexities of grief and trauma experienced by mothers during the First World War are obscured and the ability to conceptualise how their experiences of loss were navigated becomes limited. In examining

archival material and maternal memoir, we allow the mother to come forward and articulate this herself. Each section of this chapter will present an ideological representation of the maternal figure, suggesting the advantages which may have underpinned such a representation, and questioning the possible effects of this.

The Emotional and Isolated Mother

It is an established stereotype that "Emotionality is typically associated with women; […] In particular, the emotions of happiness, sadness, and fear are believed to be more characteristic of women".[54] Historically, there has been an underlying ideology which connects emotionality to femininity, judging extreme expressions of emotion as examples of hysteria and irrationality. Whilst there has been increased focus on gender studies within the First World War by critics such as Susan R. Grayzel, attitudes towards gender roles during the conflict perpetuated traditional patriarchal structures. However, views regarding the mobilisation of women in the workforce, particularly those stepping into previously male dominated spaces such as ammunitions work, "challenged a powerful gendered taboo […] participating in the culture of death instead of performing their 'natural' roles as givers of life".[55] Consequently, "the female worker […] became emblematic of […] the alleged transformation of gender roles and even identities".[56] Despite this initial subversion of gender roles, the values and priorities of house and home continued to adhere to the traditional family model, evidenced by governmental initiatives such as separation allowances which were put in place "to

[54] Sarah L. Hutson-Comeaux, and Janice R. Kelly, 'Gender Stereotypes of Emotional Reactions: How We Judge an Emotion as Valid', *Sex roles,* 47 (2002), 1-10 (p. 1).
[55] Susan R. Grayzel, 'Women and Men', in *A Companion to World War I*, ed. by John Horne (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), pp. 263-78 (p. 267).
[56] Ibid.

compensate for the loss of earnings of mobilized husbands and fathers, a measure demanded by the men themselves in recognition of their continued status as family breadwinners".[57] Grayzel comments on how recruitment tactics also depended upon traditional views of masculinity to emasculate those not in uniform – connecting enlistment and fighting with virility and desire.[58] The period of the First World War therefore saw a conflicting approach to gender roles; on the one hand, ideologies were challenged through the mobilization of women, yet traditional perspectives of gender were simultaneously reinforced through recruitment tactics such as posters which reinforced the role of wives in supporting their men. Ideas about female emotion and male strength were used to inspire action – where these traits were found to be lacking in one, and too extreme in the other, they were belittled and othered to inspire patriotic acts of bravery.

In many newspaper articles, mothers are not presented as their own individual person. Instead, they are often presented as the object of the sentence, acted upon rather than in control of the action. Their stories are told through their connections to men at the front, as without these connections the story would lack public interest. Extra details are often provided about the soldier-sons such as how often they write, or when they enlisted. This interest in detail and character does not extend to the mother, even when the narrative is foregrounded as their own. Not only are their stories re-allocated to the men in their lives, but the presentations of women remaining at home and pining after their loved ones return to ideological presentations of the overtly emotional woman. The highly emotive nature of their distress is frequently told through narratives in which they feel they have no option but to plead for help or to undertake acts of desperation such as suicide - as was the case for Emma

[57] Ibid, p. 267.
[58] Ibid, p. 264.

Cook after learning of her son's injuries.[59] These mothers are often depicted as weak and vulnerable on either a physical, mental, or emotional level. In some cases, these perceived weaknesses lead to isolation or marginalisation in which the mother is left behind or placed to the side.

Published in the *Hull Daily Mail*, an article titled 'Lord Allenby Visits His Mother' describes the celebrations held for Lord Allenby's return home.[60] The narrative is factual (the events have happened, and his mother is indeed frail), but the article unconsciously adds to gendered subject positions in wartime through the focus on Mrs Allenby's fragility in comparison to her son's heroic strength. The construction of the title immediately places the mother as an inactive participant. The possessive pronoun presents the mother as an object whilst the son remains the named subject of attention. In contrast to her son's heroism, Mrs Allenby is depicted as frail and weak:

> Mrs Allenby is 86 years of age, active in mind but infirm in body, and yesterday it was her great regret, as she was wheeled in her chair to the front door of the house, that she was unable to go to the station to embrace her soldier-son. In patience she waited at home, while the residents and thousands of visitors thronged round her hero, cheering him and welcoming him with enthusiastic scenes.[61]

Mrs Allenby's description does not add to the story of her sons return but sets out to emphasise her fragility and status as an elderly woman. The additional detail of her being "infirm in body", whilst accurate of her physical state, is unnecessary to our understanding of

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[59] 'Suicide of a Wounded Soldier's Mother', *Hull Daily Mail*, 09/11/1915, p. 6.
[60] 'Lord Allenby Visits His Mother', *Hull Daily Mail*, 19/09/1919, p.8.
[61] Ibid.

the situation. Instead, it evokes an image of a sickly elderly woman restricted to the family home, subtly urging the reader to view her in this light. The symbolism of the mother figure being restricted to the threshold of the family home whilst her "hero" son is greeted by the masses emphasises the isolation and distance in the maternal experience of war in comparison to those of combatants. Furthermore, her isolation and fragility are heightened by the juxtaposition of her son's arrival in Felixstowe. The magnitude of Lord Allenby's arrival, with "thousands of visitors thronged round" forms an impression of his importance and the town's anticipation for his return – whilst his mother remains sat in a wheelchair at her front door, isolated and patient, comparatively alone. Whilst a factual report of events, the portrayal of these individuals adheres to an ideological framework in which the mother is restricted to the home and her fragility, distanced from the core of the story to enhance the focus upon the heroic and brave soldier-son. The entire article, centred on Lord Allenby's visit to his mother, does not contain a single piece of dialogue from Mrs Allenby. Her actions and feelings are reported, her distance emphasised, her isolation clear.

Whilst physical isolation from the soldier-son was commonplace during the First World War, the separation felt by mothers led some to desperate measures to keep their beloved as close as possible. In one case, a letter was written to Queen Mary, beseeching her to spare a mother's final son.[62] Once again, the reader sees a narrative in which the truth of the event is clear – the mother is undeniably consumed by grief, but in the presentation of the events the modern reader must question the underlying, unconscious work of the article. The "grief-stricken mother" remains nameless until the last sentence, her grief told only by the description of her letter.[63] Her son's name is featured before her own, placing his story in a

[62] 'The Queen Intervenes for a Bereaved Mother', *Hull Daily Mail*, 25/10/1915, p. 3.
[63] Ibid.

place of higher narrative authority than his mother's, who is listed at the end of the article as Mrs Payne.[64] Described as a "pathetic appeal", Mrs Payne's pathos-laden letter articulates her loss; three of her four sons had already been killed during the war, with only the youngest son remaining.[65] Labelling the mother's request as 'pathetic' suggests that the written appeal displays clear vulnerability and an attempt to gain pity. Having experienced the loss of a son three times over, Mrs Payne has done the only thing she can think of to try and save her final boy. Her choice to write to the Queen, another mother who may be able to comprehend the unimaginable pain of losing a child, displays a need for empathy and intervention from a higher power. Buckingham Palace replied that "The Queen deeply sympathise[d]" with the mother's loss, and this sympathy translated into an act of benevolent pity.[66] Thankfully, Mrs Payne's request was heard, and her final son was transferred to Home Service. By writing to the Queen and appealing to her emotion, Mrs Payne has successfully saved her final son. Whilst this is a noble act of love, the story is reported through the lens of grief and pathos – we are to visualise this mother as vulnerable, emotive, and overwhelmed by grief. Instead of commending her bravery, the reader pities her situation. However, through this narrative, the writer presents the image of benevolent royalty. The Queen understood and sympathised with the loss and suffering of the mother, encouraging the readers of 1915 to admire the generosity of the Queen in sparing Mrs Payne's final son. In presenting Mrs Payne's emotional distress, we are not provided with an insight into the experience of a scared mother's grief, but into the benevolence of a wise ruler. The mother's pain resides in the letter addressed to the Queen, which was not published alongside the Queen's benevolence, thus obstructing our understanding of the emotional mother's plight. If the mother's letter and voice was printed

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

alongside the Queen's, readers of the time could witness her loss more acutely, but this is not viewed with the same importance as the Queen's benevolence. Consequently, whilst the events and emotions portrayed are factual, the mother's voice is once again obscured in favour of what is perceived by media outlets to be the more palatable narrative for the British public. It is not the mother's grief which will increase morale and patriotism, but the Queen's benevolence and generosity.

Both Mrs Allenby and Mrs Payne's stories are told through their filial relationships and the language of suffering to portray the women as emotional, distressed, and fragile. Mrs Payne is "grief-stricken," and Mrs Allenby is "infirm in body". They are primarily identified and described through their fragility, rather than the love they hold for their sons. Through the unconscious silencing and distancing of the mother in these accounts, the figure of most 'interest' can step into focus whilst the emotional and isolated mother is acknowledged but removed. By distancing the maternal figure, the reader cannot dwell on their suffering and the space to question the impact of the war is significantly reduced. Instead, they focus on the achievements and duty of the foregrounded characters – the sons and the Queen. The illusion of the maternal voice within these articles – present but obscured – encourages readers of the time to view the narratives uncritically.

Much like the women in these articles, mothers within wartime and post-war fiction are often presented as unstable both emotionally and psychologically. Their grief, and their response to grief, 'others' them in relation to each protagonist and their view of the events which transpire. A further example of this can be found in the well-known work by Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That*.[67] Graves writes of a visit to a recently wounded friend's house

[67] Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That* (London: Penguin Books, 2014).

in Kent. The wounded friend's "elder brother had been killed in the Dardanelles", and Graves enters a home in mourning.[68] After the elder brother's death, "his mother kept his bedroom exactly as he had left it," including ensuring that the bed linens were fresh and that there were "flowers and cigarettes by his bedside".[69] The room is kept in a condition akin to a shrine, completely untouched by dust and time, as if her eldest son would return home and walk into his bedroom at any minute. This behaviour is a common trope within First World War writings of bereavement, the image of an empty but maintained bedroom appearing in many different kinds of text. For example, in Virginia Woolf's modernist novel *Jacob's Room* (1922) we end with the image of Jacob's bedroom preserved in the state he left it.[70] Likewise, in Marie Leighton's memoir for her son, the author immaculately preserves and revisits Roland's bedroom.[71] The bedroom, as a private and personal space, has an intimate connection with the soldier – caring for the bedroom is a way to care for the soldier-son across the seas, or indeed within the afterlife. This observation by Graves identifies a common experience, but this is not the only experience of the mother's grief that was witnessed on this occasion. During the night Graves reports noises such as rapping and shrieks, even bumping into the mother in the middle of the night as he went to investigate the noise. The mother apologises, providing the explanation that "One of the maids has hysterics".[72] However, when Graves confronts his friend the next morning and compares his evening to being worse than France, his friend explains the events:

> I'm sorry. I should have told you. My mother has been reading Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond or Life after Death,* and she sits up half the

[68] Ibid, p. 289.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, ed. by Sue Roe (London: Penguin Books, 1992).
[71] Leighton, *Boy of My Heart*.
[72] Graves, p. 290.

> night trying to get in touch with my brother. It's pathetic, because he was not at all the person she thinks he was. The idiotic messages that she gets through from him, and believes, often make me anxious for her sanity.[73]

In this brief explanation of a mother's deeply felt grief, the son provides insight into two things: the extent of his mother's grief, and his perception of her mental and emotional stability. The presentation of both adheres to the thematic concerns which have emerged thus far – when faced with grief, women turn emotional and unstable individuals who seek comfort through actions which others perceive to be irrational or 'pathetic'. Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond or Life and Death* (1916) is a memoir and testimony aiming to provide evidence for the existence of life after death and the ability to communicate with the deceased.[74] Lodge records transcripts, observations, and testimony as evidence of successful mediumship and communication with the deceased, in particular his son, Raymond. The mother's fascination with this book implies an innate desire to re-establish a connection to her deceased son, and by acting on these practices her living son views her as unstable and deranged. She is accused of not knowing her deceased son at all, as her desperation to hear from her lost son distorts her understanding of the messages which she believes she has received. By preserving the items in the bedroom and attempting to reach out through mediumship or spiritual exercises, the mother's experience of grief is expressed through the participation in rituals which are looked down on by the soldiers staying in her home. Graves finds the events disturbing and uncomfortable, and the whole account is written with a tone of disbelief and derision. Through the living soldier-son and narrator's lack of empathy and understanding in their

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Sir Oliver J. Lodge, *Raymond or Life and Death: With Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection after Death* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1916).

portrayal of the mother's grief, we are encouraged to view her actions as similarly delusional and disturbed. In doing so, Graves' narration isolates the mother from both her household and the readers – her emotions and grief have gone too far, and she no longer has a clear and stable grip on reality. Her attempts to hold onto her deceased son's presence are portrayed as being devoid of sanity and nonsensical as she does not *truly know* him; in the reader's inability to access the mother's perspective, we are left to trust the word of the soldiers. To truly understand the nuances of her grief and thus her actions the maternal voice is essential – in her inability to express and explain her grief, her attempts to find comfort and ease her grief are ridiculed. Once again, the mother is distanced from perceptions of 'natural' grieving to marginalise her experience as being unimportant in comparison with the firsthand knowledge and opinions of death and war held by combatants.

These selected texts and articles represent one way in which mothers were stereotyped in writing produced during and after the First World War. Mother figures were distanced from the war both physically and emotionally. To make the grief felt on the Home Front seem less extreme, mothers were presented as weak and vulnerable to encourage the view that their perspective was unreliable. In the narratives presented above, the mother's grief and body are distanced whilst the soldier is brought to the centre of the story either imaginatively or physically. This adheres to the trends found in the War Books Boom of the 1920s in which many narratives favoured the soldier as writer and narrator. There appears to be an interest and fascination with the soldier's experience of war – "what soldier-writers wrote mattered; people took them and their works very seriously".[75] The soldier's written accounts of war and grief were perceived by post-war readers as having higher value due to the belief that they

[75] Nicolas Beaupré, 'Soldier-Writers and Poets', in *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume 3: Civil Society*, ed. by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 445-74 (p. 471).

held greater authenticity and depth of connection to the conflict. Mothers grieving on the Home Front, physically apart from the violence and an unreliable witness, therefore have a distorted view of what war 'was' and as such their narratives clouded the need to accurately convey the experience of the indescribable. To show the reality of the conflict to the Home Front, and to arouse anger for the obscene loss of life caused by the First World War, the parent delusional with grief must be made to look unreliable. In silencing the emotional mother, more space for the soldier's perspective is made available and prioritised. Therefore, we must critique and question how authentic these accounts of motherhood are, and the motives which led to their construction.

The Sacrificial Mother

In contrast to the isolated and emotional mother, an alternatively favoured representation is that of the sacrificial mother. This mother willingly gives her son to the war effort to end suffering on a larger scale, often declaring that if all men engaged in active service, the war would be over sooner. The presentation of the sacrificial mother was a strong tool for recruitment, benefiting those who adamantly believed in duty and honour through encouraging young men to enlist, and identifying this as a mother's duty. Alternatively, the sacrificial mother may be presented as putting her own needs aside in the interest of the greater good – either through the acceptance that her son may die, or by sacrificing her own physical and mental health for the sake of another person or cause. For example, a story was reported on the 21st December 1914 in the *Western Times* of a mother in London who physically threw herself down the stairs to rescue her son from his inability to speak after a

traumatic event at the front.[76] Corporal Tucker was "struck dumb" whilst fighting in Ypres, "and for weeks after leaving the trenches he was unable to speak a word".[77] To aid his recovery, his mother planned a "daring ruse to bring back the speech of her soldier son", yet despite this being a story of the mother's success, the narrative is told by "the man concerned" – her son.[78] The soldier-son narrates the event to the reporter, stating that he "heard [his] mother scream", when he reached the bottom of the stairs, he found his "mother, who lay groaning badly".[79] Upon finding her he exclaimed the first words he had been able to express since his injury. The soldier, so concerned for his mother's health and in a stake of shock, broke through the experience that made him mute. When he realised what had happened, he found himself "crying on her breast".[80] He recalled how she "was telling me to have a good cry, as it would do me good. […] I learned that my mother did not slip down the stairs, but had deliberately thrown herself down […] she bruised herself, but might easily have met with serious injury".[81] In her desire to give her son a shock to draw him out of his affliction, the mother took a large risk and sacrificed her physical health. The narrative of the article clearly depicts the mother as heroically saving her son, yet she is not interviewed or given a voice beyond the reported speech provided by the son. Whilst her sacrifice was both an act of love and a saving act, returning her son to fighting condition, the article focuses more on the outcomes of her act than on the bravery and commitment which motivated it. The article concludes with Corporal Tucker's optimistic statement: "My nerves are not yet right, but when they are I hope to get back to the front to do my duty".[82] In risking significant injury, the

[76] 'Mother and Dumb Son', *Western Times,* 21/12/1914, p. 3.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

mother has brought her son closer to the point of returning to active service. The soldier-son will return to the front thanks to the mother's brave act, but the mother remains silent. In the mother's silence, the reader is unable to truly understand her motivations – was she acting out of patriotic interest and love, determined to send her son back to do his duty? Or was she experiencing immense emotional distress at the sight of her son's inability to articulate his thoughts? Whilst her motivations could be both these things, or indeed neither, the driving force behind the mother's sacrifice is inaccessible and thus her individuality and personal motivations are removed. She becomes cast within the ideological role of the self-sacrificing mother determined to save her child. In her act of self-sacrifice, the mother has done her duty.

In contrast to silent tales of motherly sacrifice, some reports do allow the mother to speak and share their experiences. Anonymously printed in *The Times*, 'A Mother' shares an excerpt from her son's most recent letter and relates her experience of watching her sons go to war.[83] The anonymous mother states that she "saw with pride the eagerness" all six of her sons displayed when they "rushed to their posts on sea and land when sudden and dire peril threatened our beloved land".[84] By describing the beginning of the First World War as "sudden and dire peril", the readership of the time are encouraged to admire the bravery of her sons as they quickly run towards the terrifying unprecedented danger.[85] Similarly, we are urged to respect the mother's own sacrifice as her children were quickly swept away to fight and defend their country. She describes the experience of watching them leave, stating that "with all the courage I could muster and a smiling face I bade them God-speed".[86] This account presents a common narrative. Mothers often displayed pride at the way the young

[83] 'Mother and Son', *The Times*, 28/12/1915, p. 9.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

men they raised rushed off to enlist and protect their country; this mother, however, presents this as a bitter-sweet experience. The use of the verb 'muster' within this context conjures images of the military and assembling troops, presenting the mother's need to steady herself and draw up courage in the face of a military operation. Whilst her six sons go off to battle, she is preparing her emotional defences for her own battle on the Home Front. The mother continues to write with patriotic language, yet she veers from stereotypical patriotic remarks about winning the war and beating the enemy, instead focusing on the lessons we should learn and the peace we must find. She "pray[s]" that England "will learn the many things she must learn before this terrible war can end in peace with honour".[87] The rhetoric of peace and learning strays from the traditional language of victory typically used in Western military propaganda, whilst the reference to 'honour' keeps the tone strongly patriotic. Arguably, the undertone of sacrifice and her awareness of potential loss through the war is what alters the tone of this letter to the editor. She states that "a bitterness of despair fills my aching heart, and the sorrow which only we mothers of the Empire can know becomes a sorrow almost past bearing".[88] The evocation of the Empire in her declaration of sorrow both draws on her connection to the Empire through her fighting sons, whilst creating a statement of sorrow which claims to stand for all women with sons at the front. It evokes patriotic imagery yet pairing this with "sorrow past bearing" creates a direct connection between the Empire, the war, and the grief and sorrow being shared by mothers through their sacrificing of their sons. Therefore, this letter to the editor presents the sorrow of sacrificing sons as a shared act of maternal patriotism for the Empire and its greater good. It identifies and accepts the role of sorrow within the war but suggests that this is justified and honourable in the name of peace.

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

In acknowledging the sorrow felt by mothers, this presentation evokes an empathetic response of community feeling – acknowledging the shared pain which they are encouraged to bear for the ultimate victory of peace.

The language of sacrifice for the country's good is echoed in contemporary posters targeted towards women in the aim of encouraging the men in their life to enlist. For example, one poster is addressed 'To the Women of Britain' (Figure 2), using direct address to create a feeling of accountability and guilt.[89] It is implied in the poster that the last remaining barrier to the men in their life enlisting, is the lack of encouragement from the women they love. The poster is riddled with language of guilt, using repeated rhetorical questions to interpellate the reader and draw out an emotive response through an implication of responsibility and blame. Beginning with the popular image of horror and brutality at the time, the poster states with an air of arrogant omniscience that "You have read what the Germans have done in Belgium".[90] Through just the mention of 'Belgium', the British wartime reader will remember accounts of the atrocities in Belgium which were investigated by a committee headed by Lord Bryce in 1914.[91] Despite investigating the diaries of German soldiers, "they do not contain accounts of the sexual-sadistic outrages against women, children, and the aged which feature so heavily in the Belgian accounts", and which ran rampant in the British press.[92] Due to the large scale attention the event gained in the media and with the public, the events in Belgium were frequently referenced as a source of fear within British propaganda regardless of the fact that

[89] London, Imperial War Museum, Posters, 'To the Women of Britain', Art. IWM PST 11675 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30467>[accessed 8th April 2024].
[90] Ibid.
[91] Trevor Wilson, 'Lord Bryce's Investigation into Alleged German Atrocities in Belgium, 1914-15', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 14 (1979), 369-83 (p. 370).
[92] Ibid, p. 372.

"not all tales concerning German atrocities were well-founded".[93] Having evoked the idea of their own kind being slaughtered, the women of Britain continue to read a series of questions:

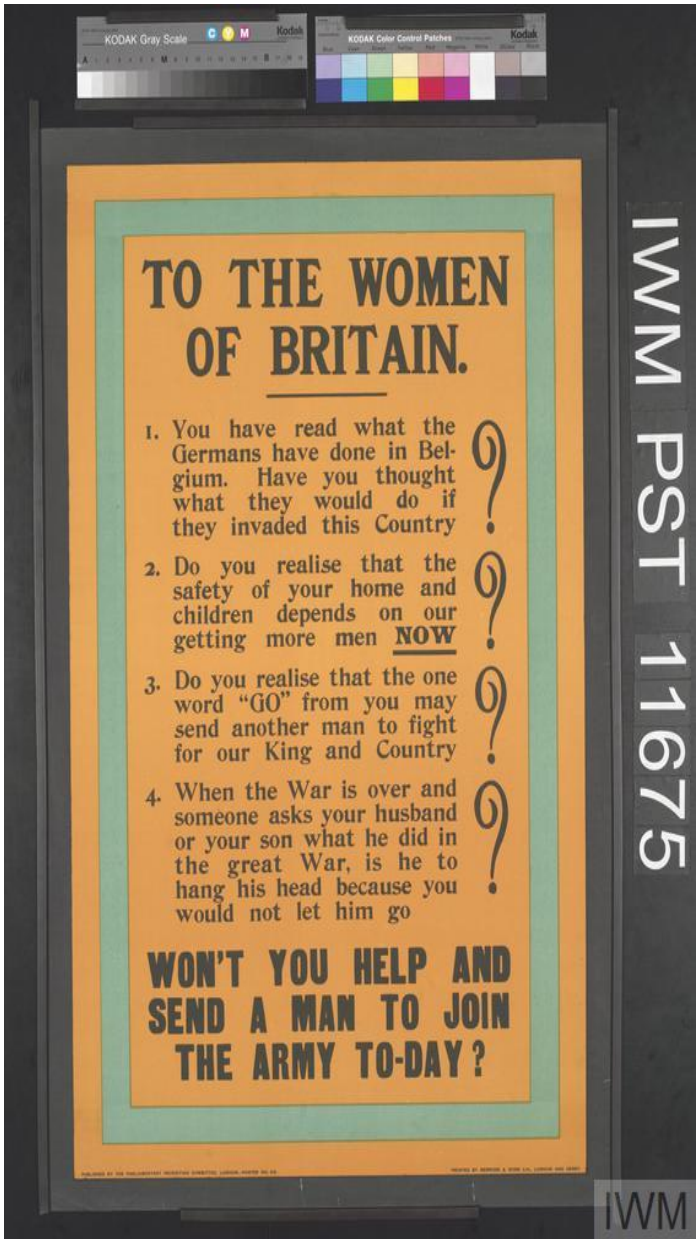

Figure 2 'To the Women of Britain' © IWM (Art.IWM PST 11675)

The first two questions develop the emotional response, building the atmosphere of urgency and fear, whilst the third and fourth question begin to build the feeling of responsibility in the reader. The accusatory and inquisitive phrase "Do you realise" implies that there is an obvious

[93] Ibid, p. 373.

and simple solution waiting in the hands (or mouths) of the women – "the one word 'GO'".[94] The fourth question implicitly calls forward wives and mothers through the evocation of husbands and sons, encouraging the wife and mother to consider the role they may be playing in the potential shame the men in their lives may hold in future should they not enlist: "When the War is over and someone asks your husband or your son what he did in the great War, is he to hang his head because you would not let him go?".[95] The wife and mother are implicitly asked to consider the role they are playing in 'holding back' their men, placing all responsibility upon the women and suggesting that they are impeding the war effort. As such, they are being asked to make a sacrifice. They must send their men away and say goodbye to their husbands and sons in the interest of others. In placing a burden of responsibility upon the women of Britain to prevent any replication of Belgium's events in Britain, the fear of women is used to encourage greater enlistment. The guilt of potentially holding back a son or husband from their manly duty is weaponised to increase recruitment numbers through employing common female figures within the home (wives, sisters, and mothers) in the recruitment initiative. Women are again used as a tool for recruitment; their emotional experience of sending their loved ones to the front remains unacknowledged in the interest of a greater good.

In her diary entry from 27th August 1914, Käthe Kollwitz (originating from East Prussia before moving to study art in Berlin and Munich) questions the attitude towards sending sons off to war and the parental willingness to offer this sacrifice.[96] Her nationality

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[94] London, Imperial War Museum, Posters, 'To the Women of Britain', Art. IWM PST 11675 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30467>[accessed 8th April 2024].
[95] Ibid.
[96] Käthe Kollwitz, 'Letters and Diary Entries', in *Women's Writing on the First World War*, eds. Agnés Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 123-124.

suggests that the perception of sacrifice was not limited to Britain but felt across the seas. Kollwitz references Gabriele Reuter, stating that:

> She speaks of the orgasmic aspect of sacrifice. It is an expression which bothers me a great deal. How do all these women, who have spent their lives praying over the well-being of those they love, find the strength to send them off to face the cannons? I fear that after this great initial soaring of the spirit deepest despair and despondency must surely follow.[97]

Commenting on the clear sense of patriotism felt by many civilians at the beginning of the conflict, Kollwitz questions the willingness mothers had to sacrifice their sons, drawing attention to the possibility of a large emotional aftermath. The expression Kollwitz connects to Reuter, "the orgasmic aspect of sacrifice", has an emotive effect on her.[98] The connotations of the word 'orgasmic' render the act of sacrificing a child in aid of the war as something which brings about an intense feeling of pleasure, excitement, and satisfaction. The thought of willingly surrendering her child, and finding immense pleasure in the act, is inaccessible for Kollwitz. She questions how "all these women" find such "strength" to send them off to "face the cannons" having previously made every effort to save their lives and ensure their safety. This short extract suggests a divide in maternal opinion regarding the act of sacrifice – a sacrifice which was evidently being questioned and taking place internationally. Whilst some women viewed the sending of their young to fight as a morally right and patriotic act, others such as Kollwitz can only imagine the "deepest despair" which must surely follow the act.[99]

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[97] Ibid, p. 124.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

Yet the need to participate in the war effort, and to allow children to participate, is felt deeply as Kollwitz's own son dies fighting at the front. Her only comfort being that "He did not suffer much […] he was taken so painlessly before the dreadful massacre even began".[100]

Kollwitz visualises the impact of this sacrifice; she conceptualises March as "the month of youth, meant for young men who wanted to live and who now lie dead".[101] The months of the year act as an ever-present reminder of the desire to live being stripped away from the youth of today and forces her to confront the robbing of their vitality. Symbolised through transformation and new life as the beginning of spring, March is placed in uncomfortable juxtaposition against the dead bodies of youth. These enthusiastic and vibrant young lives are now lying cold and dead in part due to the sacrifices being made by the eager mothers she comments on. War ebbs at the edges of her thoughts. Having a son herself of fighting age, she comments: "How lucky seem to me the people who now have small children […] For us whose sons are leaving the vital thread has snapped".[102] The inherent joy of small children, unable to fight, is the assurance that they will most likely survive the war. Contrastingly, the older children are severed from their home, safety, and mother. This tragic separation is envisioned through the sudden and painful snapping of a "vital thread", referencing ancient Greek mythology in which the Moirai (or the Fates) cut the thread of life, determining the destiny of the individual. Alternatively, the image of the thread evokes the cutting of the umbilical cord. For some, "the umbilical is considered both the physical and emotional attachment between mother and fetus", not only enabling the transference of nutrients and the circulation of blood, but potentially assisting in the formation of emotional

[100] Ibid, p. 124.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

attachment and love.[103] In this view, the severing of the cord is not only a physical experience, but an emotionally distressing event. This articulates the divide in opinion regarding the sacrifice of sons in the name of war; whilst opinions existed justifying the sacrifice within public media such as newspaper articles and published texts, sorrow was felt privately and communicated within personal diaries. However, in the private nature of such diaries these opinions were obscured from view and dominated by the narrative of willing and justified sacrifice. Perpetuating the necessity of sending sons to war benefitted those in power and kept fear and sorrow silently confined to diaries and letters, obscuring our ability to determine what the authentic thoughts and feelings of mothers were during the period. By examining archival objects and the maternal memoir, these views are made accessible and brought into view – allowing us to challenge the representations of motherhood which have prevailed.

Kollwitz's account therefore presents the act of sacrifice as an unwanted and distinctly uncomfortable act, suggesting that the role of the sacrificial mother was one perpetuated in the media but not always felt authentically by mothers in private. Despite these private feelings of sorrow, the image of the mother was still highly visible in propaganda as "Wartime propaganda artists recognized the power of mothers in recruiting soldiers".[104] It is advantageous for the media to emphasise the benefits and joys of sacrifice as it encourages the masses to follow the example of the women who have raised them and earned their respect. Exaggerating the willingness of mothers to send their children off to war for the sake of a better cause instils an atmosphere of virtue and selflessness which reaps the reward of victory.

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[103] Marina Basta, and Brody J. Lipsett, 'Anatomy, Abdomen and Pelvis: Umbilical Cord', *National Library of Medicine: National Center for Biotechnology Information* (2023) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557389/>[accessed 23rd April 2024] (para. 1 of 33).
[104] Patri O'Gran, 'Mothers in World War I', *National Museum of American History* (May 6th 2016) <https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/mothers-world-war-i>[accessed 23rd April 2024] (para 2. of 5).

Furthermore, by demonstrating the lack of fear women had in the prospect of their loved ones going to fight, an uncomfortable threat to masculinity emerges. Should you be the soldier afraid to fight, you are weaker than the mother that raised you and more cowardly than the wife relying on you to save their country and thus their children. This narrative, therefore, has two purposes: to motivate women to encourage the men in their life to enlist, and to strengthen the belief that fighting is justified in the name of peace. However, in hearing a mother's voice directly, such as Kollwitz's narrative, nuance is added to our understanding of the mother's experience and perspective of sacrifice. The ideological image of the sacrificial mother becomes complicated by the distaste expressed by Kollwitz; in listening to the maternal voice, readers can come to understand that the mother figure is not one dimensional. The mother may enact sacrifices, but these may be done out of fear, necessity, love, or patriotism. The maternal voice is therefore essential to enriching our understanding of the complex and nuanced emotional experiences encountered by society during the conflict.

The Patriotic Mother

Often overlapping with the sacrificial mother, the patriotic mother is a figure primarily used within stories intended to convey a political message – whether that be of staunch support for the war cause, or as a satirical mockery of the intense patriotic feeling which swept the country. In some cases, the sacrificial mother may be read as the patriotic mother of propaganda. However, the distinction made here is in the implied intention of the material. The patriotic and propagandic mother is distinctly political and staunchly proud, whilst the sacrificial mother is often emotive – pulling on the heart to sway action, rather than pride and politics to impart opinion. In both cases, the importance of active duty and responsibility are keenly felt and used to encourage others to act.

Posters which explicitly used the idea of mothers to recruit and encourage young men to enlist were not uncommon. The language may evoke the pride of a parent, or opposingly the suffering of innocent women – wives, children, and mothers alike. In both cases the message is clear: enlist for the women in your life. Some posters may be direct in their message, whilst others rely upon inferences and subtle ambiguity to encourage the viewer to position the relevant individual within the narrative. For example, the poster pictured below is direct in its message to the viewer.[105]

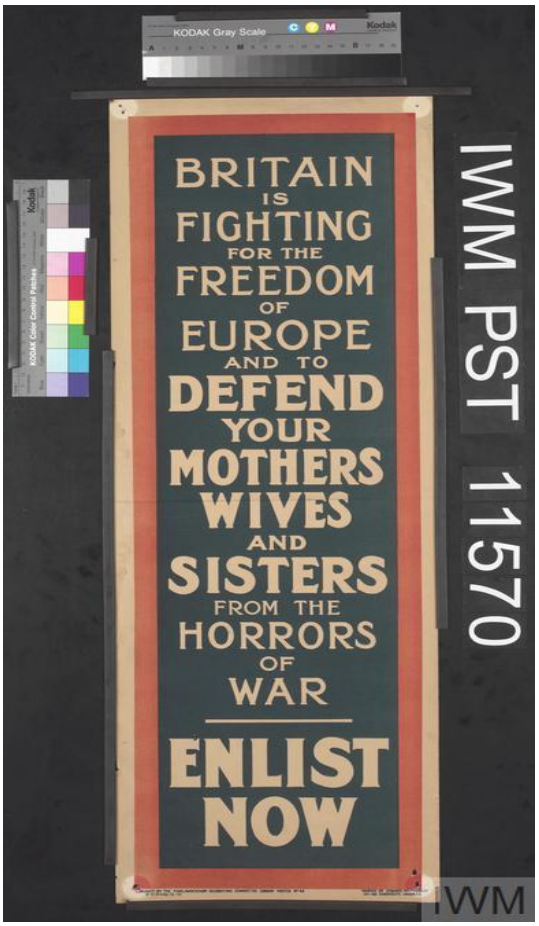

Figure 3 'Britain is Fighting for the Freedom of Europe' © IWM (Art.IWM PST 11570)

[105] London, Imperial War Museum, Posters, 'Britain is Fighting for the Freedom of Europe', Art. IWM PST 11570 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30369>[accessed 8th April 2024].

Examining the typographical choices of this poster reveals a clear message upon which the viewer is urged to focus. The use of emphasised text, created through the variation in size and bold font, grants particular words a higher value; 'defend,' 'mothers,' 'wives,' 'sisters,' 'enlist now' are all emphasised in the text. Through this alone a clear message emerges - defend the women in your life. Furthermore, the order of the list opens with the most universal female figure within a soldier's life. By beginning with the mother, an appeal is made to the widest breadth of men as more men of fighting age are likely to have a mother, whereas a wife and sister will not implicate as large of a majority. Britain is described as 'fighting' for Europe and to 'defend' the mothers of the readers from the ambiguous but fear-inducing "horrors of war".[106] The ambiguity of the horrors allows the reader to associate the language with any extent of violence and torture, calling forth previously reported events which used similar language in the coverage. Furthermore, using the noun 'Britain' to describe participants creates an imaginative majority of which the non-combatant reader is excluded. By following this statement with the imperative phrase which commands action and enlistment, the reader may feel compelled to protect and defend from the 'horrors of war' which may be forced upon the women in their life. Mothers, as a primary female figure in life, are depicted as a motivating factor for the men of Britain, and through this symbolic importance we can begin to unravel the usage of the mother in alternative posters.

[106] Ibid.

Figure 4 'Make us as Proud of You as we are of Him!' © IWM (Art.IWM PST 11924)

For example, the poster pictured above (whilst not explicitly depicting the figure of a mother) has many visual and linguistic cues which create the illusion of a maternal presence.[107] The majority of the poster is occupied by the image of a soldier set in an ornate frame which appears to be a locket, implied by the pastel blue ribbon threaded through the hook at the top. In design and contents, the locket resembles many of the lockets which were given to loved ones by the soldier before going to the front. The portrait depicts a happy and smiling soldier, and the wearing of the portrait as a necklace suggests that the item must belong to a woman in his life. Whilst one could perceive that the wife or sweetheart of the

[107] London, Imperial War Museum, Posters, 'Make us as Proud of You as we are of Him!', Art. IWM PST 11924 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/20518>[accessed 8th April 2024].

soldier could be the owner of such an item, the text placed directly below the image implies otherwise. The plural pronouns of 'us' and 'we' suggest a group identity which is being used to appeal to all men, whilst the evocation of pride in the imploring statement to "Make us as proud of you as we are of him!" forms an image of proud mothers.[108] Through the universality of the language, directly addressing the viewer whilst maintaining ambiguity through the plural pronouns, the viewer can project themselves and their loved ones into the framework presented. Depicted unworn and on a plain background, the figure who may own the item is further mystified. Consequently, the un-enlisted soldier can imagine the item upon their own mother and the pride with which they may share their soldier-son's story with those who ask about the portrait. Despite the visual absence of the mother, the image of the soldier is glaringly present. The viewer must acknowledge their own absence. They are not the man in the image, and they are therefore not the figure evoking pride. Consequently, their distinct lack of uniform becomes an implied source of shame. If the mass voice of mothers proclaims pride in this symbolic son, then the singular mother of the un-enlisted son must be isolated in their experience. The ambiguity and absence of the specific mother allows the creator of the poster to employ the ideology of the patriotic and supportive mother to craft a clear message and further their aim of recruitment. In the cases of both posters explored, the son must enlist to save his mother – either from the horror of war, or from the shame of his lack of service. In evoking the imagined maternal voice, recruitment tactics target a wide range of men and use the emotional impulse and desire to protect their loved ones and avoid bringing shame to their family to motivate soldiers to enlist.

[108] Ibid.

A contrasting example of the patriotic mother is evidenced in an article from *The Times*, which narrates the story of Mrs Bross and her sons.[109] The article states that "Of five sons, she has four in the Army, and the fifth will join as soon as he is old enough", echoing the familiar quantifying of sacrifice seen in earlier articles where the mother must number her loss.[110] The quantifying of the sons she has proudly provided to the war effort provides evidence of her motherly and patriotic virtue, creating a shield through which she can critique the Army's organisation. The article's headline names her as 'A Mother to the People,' positioning her as an exemplar of civilian virtue and patriotism, an example of giving your all for your compatriots. As a result of Mrs Bross's sons being involved in the war, and the implied drunkenness of her husband (who "is, if possible, more frequently drunk than usual"), Mrs Bross has endured personal hardship and financial struggles.[111] Her plight is articulated as follows:

> Nature and circumstance have combined to give Mrs. Bross a horror of waste and muddle. To that horror of waste and muddle England owes eight healthy and active Brosses.[112]

The imagery of waste is deeply embedded within writings describing the First World War, particularly by those who critiqued the war and became disillusioned by the catastrophic loss of life. The imagery of the Lost Generation portrays an unprecedented waste of human life, embedding waste in modern readers' conceptualisation of the conflict. Using the language of waste to describe the war effort from a civilian's perspective is intriguing as it contrasts the association of waste through violence and identifies how time and effort have been wasted or

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[109] 'A Mother of the People', *The Times*, 01/06/1915, p. 11.
[110] Ibid
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

unfairly distributed. Mrs Bross asks how the country can be victorious when the work is not evenly shared. Her own pride for her sons is used to form a patriotic rhetoric and encourage the belief that her family are setting an example of true honour despite the muddle and confusion caused by the inefficiency of the Army. She recounts how lost paperwork led to her son Alf having "no official existence" within the Army, yet they knew enough to court martial him when his frustration at not existing motivated him to go home.[113] His response to the accusation of desertion was to cite a desire to exist and be enlisted in a meaningful way – he wanted to go to the front. Alf's frustrating experience becomes an example of motherly pride. Mrs Bross's anger over the confusion and 'muddle' is used to send a message to the public, and to the government: "Mobilize the nation".[114] Her motherly pride is used to recruit and encourage change:

> Why, she asks, should her boys go and fight for others that have not the pluck? […] Don't 'they' know that there are dozens and dozens of young fellows in Mrs. Bross's own street who are saying:- 'I know I shall have to go all right, but catch me going till they come and fetch me!'? If 'they' would come and fetch all the young men, […] things would be fair and we should know what's what.[115]

Mrs Bross's message is paraphrased, and in the words of the correspondent, her argument has been summarised "briefly, and in episcopal language".[116] From this we can infer that her original statement may have been translated into more acceptable phrasing, altered to preach or to convey a higher message. As such, a statement of motherly pride and frustration is

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.

mobilised for a patriotic cause. The article concludes with a reaffirmation of what Mrs Bross has already willingly sacrificed, reminding the reader that she has earned the right to question the lack of involvement from other young men as "She has given her dearest gladly".[117] Mrs Bross's willing gift of her young sons is finally interwoven with the image of waste, implying that they have been given to the cause with knowledge of what their fate may be as Mrs Bross "cannot help wondering whether Bill and Jim and Alf and Tommy are not being wasted".[118] Her pride as a mother of dutiful sons contrasts with her frustration as a patriotic civilian, voicing her concern that victory will not arrive unless everyone is called to do their part. With victory so far in the distance, it is no wonder she fears the potential waste of her children.

Mrs Bross's story is an example of how a mother's patriotism can be used to mobilise and encourage civilians to enlist. The clear sense of duty and pride displayed articulates how the maternal voice was used to enlist civilians into doing their part for the war effort. The article presents a similar rhetoric to the posters which placed the mother as a motivating figure encouraging their sons to do the right thing by their country. In these cases, the willingness to give their sons to the war effort is a point of pride and acts as an exemplar for all other British mothers and sons. If these women can do it, and are applauded for it, then others should do so too. The posters and article have a clear ideological underpinning – that the duty of motherhood resides in allowing and encouraging your sons to fight and participate in the war effort, in sacrificing your own love and needs in favour of duty and patriotism.

Critical Representations of the Mother Figure

[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.

Despite a tendency to publicise examples of patriotism, not all renditions of the patriotic maternal figure were positive or uncriticised – particularly within writing by combatants and active participants. Maternal characters were often satirised within fiction of the First World War which displayed disillusionment regarding the war. A fleeting example of this is demonstrated in Helen Zenna Smith's *Not So Quiet…* (1930), during a description of her first night of horror when ambulance driving.[119] Smithy is a twenty-one-year-old volunteer ambulance driver outraged by the meaninglessness of war. After witnessing the bodily horror of wounded men which leaves her "frozen-hearted", Smithy is comforted by Tosh - a fellow ambulance driver disillusioned with the war.[120] Seeing the distress in Smithy's face, Tosh comments on the inability to leave the front, implying that the "admiring family at home who are basking in your reflected glory" would never be able to accept the shame of a quick return to the Home Front.[121] The phrase "reflected glory" counters the analysis presented so far regarding articles which feign an interest in maternal achievements, only to ultimately focus on the successes of their sons. The implication of the image is that those who are "basking" in this light, are benefiting from the heroism and perception of those they are connected to. As such, we can infer that by serving your country you added value and glory to yourself and to your next of kin. Abandoning your duties would be a shameful act, and Tosh cites patriotic rhetoric to drive home the reality of the decision which the girls have made by joining the ambulance drivers. She explains that they are "one of England's Splendid Daughters, proud to do their bit for the dear old flag".[122] By choosing this line of work, Smithy has fallen for the dream and 'splendour' of doing her part, unaware of the horror which would confront her.[123]

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[119] Helen Zenna Smith, *Not So Quiet…Stepdaughters of War* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989), pp. 11-17.
[120] Ibid, p. 12.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid, p. 13.
[123] Ibid.

Tosh concludes that the only escape is to "stay until you crock up or find some other decent excuse to go home covered in glory," stating that, "It takes nerve to carry on here, but it takes twice as much to go home to flag-crazy mothers and fathers".[124] Death or witnessing a death so extreme in the name of patriotism that it metaphorically covers and renders your body, mind, and spirit ineffective is the only way to leave. Awareness of parental patriotic fervour motivates the women to remain working close to the front despite the horror they witness every day; parental perceptions of duty motivate their children to ignore traumatic responses to violence and instead provoke them to endure the horror at the expense of their wellbeing.

However, the lack of understanding Tosh attributes to the parents is expanded upon by Smithy. As she narrates how Tosh is cutting her hair to avoid lice, Smithy reflects on how she could not do the same as a "mental vision of [her] Mother restrains [her]".[125] Despite the pressing need to cut her hair and avoid the discomfort of lice, Smithy explains that her mother "wouldn't understand the filth and beastliness after [her] cheery letters home".[126] The act of obscuring the nature of your existence when writing home was not uncommon. Hiding or omitting elements of your daily life on the front in the interest of keeping your mother calm and proud was felt to be a necessity, yet the result was a gulf of knowledge. Mothers are left blissfully unaware of the cost of their pride as their children simply struggle on to uphold the vision of the successful and patriotic child. The lack of understanding is particularly clear in *Not So Quiet…* in the discrepancy of Smithy's mother's actions towards her daughters in comparison to her soldier-son:

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[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid, p. 15.
[126] Ibid.

> With Trix a V.A.D. and me ambulance driving, I can see those wee curly heads working overtime, while Mother drops a sentimental tear on the socks she is knitting for my second-loot brother, her "hero boy".[127]

Observing a gendered difference in care and feeling, this comment articulates one perception of mothers in relation to their soldier-sons. The son is understood to be in the most imminent danger through his 'active' role, whilst the daughter takes on a care-giving role, displacing the idea of danger through the belief that she cannot be in danger caring for the wounded. Whilst the daughter is doing something to be proud of, the son is fighting. Consequently, the "sentimental tear" is shed not for the daughter but for the son who receives the carefully handmade domestic comforts of socks to connect him to the Home Front and the notion of safety and maternal care. This act of domestic outreach is lightly mocked by Smith, contrasting the hard work and overtime of the mother's daughters with the hyperbolic and disparaging image of the crying mother pining for her "hero boy". Yet even in this description of the patriotic and emotional mother, the act of shedding a tear is completed silently and stoically. The tear is singular, implying a failure of attempted restraint – the mother is aware of the expectations to bear the weight of her sacrifice in the name of victory, so she feels her loss in private. This is the same "flag-crazy" mother that Tosh believes they cannot return to.[128] These versions of the maternal figure are both distinctly separate and yet unavoidably interwoven. They are the first to share their patriotic views and pride for their soldier-son

[127] Ibid, p. 16.
[128] Ibid, p. 13.

whilst remaining stoic and silent, sentimentally dropping tears into their private acts of love and care.

The opposing versions of the patriotic mother (the staunchly patriotic, and the weeping caregiver) are used by Siegfried Sassoon as a vehicle of mockery in 'Glory of Women'.[129] Sassoon's poem critiques and questions the actions of women in relation to their patriotism and voyeurism, suggesting that women find pleasure in the war's violence, making "the gap between men (combatants) and women (noncombatants) […] clearly defined".[130] Susan R. Grayzel states that through 'Glory of Women', "Sassoon gives voice to one vision of the complex interaction between the role assigned to men and women during the war".[131] Grayzel articulates how this view of gendered war contributions has gone relatively unchallenged until modern times.[132] Whilst the focus has recently moved to examine a range of experiences of wartime contributions, including the roles played by women and non-combatant men, the lack of attention prior to this suggests that Sassoon's view of these individuals may have been a pervasive one. Whilst the poem does not open with an explicit identification of an addressee, by the final three lines of the poem the mother figure is evoked in the familiar image of "knitting socks".[133] Sassoon directly addresses women readers in the opening line, creating the start of a searingly accusatory tone: "You love us when we're heroes".[134] Many of the mothers who have been quoted so far weaponised the language of heroism to display their pride in the actions of their soldier-son. Describing the soldier as heroic thus appears to be a womanly trait. Barred from physically fighting in the war effort

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[129] Siegfried Sassoon, 'Glory of Women', in *Poetry of the First World War*, ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 100.
[130] Grayzel, p. 263.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] *Poetry of the First World War*, p. 100.
[134] Ibid.

themselves, they were reliant upon the valour of the men in their lives to end the war, and as such the boys and men wearing uniform were painted as heroes, imbued with a particular power which was inaccessible to the women at home. Sassoon goes on to critique how women do not accept the need to run from war, "blind with blood" after "hell's last horror" breaks the men. The metaphor of hell to describe war, leaving the men unable to see a way out of the violence and trauma, unable to see through the 'blood', echoes the sentiments shared by Tosh in *Not So Quiet*…. Understanding the true meaning of war is inaccessible for those at home, and both Sassoon and Smith seem to be placing blame on patriotism, on the "flag-crazy" individuals (women, and parents) who cannot see sense beyond victory.

Sassoon connects this image to mothers by using the familiar trope of knitting socks to force the reader to reconcile with the violence being done upon other sons – "O German mother dreaming by the fire, / While you are knitting socks to send your son / His face is trodden deeper in the mud.".[135] The highlighting of death at the hands of the British, and the anger emulating from the warmth and peace in which the German mother is existing, are at odds in this image. Can the women who have been "fondly thrilled" by war stories align this with the violent reality? The exclamation of "O German mother" can be read in several ways. The apostrophe 'O' could be interpreted as a pitiful and heartfelt declaration of sympathy. The speaker pictures the mother in a state of blissful peace, "dreaming by the fire". The fire or the hearth is often symbolic of the home and domesticity, further emphasising the distance between home and warfare. However, given the tone of the speaker's vitriol before the volta, this exclamation is perhaps an extension of Sassoon's contempt for the gulf being formed between combatants and non-combatants. Despite Sassoon drawing attention to the atrocities

[135] Ibid.

of British violence, forcing the reader to grapple with the true nature of warfare, the gentle and loving action of knitting socks contrasts the horror of mud and death experienced by combatants. Therefore, despite the air of potential sympathy for the German mother, the ignorance of the patriotic act (doing her 'duty' by knitting socks from the comfort of the hearth) creates a statement about the detachment from reality on the Home Front. Socks cannot save their sons. The German mother, and the women Sassoon describes, are all complicit in accepting violent warfare – their thrill and excitement at the prospect of 'heroic' tales add to the ignorance of the non-combatant population. Through the image of the mother figure, Sassoon asserts his message to the complicit and ignorant Home Front.

Much like Sassoon, who critiques non-combatants through the imagery and tone of his poetry, Claire Goll directly questions the role of women in a short story titled, 'The Hand of Wax' (1918).[136] The story opens with a description of soldiers returning home, haunted by their experiences. Goll depicts a wife, Ines, unable to reconnect with her husband and afraid of the war and its effects.[137] Goll depicts a shared female anxiety - the knowledge that the war could take what you treasure most at a moment's notice. Goll demonstrates the horror of warfare through the husband's description of his encounter and subsequent killing of a man holding a bayonet. The violence of the man's death, and the distressing irony of the "fraternal gesture" which sought companionship in his final moments, demonstrates a lack of mercy which the wife is unable to understand.[138] The moment communicates a distaste with the violence enacted by men in the name of patriotism. However, the silence of women is

[136] Claire Goll, 'The Hand of Wax', in *Women's Writing on the First World War,* ed. by Agnés Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 244-250.
[137] Ibid, p. 245.
[138] Ibid, p. 247.

critiqued to a greater extent. Goll presents a scathing assessment of women's complicity in the collateral deaths of warfare as Ines imagines a stream of accusations lobbied against women:

> [W]e remain silent when the children born of us are being sacrificed and become heroes as they learn to perfect the art of killing. And still we women say nothing. They refused us the dubious honour of going to war but not once did we avail ourselves of the much greater honour of mounting a campaign against it. We remained silent. We said nothing. It is we who carry the greater part of the responsibility![139]

Goll uses the language of heroism, drawing upon the imagery identified within the patriotic rhetoric of newspapers, posters, and fiction of the time. Whilst this language has been used for patriotic means elsewhere, in Goll's rendition this language is subverted to critique the complicity of mothers who have silently and willingly given their children to the war. Instead of being used to applaud the patriotic acts of society, the language of heroism is used to call into question the role women have played in society's downfall suggesting the responsibility and blame for the catastrophic loss of life rests with them. Using the declaratives "We remained silent. We said nothing", Goll reinforces the involvement of women whilst implicating the reader – the plural pronoun 'we' levels the accusations at not only Ines, but the reader reflecting on their role in the conflict.

Whilst Goll directs the accusations towards all women, there is a particular focus upon the mothers who have allowed these atrocities to happen to their children. As the parental figure that gave them life, the mother figure is expected to protect and nurture their children.

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[139] Ibid, p. 249.

Therefore, by displaying a lack of resistance they have subverted the stereotypical expectations of gender and by extension, the natural order. Goll places the mother at the center of the blame, questioning their actions and asking, "Why then, did the mothers of all men not unite in resistance to this madness? Weren't they thus even more responsible for the collapse of their world than the men?".[140] Goll displays an inability to understand the motives of war; she labels it as an "absurdity" and "madness", implying an irrationality and lack of logic which cannot be reckoned with. Furthermore, Goll examines the role of responsibility, placing a great burden and guilt upon women, but particularly upon the mothers who did not argue with the irrational and unnatural sacrifice of their children.

Goll's critique of women and mothers demonstrates a clear difference in approach to the presentation of the maternal figure. Whilst Sassoon's scathing depiction of women focuses on the thrill they found in the 'heroic' tales, Goll's critique resides in the silence which enabled the horror of war to begin and continue to take their children. In both cases, blind patriotism and tales of valour are attributed to the ability of women to silently withstand or find thrill in horror. The mothers remain silent yet active participants in the conflict through the provision of their sons, in their warmly knitted socks. By presenting a critical view of mothers, writers such as Sassoon and Goll set out to explore the involvement of non-combatants and the complex question of blame, suggesting the responsibility may not reside within military orders and strategy alone.

In some cases, the critique of the mother figure emerges through satire. For example, in Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, Graves reproduces a variety of material ranging

[140] Ibid, p. 248.

from battle orders to a letter printed in a newspaper from a mother.[141] Christopher Martin agrees with Paul Fussell that the intended effect of Graves' autobiography is satirical, and Martin argues that the reproduction of the letter aids in "convey[ing] his sense of being trapped in an insane world".[142] Graves critiques the blind patriotism of parents (and the British public in general) through the reproduction of an anonymous letter from a 'Little Mother', using it as an example of the nonsensical way society was discussing the war, providing it as evidence of what he called "newspaper language".[143] The letter opens with the familiar assertion that the mother has a right to speak due to her son's active participation in the war effort – he "was early and eager to do his duty".[144] After asserting her right to speak and be heard, the Little Mother launches into a passionate argument against peace negotiations, which Paul Fussell describes as "sentimental, bloodthirsty, complacent, cruel, fatuous, and self-congratulatory".[145] Furthermore, the author of the letter utilises biblical passages to underpin her rhetoric with religious authority. Borrowing images from the Bible, she states that "The corn that will wave over land watered by the blood of our brave lads shall testify to the future that their blood was not spilt in vain".[146] In Psalm 72, the image of corn being watered is used to represent the abundance and peace gained through victory over enemies.[147] The image of water is presented in line 6: "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth".[148] Psalm 72 refers to the success of Solomon, praying for prosperity and righteousness under his rule. Through borrowing from this chapter,

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[141] Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*.
[142] Christopher Martin, 'The Date and Authorship of the Letter from 'a Little Mother'', *Notes and Queries,* 62 (2015), pp. 447-50 (p. 447).
[143] Graves, p. 283.
[144] Ibid, p. 284.
[145] Fussell, p. 234.
[146] Graves, p. 285.
[147] Psalm 72. 1-20.
[148] Psalm 72. 6.

the Little Mother evokes images of triumph and victory over enemies in the interest of peace at the end. The triumph must come first, aligning with the language of the biblical passage which states that Solomon will "break in pieces the oppressor" and that "his enemies shall lick the dust".[149] Through borrowing from religious scripture, the Little Mother evokes the language of sermon, preaching to the masses about the correct resolution to the conflict. The passion in her messaging is so strong that the water of peace and abundance mutates into the visceral image of blood saturating the earth in the interest of abundance. Conceptualising the reward as a harvest of corn, the sacrifice and death of soldiers is portrayed as a necessary and justified step in reaching peace and reaping the rewards of victory.

Furthermore, the loss of the young men is articulated as a necessary and willing sacrifice made on the behalf of mothers, once again demonstrating the overlap between the patriotic and sacrificial mother:

> We women pass on the human ammunition of 'only sons' to fill up the gaps, so that when the 'common soldier' looks back before going 'over the top' he may see the women of the British race on his heels, reliable, dependent, uncomplaining.[150]

The triadic structure of the final summation of the ideal mother as, "reliable, dependent, uncomplaining", enhances our understanding of the narrative of the patriotic mother.[151] The representations of these women are rampant in contemporary texts because they can reliably communicate a government message of duty and honour in their exemplary sacrifice of their

[149] Psalm 72. 4-9.
[150] Graves, p. 285.
[151] Ibid.

sons. Crucially, the patriotic mother is uncomplaining about the war itself. These patriotic mothers willingly sacrifice their sons in public, but "share with Rachel the Silent the lonely anguish of a bereft heart" in private.[152] Referencing another biblical passage, the Book of Jeremiah, further sanctifies the message of the Little Mother as she compares the grieving women to Rachel.[153] Rachel is promised reward for not weeping as the Lord will return her children from the enemy's land. The Little Mother is positioning the sacrifice of their sons as one which will bring peace and reward. She takes comfort in the idea that they will be returned to the women of Britain as though it is a promise from God. By citing scripture once more, she leans into the faith of the public and assures them that peace can be found both during and after the war if the enemy is conquered. She argues that women want victory, and the government wanted the same. In fact, there was some speculation around the publication of this letter as to whether it was propaganda written by a faction of the government to drum up patriotic fervour and morale.[154,155] The "white heat" of patriotism found within the letter clearly echoed the 'newspaper language' of propaganda which aligned with the government's own messaging.[156] Despite the proximity of the letter to the government's desired political messaging, the distance between the Little Mother's opinion and those of combatants at the front is vast, which Graves capitalises on through his reproduction of the text.

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[152] Ibid, p. 286.
[153] Jeremiah 31. 15-16.
[154] Martin, p. 449.
[155] According to Christopher Martin, the author was identified as Madame Bella Howell-Jones, from Bristol (Martin, p. 449). Martin records that whilst Athol Cuthbert Howell-Jones was reported missing on the 19th of May 1918, he does not appear to be the Little Mother's son, stating that "Perhaps the Little Mother did not after all have to share the sacrifice that she so warmly recommended to others" (Martin, p. 450).
[156] Graves, p. 285.

"People [...] like reading about other people's mothers".[157]

In these constructions of the maternal figure, we lose sight of the complex emotions experienced by women when sending their children off to war, knowing that there was a risk they would never return. Popularised presentations of the maternal figure contain unconscious repetitions of ideologies, such as the emotional or hysterical woman, which enact a distancing of the mother's individual identity or nuanced experience. Motherhood, and the maternal figure, comes to represent a whole within society – the mother becomes the icon of the Home Front, the symbol for those who cannot possibly understand the horrors of war, and the representative of blind patriotism. In contextualising these representations amongst individual maternal voices, allowing them to speak their own experiences, modern critics can begin to unravel the complexities within these narratives. Whilst there is truth to some stories, these stories are not the whole truth. In overlooking the maternal voice in favour of experiences which have seemingly had greater value or interest to the post-war reader, a body of work has developed around the First World War which does not reflect the diversity of experience, or the individuals involved in the conflict. The collection information available on the IWM's website states that they aim to record a variety of experiences during conflict, yet they acknowledge that they have:

> [O]nly been partially successful. White male narratives are over-represented. [The IWM's] collections are geographically weighted towards the south [*sic*] of England. Collections of non-English

[157] Robert Graves, *But It Still Goes On: An Accumulation* (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 1931), p. 4.

> perspectives are almost non-existent, except for a strong collection of oral history interviews.[158]

As such, there is an abundance of material related to the white male soldier, and this is thus the narrative which becomes projected from within the archive. This is particularly relevant to consider in the case of exploring the maternal voice as it is a narrative which has historically been underexamined and overlooked. From a practical view, how many letters sent by mothers to the trenches would have survived the mud and annihilation? Whilst some soldiers may have taken care and returned the letters for safekeeping, many paper notes of love and news from home may lay sodden and destroyed on the battlefield. Beyond the practical, we must also consider that preserving such a voice amongst the deluge of first-person perspectives of trench warfare and horror amidst battle may not have been prioritised, and as such we must ask ourselves whether what remains in fiction and newspapers is the only experience of motherhood at this time. We are left to make a narrative out of the remnants of the past, to suggest a conceptualisation underpinned by the objects we find and enriched by the memoirs written by the mother herself.

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[158] Imperial War Museum, 'Developing our collections information' (No Date) <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/collections-information>[accessed 19th February 2024] (para. 1 of 9).

Chapter Two: Objects and the Archive

The concept of archives as a spiritual, evocative place was intensified by the experience of mass loss across Europe. This chapter suggests that this occurred due to an increased desire to maintain a connection to the deceased. Therefore, the archive can be understood as a sacred space which allows the viewer to seek a connection to the dead through the objects and texts it holds. This chapter seeks to establish that the creation of memoir mirrors the act of forming an archive; both function as an intimate process in which the archivist or memoirist seeks a tangible connection to the deceased through the fragmentary evidence of existence. In creating memoirs, mothers create their own archive and their own object through which a connection to the dead can be sought. These memoirs and First World War archives have overlapping attributes which attest to a need in society to return and preserve the dead, to seek connections, and form a substitute body or grave. This chapter aims to outline those shared attributes and how conceptualisations of archives can support a new way of reading the maternal voice and memoir.

The question of what the archive 'is' has been growing in scholarly weight in recent years as academics across disciplines have begun to consider the implications of archives, what they are, and how the archivist functions within them. Marlene Manoff aptly explains this increase in interest, stating that "historians, literary critics, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, political scientists, and others" have engaged with and debated the archive, resulting in a wide and "compelling body of literature […] that demonstrates a convergence of interests among scholars, archivists, and librarians".[159] The questions which

[159] Marlene Manoff, 'Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines', *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 4 (2004), 9-25 (p. 9).

underpin these debates return to similar themes: memory, history, and truth. This project's interest in memorialisation, memory, grief, and objects, positions the archive as a central concern and begins to consider the role of the archive in maintaining a connection to the dead.

The Archive and the Home

In Jacques Derrida's influential text *Archive Fever* (1995), he establishes the meaning of the word archive through the Greek "arkheion".[160] The archive can thus be understood as originating in a location:

> [A] house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. […] On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house […] that official documents are held.[161]

An archive, in this definition, is a physical place which houses or stores documents of official and authoritative importance (laws, legislation, and knowledge) for use by a limited and selected audience. These documents are presided over by an authoritative figure who interprets, uses, maintains, and repeats the laws housed there. It is a place, one of safety and preservation, one of knowledge which has been deemed vital to remember and thus holds authority. Within this etymology thematic threads emerge, namely that of place, authority, and knowledge.

However, Derrida's articulation of this etymology leans heavily upon the idea of authority and power, and as such another key image within the definition has been

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[160] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 2.
[161] Ibid.

overlooked. The archive is not simply stored under the nose of an authority figure, it is literally and figuratively *housed* within "their home".[162] Whilst this language may simply be a turn of phrase, or an issue of translation, the archive being stored in a home, a place with its own connotations of safety, love, family, and memory, nevertheless imbues the items stored within it with a sense of corporeality and humanity. These items are loved and cared for by an authority figure as a child is by a parent. Consequently, much as a child is, the items can be read as being entitled to or enriched by these qualities of safety, love, and care due to their importance and status within the world – as witnesses to the past, the items can share their stories with the future, to enrich the lives and knowledge of those yet to come. If the archive is viewed and defined in the etymological sense, with the image of a house and home, the material stored within the archive adopts an increased element of humanity, holding a 'stickiness' formed by the traces of those who have interacted with them. As we maintain and preserve the memory and legacy of these items to share this with future generations, we treat them as kin – the items which have coexisted and lived within the borders of human experience. They share importance, we interact with them physically and emotionally, we may even anthropomorphise them through our kind touches, as if the leather of the binding could feel pain. In collecting and bringing the scraps of the past to an archive, or in creating an archive, they are given a home – these fragments of humanity, otherwise dispersed or left to decay, are returned to a place of safety, love, and care. In collecting the textual remains or personal effects of their deceased loved ones during the First World War, the next of kin enact an imaginative bringing home of their dead, restoring them, and protecting them from erasure. Likewise, the memoir enacts a similar role. Collecting even more illusory fragments of the

[162] Ibid.

past in the form of memory, the memoirist records and preserves the life, experiences, and memories of the past and the dead.

Much like the archive, the memoir allows the creator to house their memories and textual fragments in a singular place which provides the object of the memoir with longevity, ensuring their memory lives on when the creator is no longer alive to share the deceased's story. Whilst sat awaiting her son's arrival home on leave, Marie Leighton instead experienced "the tragic coincidence of the news of his death reaching his home in the very hour in which he himself was expected there"; it is at this home whilst waiting to have a family dinner that Leighton's memoir for her son Roland Leighton, *Boy of My Heart*, is set.[163] The family dinner, an image of domesticity synonymous with the family unit and home, tethers the distant memories of Roland's childhood and the disparate selections of letters and poetry to a central place – his home. Through this setting, made even more poignant by the contextual factors involved in this moment of anticipation and realisation, Leighton entwines Roland's existence as both child, soldier, and man to their "home – this house in which I am waiting".[164] In connecting these memories back to the present, drawing them closer to this moment of awaiting his arrival, she constructs a metaphorical coming home. Roland's personality and likeness is drawn closer to his mother and the home through the retelling of his youth and the evocation of his voice in letters. Despite his physical body being unable to make such a journey, Leighton's retelling situates our image of him within the home through her choice of setting and narrative structure. In doing so, Roland can once again be kept safe and secure within a loving central place – much like the returning of objects and texts to the

[163] Marie Leighton, 'Foreword', *Boy of My Heart* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), unnumbered.
[164] Marie Leighton, p. 17.

archive. They are both brought into a home which will love and preserve their memory.

The Archive and the Sacred Space

The physical space of the archive, the place in which these objects remain, and to which the archivist visits is a core component to the meanings which are created within it. Entering the archive is a sensory experience; you sit within the hushed tones, darkened rooms, and cool temperatures employed to keep the objects from decaying and turning to dust between your fingers. There is something sacred about this space, which is elevated beyond a mere repository of items to a domain of revered, hallowed status. Almost crypt-like, the archive stores the items of the past, entombing them in safe spaces, much like a grave or morgue, preventing remains from decaying, and allowing viewership to those who have an interest or connection to the material which remains within their walls. In visiting the archive, we can visit and find proximity to the past, memory, and ultimately the dead. The act of viewing objects within archives could be seen as a process of visiting the dead. In the case of many items, interactions with them can feel intrusive as the realisation of the death the object represents sinks in. This exact sensation echoes Santanu Das in his exploration of how touch is presented in iconography and language of the First World War; he articulates the act of being in the archive as a "palpable relation to past lives, past bodies".[165] He describes the archived items of Private George Bennett, in particular some pressed flowers, as Das undertakes an imaginative retelling of taking these objects in our hands, opening the envelopes and treating the items with care, he states that "our intrusive fingers" return what we "have pulled out of the envelope", arguing that "the process is intimate and unsettling".[166]

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[165] Das, p. 13.
[166] Ibid, p. 15.

The archive feels sacred, and our act of 'pulling out the bodies' subsequently feels intrusive. The experience of handling these items coats your fingertips, the 'stickiness' of the emotion and symbolism attached to them lingers on your skin. It is this sensation of taking something with you, but which does not belong to you, which fuels the unsettling and intimate feeling Das cites. Clearly, the items are more than just objects and influence and affect the individual handling them, becoming actors within the network of the archive and grief. We are moved to think, feel, and act by the items we come across due to their rich affective qualities.

The production of sacred spaces in the wake of death is a much-discussed phenomenon in scholarship on the First World War. Jay Winter states that the search for the sacred and for a greater connection to the dead was a prevailing concern in Europe due to the "universality of bereavement" experienced by society in the aftermath of the war.[167] Whilst Winter explores this notion in relation to the creation of memorials and the emergence of Spiritualism in the aftermath of the First World War, the underlying concerns relate to the desire to engage with the dead in a world where "conventional Christian modes of burying the dead and commemorating them were simply irrelevant".[168] Out of this need emerged a governmental and militarised approach of public remembrance to mark the loss incurred during the war, a way of symbolising the loss and sacrifice of society whilst attempting to 'bury' the unburied and missing; war memorials catered to this need by becoming "collective symbols" of grief, sacrifice, and remembrance.[169] A particularly useful example of this is the grave of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey. Four bodies were exhumed from four battle areas in France (the Aisne, the Somme, Ypres, and Arras) before one body was selected

[167] Winter, p. 77.
[168] Ibid, p. 69.
[169] Ibid, p. 51.

randomly by Brigadier General L. J. Wyatt.[170] The anonymity of the corpse ensures that the grave could belong to a man from any rank or region, acting as a universal indicator of the loss experienced by the British public. The coffin itself contains soil from France, scattered into the grave before burial.[171] In doing so, the soil itself becomes an actor within a network of funereal processes. Within the ground, the soil enacts the role of grave and shroud – covering the bodies and returning them to the earth. As such, it becomes a symbol of death and burial. Within this network, as it is lifted and thrown upon corpses, the soil is death and bereavement. Yet, when taken from the ground and placed within the coffin, the soil becomes part of a network of memorialisation and performs a new role. In its proximity to the corpses of lost soldiers, the soil becomes sticky with lost life, an affective symbol of lost lives and the bodies which held them. By including French soil in the symbolic burial process the remaining corpses left in the French ground are symbolically returned to the Home Front – the earth which has touched them, and which covers them still, has been buried.

However, these gestures of grief and memorialisation were met with divided reactions. For many, these memorials were an unfeeling cleansing of the barbaric and unnecessary deaths of too many men – clinically clean of the bloodshed, these white monuments presented a patriotic and unfeeling sentiment which did not appropriately attend to the widespread grief of the bereaved. Instead, these monuments seem to erase any sense of the individual soldier, figuratively burying the dead in a mass grave as the soldiers as which they died, rather than mourning the life of the man inside the uniform. A famous example of this resentment can be found in Siegfried Sassoon's 'On Passing the New Menin Gate'.[172] Sassoon conceptualises

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[170] Westminster Abbey, 'Unknown Warrior' (No Date)<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/unknown-warrior>[accessed 21st March 2024] (para. 4-5 of 25).
[171] Ibid, para. 1.
[172] Siegfried Sassoon, 'On Passing the New Menin Gate', in *Poetry of the First World War*, ed. by. Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 101.

the monument as an insufficient payment for the horror of war and the loss of innocent men, stating that they have been "Paid, with a pile of peace-complacent stone".[173] The anger towards the monument is viscerally created through the alliteration of the voiceless plosive /p/, causing the reader to spit the words as they evoke Sassoon's hatred for the memorial. Furthermore, the personification of the stone villainises the monument – it stands there marking the deaths without showing anger towards the lack of justice towards the "doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones".[174] By allowing these injustices to be hidden beneath a universal claim to remember, the memorial covers the sacrifice and horrific destruction of male bodies. Hiding and obscuring this mass murder, the stone can only be named as a "sepulchre of crime".[175]

David Bradshaw describes this divide in opinion regarding these attempts at memorialisation and names an "anti-monument" reaction which inspired artists, poets and writers alike to try and capture the reality of war.[176] Virginia Woolf was another writer from the period "who reacted with cynicism to the state's orchestration of the nation's grief and joy", and Bradshaw argues that "it is obvious that *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* are primarily 'anti-monument[al]' in tone and design".[177] In *Jacob's Room* in particular, the final scene attests to the reality of the soldier's death.[178] Betty Flanders's confused and pitiful exclamation regarding Jacob's shoes, left behind in the wake of his death, sheds light on the life which was lived and which now must be reconciled with death. In ending her novel on this image, Woolf repositions the reader, insisting that there is more to

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[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.
[176] David Bradshaw, "'Vanished Like Leaves": The Military, Elegy and Italy in "Mrs Dalloway"', *Woolf Studies Annual*, 8 (2002), 107-25 (p. 108).
[177] Ibid, p. 108.
[178] Woolf, *Jacob's Room*.

Jacob's life than the soldiering with which it ended. In fact, Sue Roe states in the notes to this edition that in echoing Archer's call to Jacob in the final chapter, "Viginia Woolf reminds us that it is Jacob's life-span, Jacob's history, with which we have been concerned all along".[179] These everyday items, such as shoes, contain traces of the individual's life and attest to their existence before the conflict. As commonly used items, their stickiness is greater due to the high frequency of their circulation. Consequently, the memories and emotions embedded upon these seemingly mundane objects become emblematic of the lost individual's essence. One cannot capture this within a mass monument, and thus this cleansed representation of traumatic collective loss was combated through alternative expressions of grief and new ways to honour the dead. The memoir allows the writer to perform a similar act. In preserving the minutiae of everyday life, the individuality of the soldier is recorded for the world to see. An attempt emerges to embed faces and stories to the names upon barren stone.

In response, or retaliation, to this militarised attitude towards grief, many sought more private and personal approaches to mourning and memorialising their dead. This took place "on a much more intimate level, through the preservation in households of possessions, photographs, personal signatures of the dead" and many other items which we now find in our archives, in addition to the creation of memoirs for the deceased.[180] Both archive and memoir aim to collect evidence of the dead to ensure that they are not forgotten; these two products of memorialisation combat the nameless monuments despised by Sassoon and the anti-monument movement, producing unfailingly personal evidence of the individual's existence. For example, the National Army Museum contains a photographic miniature of Lance

[179] Ibid, p. 187.
[180] Winter, p. 51.

Corporal Dennis Arthur O'Rourke (Figure 5).[181] The image captures O'Rourke in his uniform and is lovingly kept within the plush confines of a lined case – this item was evidently cared for and treasured in the past and remains so today, extending the love for the man himself onto the representation of his likeness. Remaining within a lined case, the portrait becomes symbolic of the body in a state of burial. Unable to locate the body, does the enclosed portrait stand in for its absence? As the lid is opened to reveal the human depiction inside, there is a familiarity in the movement. The experience is sticky – at a point in history this act may have been performed by those who sought to connect with their departed, to recall their face and remember their beloved. Likewise, Glenconner provides portraits in photogravure throughout her memoir from Edward's infancy to the year of his death.[182] In doing so, Glenconner captures Edward at each stage of his life, allowing the reader to emotionally follow her lead through the memoir's structure as we watch Edward grow into a young man in uniform. These treasured images which retain memories and love capture the existence of the individual, drawing poignant attention to their physical absence through the presence of their substitute body.

[181] London, National Army Museum, 'Lance Corporal Dennis Arthur O'Rourke, 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards 1915 (c)', NAM. 2022-02-2-1-1.
[182] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant*.

Figure 5 Photographic miniature, Lance Corporal Dennis Arthur O'Rourke, 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards 1915 (c), NAM. 2022-02-2-1-1[Image number: 1157690]

In contrast to portraits, Winter identifies how the need to collect the remaining items of the deceased is one of the driving motivators behind many mothers and fathers fervently seeking to obtain their son's personal effects after their death.[183] Whilst some parents had to resort to these acts of searching, others had their loved one's items returned to them directly. Whatever the means of acquiring the objects, each object holds a sentimental or even spiritual role in these processes of mourning. In collecting these items and storing them within the

[183] Winter, p. 51.

'home' of the archive, the bereaved can imaginatively bring home their deceased in ways they were otherwise prohibited or unable to enact. Through their belongings, the soldier's next of kin can engage with a method of burying them through the process of storing their effects in a designated and safe location.

Many items such as these have come to reside in the IWM. For example, Albert Tattersall's personal effects were sent home after his death from wounds acquired during the Battle of the Somme: "the Museum holds his personal effects sent home after his death - pipe, tobacco pouch, wallet, pocket knife, scissors, tin of cigarettes, and identity disc".[184] From the act of sending such items home, we can infer that there may have been an understanding of the metaphorical weight they may have held. The wallet (Figure 6), mottled in colour through time and use, evokes a particularly emotive response when held – the physical marks and grooves of the fabric attest to a previous owner, one who would bend and hold and manipulate the leather.[185] At the corner of the fabric, where the closing has been repeatedly opened, there is a small tear which slices into the curved top of the wallet. The edges of the tear have become rigid and tougher in texture than the softer fabric of the unharmed exterior, as if the fabric has formed a scab over the wound to aid in the recovery. Thread, which was previously holding the wallet in one piece, stitching the flesh together, has worn away in places, allowing the fabric to wrinkle and crease. It exudes evidence of previous life, yet it sits empty. The wallet no longer retains any money, notes, or photographic keepsakes, reminding the viewer that the owner has ceased to use this item. Yet in opening the wallet and enacting the same motions once performed by the deceased, it is as though we have re-animated their touch in

[184] Imperial War Museum, 'mirror' (No Date) <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30089552>[accessed 19th February 2024] (para. 3 of 3).
[185] London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, 'wallet', EPH 9791.

the familiar movement of the fabric. Despite this imaginative resuscitation of the dead, the wallet's disuse is evident in the discolouration of the fabric, the spots of white and smears of mottled brown. The leather, or the skin, of the wallet is decaying before you and you are simultaneously struck with the evidence of both life and death. Sticky with the residue of a lost life, the wallet's decay is both emotive and disturbing, mimicking the slow decay of a body awaiting autopsy and reaffirming the reality of death through the connection it maintains with the deceased. Similarly, Tattersall's pipe encourages you to imagine the man holding the wood and using it in times when he needed comfort or camaraderie.[186] In fact, the pipe holds literal traces of its use; at the bottom of the bowl there are some small, charred remnants of tobacco, likely the last he may have enjoyed or sought solace in. The wood of the pipe displays miniscule scratches and dents, perhaps from when it was made, or from repeated usage. Each scratch or mark is evidence of existence – it is an item that was once intended to be used repeatedly. Yet it remains housed in the archive, cared for to such an extent that the tobacco remains. Such small, tangible connections to the dead are encouraged and preserved by the archive and the objects it holds, as though a spiritual bridge is held within their material to ensure a continuance of their being. As such, the spiritual and talismanic nature of these objects is fostered through repeated viewing and handling, and the sacred space of the archive is enriched.

[186] London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, 'pipe', EPH 9789.

Figure 6 'wallet' © IWM (EPH 9791)

To recall Sara Ahmed's affect theory, these objects (given their intensely sentimental value) are deeply entrenched in emotional meaning and 'stickiness' – as they are held and touched they acquire an increasing affective value.[187] Touch, as argued by Das, "dies with the person, impervious to technology and preservation, as if the soul lodged in the skin".[188] If this is indeed where the soul resides, the touching of objects leaves an impression from the soul which cannot be replicated once it has been disembodied. Ahmed's affect theory describes the role of impression, listing the varying meanings of the term (a perception, an image, a mark upon the surface), concluding that "We need to remember the 'press' in an impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface

[187] Ahmed, p. 45.
[188] Das, p. 27.

upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace".[189] Considering the "obsess[ion] with tactile experiences" in war writings from the period, it is not an unfounded view that touch, the receptor of such tactile experiences, would be a marker of emotional and psychological value.[190] With such limited autonomy over their senses, and thus their sensory experience, the value of chosen and meaningful touch is magnified; surrounded by the horrors of mud, decay, and blood, sentimental and loving touch must impart a significant affective value upon cherished objects such as letters and personal effects. Flight Lieutenant T. E. Viney's tie pin lies in the confines of the IWM, encased in a plastic bag inside of a box and carefully shrouded within a temperature-controlled environment.[191] The pin bears a slight dent from repeated usage, or age and time. You feel the pin, and in doing so you feel the metal which was held and worn by a living human being, you hold a part of their life. In keeping these items and storing them for future generations, the archive assumes an atmosphere of remembrance and grief. In holding the wallet or the tie pin, you hold a part of someone's existence, and they are imaginatively called forth. By storing these cherished and affective items, the archive holds remnants of the deceased, and the love others had for them, creating a sacred space of memorialisation which enables people to visit a shrine for the past and engage with the memories of the individual's life and soul. In memorialising the dead through affective enshrined items, the individual moves away from the symbolic erasure of the individual in the pristine militarised monuments, free from the touch of the dead.

The objects which were desired after the war for preservation illustrates the desire to preserve and remember the lives and emotions of the dead. Elise Edmonds explores the collecting drive which emerged in post-war Australia, known as the European War Collecting

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[189] Ahmed, p. 6.
[190] Das, p. 5.
[191] London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, 'Tie pin', EPH 10942.2.

Project, in which collectors such as William Ifould sought to collect personal effects (particularly diaries) after the First World War.[192] Ifould was "particularly seeking accounts which had sentimental value […] The 'personal feelings, doings, and relationships of the men, their thoughts and actions' were the criteria the Library was seeking from diaries".[193] This collecting drive was interested in the personal, social, and emotive lives of all who fought. However, this interest applied to those accounts written *during* the war, at the time of the events recorded; accounts and narratives written *after* the war were rejected.[194] This illustrates an interest in the objects which hold emotive value – whether that be in the words or the physical qualities of the item. Edmonds cites this case study as an example of how archivists, in their appraisal, payment, or rejection of various submitted diaries, privileged some accounts and marginalised or rejected others. However, what is of interest for this project is the focus on sentimental value and personal interiority – these written accounts mirror the desire of next of kin to collect and save items which reflect or 'contain' the interior soul or life of their loved one. Whether that be a letter, compass, cigarettes, or alternative item kept constantly on their person, there is an academic and personal yearning for these items. Regardless of the type of object, there is a pattern of prioritising items which have affective value – items which conjure a sense of what Stephen Greenblatt describes as resonance and wonder.[195] Greenblatt is interested in the effect of objects, stating that even "wounded artifacts may be compelling not only as witnesses to the violence of history but as signs of use, marks of the human

[192] Elise Edmonds, 'Of Sentimental Value: Collecting Personal Diaries from the First World War', *Archives and Manuscripts,* 48 (2020), 186-99.
[193] Ibid, p. 190.
[194] Ibid, p. 192.
[195] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences,* 43 (1990), 11-34 (pp. 19-20).

touch".[196] Not only do these objects evoke an affect, wonder, and a history of touch, they mark human existence and a life lived.

This is evidenced in the preservation of what Greenblatt has called "wounded artifacts".[197] Even those items which bear wounds, but do not bear any connection to the death of the individual, are preserved in an equally reverent state – as though capturing the proximity of death, the narrow escape, keeps the memory or danger from escaping outside of the item. Many of these items remain on display or within the archives of the IWM, such as a pocketbook within the private papers of Captain Annan Dickson which bears evidence of near death; the book exhibits its own wound with the bullet which caused it still lodged in its spine.[198] The components and language used to describe the item are eerily bodily; the spine has been punctured by the bullet, and it remains within the body of the object as if the moment of near death has been permanently captured and preserved to attest to the experience. Similarly, Second Lieutenant Harold Cope survived a wound in August 1916, yet his jacket, torn and bloodied, remains frozen in that moment of peril (Figure 7).[199] The arm is missing, torn in haste at the shoulder when it was presumably cut away for life-saving purposes, and blood stains the front of the fabric. The body both literally and figuratively remains woven into the fabric, visible for all to see. At the time of writing, the jacket remains on display at the IWM – a testament to the violent experiences endured and survived by some of those fighting soldiers. However, not all were fortunate enough to survive injury. Other

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[196] Ibid, p. 22.
[197] Ibid.
[198] London, Imperial War Museum, Private Papers, 'Private Papers of Captain A A Dickson', Documents.11650<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030011512>[accessed 16th February 2024].
[199] London, Imperial War Museum, Uniform and Insignia, 'Jacket, Service Dress, 1913 Pattern: Second Lieutenant, Border Regiment', UNI 10830 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30099475>[accessed 16th February 2024].

items, such as Lieutenant R. S. Smylie's wallet, containing images of his next of kin, remains damaged from the point of his death – living proof of the dangers that many did not survive.[200] Death clings to the object, and as such it brings the horror of war and the reality of death back to the Home Front. Without a body, collecting and storing these items may enforce an otherwise impossible concept – that their beloved is gone. Even potentially gruesome and disquieting items have been preserved as testament to a life lost. A small piece of shrapnel, removed from a wound which became infected and ultimately killed Charles Frampton, sits in the IWM (Figure 8).[201] Red with rust, the metal holds images of pain and bloodshed forcing the viewer to reckon with the reality it narrates. These items are of interest to this project. The imparting of the self and emotion onto objects through touch, 'stickiness', impression, or memory create items which harbour traces of the individual, or the experience of peril and distress, and as such a symbolic value adheres to the surfaces and materiality of the object.

[200] London, Imperial War Museum, Private Papers, 'Private Papers of Lieutenant R S Smylie', Documents.8175<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030008005>[accessed 16th February 2024].
[201] London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, 'shrapnel, piece of', EPH 4693 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30084622>[accessed 19th February 2024].

Figure 7 'Jacket, Service Dress, 1913 Pattern: Second Lieutenant, Border Regiment'© IWM (UNI 10830)

Figure 8 'shrapnel, piece of' © IWM (EPH 4693)

As argued in the 'Introduction' to this thesis, the symbolic value of objects which remain after the soldier's death can be positioned theoretically as a substitute for the physical corpse through the connection they hold to the social body – the parts of the person which persist after the death of the physical body.[202] As such, the movement of these objects into the archive (with all its reverent physical qualities), becomes an attempt to bury the remains of the dead, many of whom could not be granted a traditional Christian burial. The archive, with its roots in memorialisation and recording a past otherwise inaccessible to a future generation, marks the life of the individual as a headstone marks a grave. Some objects even absorb the visual markers of a headstone. For example, Private E. M. Tyler is memorialised through a mounted plaque which was given to the next of kin for those killed in service (Figure 9).[203] The plaque, bearing his name and the iconography of heroism, provides an honourable marker of the soldier's death. Beneath the plaque sits a portrait of the deceased, providing another tangible thread between the life of the individual and the importance of mourning the man in question, not the death of the soldier alone. In looking at this symbolic headstone we are visually forced to reconcile the name on the plaque with the image of the deceased, drawing our attention to the palpable grief which sits upon the surface of the object, sticking to the fabric. Removed from the mount, and stripped of the deceased's face, we are left with a militarised and heroically painted death. This recalls Jane Bennett's belief that inanimate objects can create effects through their 'Thing-Power'.[204] Through the evocation of the headstone's image and the intimate addition of the deceased's portrait, the object performs in a different capacity to an isolated plaque. Comparing the mounted plaque of Private E. M.

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[202] Elizabeth Hallam, Jenny Hockey, and Glennys Howarth, *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 142.
[203] London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, 'Next of Kin Memorial Plaque, mounted', EPH 499<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30080753>[accessed 16th February 2024].
[204] Bennett, p. 6.

Tyler to the unmounted plaque of William Edginton (Figure 10), the plaque's affective qualities become less personal and the network shifts to a militarised form of memorialisation.[205] In place of the personal features of the lost loved one, we are greeted with heavily symbolic imagery – a result of a design competition held during the war, the only specification for the design being that the words "He died for freedom and honour" must be visible in any design submitted.[206] In specifying the purpose of the soldier's death, the plaque takes on a government ordained form of memorialisation – a step between the cleansed mass monuments and the careful preservation of the individual within archives. The imagery itself is heavily patriotic, the figure of Britannia laying a laurel crown upon the box containing the deceased's name – a country laying flowers at the grave of the dead soldier. She stands tall with a trident in her hand, displaying her authority over the water and land, whilst a lion growls in front of her to convey the soldier's fearless valour in the face of death. These two figures, and the representation of the dead soldier, stand above the scene resting below the lion's feet. Visually beneath the triumphs, freedom, and honour of the figure lies a vicious scene of a smaller lion biting the German Imperial Eagle, demonstrating that in death, the soldier has triumphed and lives on through the determination to defeat the enemy. Gone are all traces of the loved individual, what remains is a disc of metal, mass produced and customised to meet the grief of British citizens.

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[205] London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, 'Next of Kin Memorial Plaque', EPH 2114<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30084049>[accessed 16th February 2024].
[206] Imperial War Museum, 'Next of Kin Memorial Plaque, Scroll and King's Message' (No Date) <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/first-world-war-next-of-kin-plaque>[accessed 16th February 2024] (para. 9 of 18).

Figure 9 'Next of Kin Memorial Plaque, mounted' © IWM (EPH 499)

Figure 10 'Next of Kin Memorial Plaque' © IWM (EPH 2114)

Objects, after all, do not exist with a singular meaning. Patrick Collier has argued that objects are not limited in value to their commodity status, but that they "accrue multiple and different meanings and forms of value in overlapping but distinct systems".[207] Much like the deeply personal narratives of memoir, objects and the archives which hold them navigate emotional, imaginative, and memorialised meanings which extend beyond the mere commodity and into the talismanic and sacred. Thus, the archive and memoir become arenas in which the dead can be recaptured, holding the only 'living' remains of some of the war's deceased. As we attempt to remember the catastrophic loss of the First World War, and to preserve the items leftover from it, we enact a process of continual remembrance.

Re-writing Narratives and the Process of Recovery

The archive, viewed simply, is a place which holds items from the past - a record which attests to the history of mankind. However, the term 'archive' has acquired a metaphorical status, representing memory, the past, and history – a status which has been queried in recent decades. For Carolyn Steedman, the metaphor of the archive is misplaced – the archive is not a fantastical, figurative idea, but a location identifiable by the dust which the historian touches, inhales, and works within.[208] This approach returns us to the idea of the space itself holding an evocative nature, a bodily, sacred quality. It is a place which is filled with useful and intentional documents surrounded and engulfed by fragments which hold little to no meaning; Steedman argues that "although endless information is found in archives, no archive is the place where historical knowledge is produced".[209] Steedman attests that there is often

[207] Patrick Collier, *Modern Print Artefacts: Textual Materiality and Literary Value in British Print Culture, 1890-1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 2.
[208] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
[209] Carolyn Steedman, 'After the Archive', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 8 (2011), 321-40 (p. 323).

little to be found in the archive itself, but that historical knowledge is formed after the archive, by the historians and scholars who use and engage with the archival material they stumble upon when painstakingly examining the minutiae of the accidental remnants of the past.[210] Steedman is not alone in her belief that historical knowledge is not written by the archive, but rather by those who have interpreted it; this concern is shared by all those who critique the reliability and truth of archival material. For example, this has been echoed by "the postmodern suspicion of the historical record" which has perceived the archive, "not as an objective representation of the past, but rather as a selection of objects that have been preserved for a variety of reasons (which may include sheer luck)".[211] Manoff echoes Steedman's own belief that the archive is not as intentional or accurate in its recording of history as we would like to believe – rather than reflecting the true past and allowing us to reach out and touch what was, the archive offers a window through which scholars can glance a small suggestion of history. It is what the historian, archivist, or scholar understands from these remnants which shape historical knowledge. To apply this same concept to the memoir – it would be inaccurate to state that the memoir is an unquestionably true account of events. It is impossible to create an unmediated account of events, especially events which are tremendously difficult to navigate emotionally and psychologically such as the death of a child. Much of the work conducted by a memoir or an archive may be unconscious; yet this is worthy of note as it suggests there is an innate desire to record and evidence human existence. Whilst at their point of creation the memoirist and archivist have produced their version of history, preserving what they feel to be important, in doing so they have both created what the

[210] Steedman, 'After the Archive', p. 325.
[211] Manoff, p. 14.

historian and critic can view as substitute bodies. The remains of life function as actors within a network of memorialisation, providing tangible connections to the deceased.

The term 'remains' adds yet another layer of meaning. Samantha Matthews, in an examination of the nineteenth century's engagement with fragments left behind by poets, defines remains as a term used to describe "these often fragmentary and miscellaneous posthumous texts; however, when associated with the corpse, 'remains' connotes a disconcerting corporeal disintegration".[212] In using the term remains, we not only identify what is left behind after death (the leftovers of the past), but the term brings forth connotations of the decaying body – embedding the items and the archive with an awareness that these objects can and will disintegrate without care and careful choice. For Matthews, this speaks to a concern within the nineteenth century to perceive the body as continuing after death, "persisting in the metaphor of death as rest or sleep".[213] Matthews argues that the ability to collect and preserve textual remains (or disjecta membra) through their "transformation […] into the unified and printed volume" made the term 'remains' unstable due to the undeniable fact that the corpse does not share the same fate and therefore cannot retain "integrity" after death.[214] The outcome of this concern was a "gathering together [of] biographical and textual fragments to form them into an artistically coherent whole".[215] However, in creating a coherent whole out of the remains of what was, we re-create and thus re-write this history. If archivists misplace a fragment, they may present the past inaccurately. Or, even more drastically, if these remains have reached the fate of the corpse – decay and disintegration – before they have been 'transformed', historians and archivists cannot possibly

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[212] Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 7.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.

present the 'truth' of the past. In forming their memoirs and archives, the mothers and mourners of the First World War attempt to record their version of history– the weight of their loss, and the importance of their beloved.

The inability to truly convey the past has brought many archivists to the similarly slippery concept of memory. In many ways, the archive as a mnemonic structure parallels the concept of the archive as historical record. The ability to recall or record memory and events are enabled by the archive as "The archive is hypomnesic" - it accounts for and supports a society in which the ability to remember is deficient or unreliable as time progresses.[216] An unconscious fear of losing reliable memories may motivate the author-mother, creating a drive to narrativize the reality of their situation through what remains of their son to preserve the memory of their deceased. George Bornstein discusses how the materiality of the text can be read to create meanings, stating that "texts emerge as constructed *objects*, not as mystified transparent lenses giving us the 'real' Keats or Shakespeare or Dickinson".[217] Bornstein argues that editorial decisions create and erase meanings through altering the physical appearance of the text on the page and the information provided with it, forming constructions of the author or event the reader is trying to access.[218] He provides an example of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* which he claims erased the political meanings of texts by removing pertinent details (such as whether the poem appeared in a political pamphlet) and printing only the poem itself and the original date of publication, positioning "the anthology itself as a dehistoricizing field that obscures the social embedding of its own contents".[219] Whilst this may seem like an unintentional erasure intended to foreground the language rather than the

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[216] Derrida, p. 11.
[217]George Bornstein, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 15.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid, p. 14.

politics of the past, it is emblematic of how small decisions can be made, or are, political. With this information removed, the poem is interpreted differently, and alternative meanings are made. Thus, scholars must consider this in how both archives and memoirs are constructed. These texts are not simply narratives, but constructed *things*. The archivist may unconsciously favour the perspectives they feel are the most important at the time, and in doing so they may not record and preserve alternative views – thus, they risk obsoletion. In choosing to write and create their memoir, the mother can similarly avoid or re-live the trauma and joys of their child's existence, they can re-write their grief and imaginatively re-live the childhood of their beloved soldier-son before the moment of their death, and we (the reader) are taken along with them.

In an exploration of writing and reading death, Erika Quinn states that "the bereaved attempt to stop domestic life in order to enshrine the daily lives of the dead. Some scholars have suggested that such "shrines" or sacred spaces are in fact substitute graves".[220] Quinn's exploration stems from an examination of how women's wartime experience was presented and interpreted in "a bestselling literary genre in Germany" called "Unterhaltungsromane".[221] The protagonists in these novels do not view the corpses of their deceased or watch their loved ones die; Quinn argues that because of this physical and imaginative distance, "The presence of a loved one was preserved through the possession of talismanic objects and the curation of sacred spaces".[222] As this chapter has presented, these sacred spaces and objects are not limited to fiction. The storing of meaningful, talismanic items in dark and quiet archives mimics the burial of the body in a grave. Consequently, the archive holds a similar role to these novels; both the archive and the Unterhaltungsromane enact or depict "private

[220] Quinn, p. 282.
[221] Ibid, p. 273.
[222] Ibid, p. 274.

acts of remembrance, depicted in a public form".[223] The protagonist of these novels, and the reader of the archive, engage with objects and spaces which exist as a means of holding memory and increasing or maintaining the affective value of the soldier's remains; even if those remains are purely textual or embedded within every-day objects. Archives therefore begin to function as a location of memorialisation in which private correspondence and ephemera are kept, viewed, and cared for with the reverence commonly reserved for the dead body. Whilst this chapter has positioned the public archive as a sacred space and realm of preserving the dead, this process was not limited to the archive but extended into literature.

To summarise, through the archive you have access to the ability to manipulate and control the evidence of collective memory. In choosing not to preserve items, you re-write the past for future generations and erase the ability to evidence the claims of those in the present. In fact, Tom Nesmith argues that archivists "co-create and shape the knowledge in records, and thus help form society's memory".[224] Until recent years, the mother's experience has not been adequately included within the records which form society's memory – either through unconscious neglect, or through the material traces having met disastrous ends. In engaging with the narratives of the bereaved, we uncover a perspective that has not had the room to be explored. Whilst the soldier's narrative is essential, the maternal voice allows us to view the items within the archive in a new light – considering the weight and stickiness of their affective qualities and their role within a network of memorialisation. The maternal memoir extends the work of the archive, enacting a desire to record, evidence and return their sons to

[223] Ibid, p. 274.
[224] Tom Nesmith, 'Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives', *The American Archivist*, 65 (2002), 24-41 (p. 27).

the Home Front through the formation of a substitute body over which to mourn and process their trauma.

Chapter Three: Maternal Memoir: Mourning, Memorialisation, and Material Monument

As established in Chapter 1, 'The Mother in First World War Narratives', representations of motherhood during the First World War utilised ideological constructions of the sacrificial and patriotic mother to pursue agendas of recruitment and shame. The mother became a symbolic figure of misunderstanding, emotional vulnerability, and blind patriotism on the Home Front. Consequently, the individuality and particularity of the mother figure was obscured. To access a more nuanced representation of motherhood in this context we must investigate the material which the mothers themselves preserved, produced, and collected. By exploring how mothers grieved through the lens of the memoirs they created, modern readers can look beyond the limited representations of motherhood within First World War newspapers, fiction, and posters, and in doing so we can extend our current understanding of bereavement and motherhood during this period. As discussed in Chapter 2, 'Objects and the Archive', the shared features of maternal memoir and archive can aid us in this aim through the mother's own retelling of traumatic loss, shedding light on the desire to maintain a connection to the lost son. In viewing these memoirs within an assemblage consisting of objects, memoir, archives, and literary remains, their relationship with memorialisation emerges, suggesting that these materials reflect the mother's lived experience with grief and the desire to mark the life of their son in a tangible way. This chapter will offer an analysis of two maternal memoirs: Marie Leighton's *Boy of My Heart* (1916), and Pamela Glenconner's *Edward Wyndham Tennant: A Memoir by His Mother* (1919). It will explore the role of the memoir as object, literary narrative, and material monument. The description of memoir as 'material monument' is employed to highlight the memoir's function as a tangible location beyond the constraints of the label of object and towards a perspective in which the memoir becomes a

structure, a *place* akin to the archive in which the reader can connect to the deceased through their substitute corpse.

Marie Leighton, often writing as Marie Connor, was a successful writer of melodramatic serials which financially supported her family.[225] She married Robert Leighton and had three children: Roland, Evelyn and Clare.[226] She had a fear of fire, and according to her daughter she would carry her manuscripts with her to prevent them from catching alight, leaving damp cloths around them in her absence to protect them from flame.[227] In 1916, Marie Leighton published her memoir for Roland Leighton anonymously.[228] Titled *Boy of My Heart*, Leighton's memoir shares memories of her son from his childhood through to the moment his death is revealed.[229] Publishing anonymously and obscuring any identifying names creates a narrative of loss which could be representative of any mother's experience of grief. This suggests a desire to allow mothers to project themselves into the narrative. By removing these identifying details Leighton creates a text which identifies and acknowledges the collective loss of sons, distancing herself from the loss of Roland specifically.[230] The anonymity performs an attempt to distance herself from the tragedy, and thus the reality of the narrative.

Pamela Adelaide Genevieve Wyndham was one of three sisters depicted in John Singer Sargent's painting, *The Wyndham Sisters: Lady Elcho, Mrs. Adeane, and Mrs. Tennant*.[231] Pamela Wyndham married Edward Priaulx Tennant, 1st Baron Glenconner, in

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[225] Clare Leighton, *Tempestuous Petticoat: The Story of an Invincible Edwardian* (New York: Rinehart & Company Inc., 1947), p. 4.
[226] Clarke, 'Marie Leighton and Her Family in Abbey Road before World War 1', (para. 2 of 8).
[227] Clare Leighton, pp. 6-7.
[228] Bette London, 'Writing Modern Deaths: Women, War, and the View from the Home Front', in *The History of Women's Writing, 1880-1920*, ed. by Holly A. Laird (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 284-97 (p. 284).
[229] Marie Leighton, *Boy of My Heart*.
[230] Ibid, p. 66.
[231] John Singer Sargent, *The Wyndham Sisters: Lady Elcho, Mrs. Adeane, and Mrs. Tennant*, 1899, oil on canvas, 292.1 × 213.7 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

1895.[232] After his death she married Edward Grey, 1st Viscount Grey of Fallodon, in 1922.[233] Her circle of friends included famous figures such as Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Edward Burne-Jones.[234] Furthermore, Pamela Glenconner belonged to a literary and intellectual group called 'The Souls'.[235] This was "a group of powerful aristocrats attempting to live beautifully by dedicating themselves to art, learning and sexual equality".[236] Her memoir, *Edward Wyndham Tennant: A Memoir by His Mother*, was published in 1919; like Leighton, Glenconner traces her son's life through childhood to death. However, Glenconner claims her position as mother and author through the title of the memoir. Glenconner aims her memoir at the collective maternal mourning of the period in the dedication of her text, stating that the memoir is "to all those Mothers [*sic*] who have suffered the same loss. […] all I have found good to tell of my son here, they will feel to be most true of theirs".[237] In creating their maternal memoirs, both authors harbour an awareness of the reception it may receive and the importance of locating spaces through which mothers can identify and share their losses. There is a universality to this mourning, and in creating these objects of grief, the maternal authors create locations for their own mourning alongside a material monument to combat the cleansed and impersonal monuments erected by government bodies. It is within these material monuments that another mother may find traces of their own son, unavailable in the cold stone of statues. The memoirs are sticky with emotion and traces of the lost life – insisting

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[232] The National Archives, *Grey, Pamela Adelaide Genevieve, (c1871-1928), Viscountess Grey of Fallodon, author*, (No Date)<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/c/F66065>[accessed 10th June 2024].
[233] Ibid.
[234] Lara Feigel, 'Those Wild Wyndhams: Three Sisters at the Heart of Power by Claudia Renton – Review', *The Guardian* (2014)<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/feb/03/those-wild-wyndhams-claudia-renton-review>[accessed 10th June 2024] (para. 2 of 11).
[235] 'The Souls', *National Portrait Gallery* (2024) <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/group/1230/TheSouls>[accessed 10th June 2024].
[236] Feigel, 'Those Wild Wyndhams', (para. 6 of 11).
[237] Glenconner, p. v.

upon an intimacy with the mother's grief through personal anecdotes and the witnessing of traumatic loss. As an archive welcomes the public to learn about and to remember the past, the maternal memoir invites the reader to participate in the memorialisation and recovery of the son's personhood in a way mass monuments cannot achieve, attending to the need to 'bury' their dead without access to funereal processes.

Maternal memoirs symbolically stand in for the absent son through collecting traces which attest to the existence of the son lost within the mass casualties of warfare. As an archivist selects material for preservation, the mother embarks on the same task, selecting material to embody the deceased's personhood. Furthermore, the memoir as a physical book forms a location to which memory can be attached, and where it can be touched and visited. The memoir forms both literary body and literary grave; an attempt to form a corpse from a corpus. In Pierre Nora's discussion of *lieux de mémoire*, he establishes the nature of memory, stating that "Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image".[238] These memoirs, formed of collected traces of existence, are attempts at holding the lost individual and returning them to a place of proximity and care. Nora asserts that the *lieux de mémoire* is "material, symbolic, and functional", a description befitting these memoirs.[239] At once material (a physical object, printed upon paper and bound together), symbolic (a sign and symbol of the deceased, an indicator which signifies the reality of the loss), and functional (a way of aiding remembrance and supporting processes of grief), maternal memoir adheres to the distinction set out by Nora. Furthermore, Nora suggests that

[238] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire', *Representations,* 26 (1989), 7-24 (p. 13).
[239] Ibid, p. 19.

> [I]f we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial […] it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis.[240]

Maternal memoirs enact a desired stilling of progression – time becomes malleable in the case of Leighton who chooses to live amongst the memories of childhood, whereas for Glenconner it is the future she wishes to avoid, ending her narration after Edward's death. Without a body to bury, mark, or lament, the denial of funereal rites finds an outlet in the immortalisation of traces which attest to the deceased soldier-son's life, mimicking the archive's ability to slow the decay of objects and memories through careful preservation techniques. In choosing to write memoir, as opposed to fiction, the maternal author places their work within the realm of memory – fighting against the inevitability of prolific forgetting and loss ushered in by the enormity of the conflict, aligning with the focus on remembrance which followed its conclusion. As Nora states, "Memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events".[241] Denied access to a grave, and unable to control the events which lie before them, maternal memoir provides a site of attachment – a substitute body over which to mourn, and a literary grave capable of materialising the intangibility of loss.

The assertion that these memoirs are attempts to materialise memory highlights the slippery concept of memory itself. Unable to confirm or deny the authenticity of memories presented as fact, the complexity of the maternal memoir as a site of memory and evidence presents a challenge. Just as an archivist selects and excludes, so does the memoirist. As we

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[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid, p. 22.

examine the memoirs in more depth, an awareness of the nature of authorship and mediation may illuminate elements of the writing and memorialisation process which would otherwise go undetected. Why has the author chosen these memories, these objects, these devices? What does their inclusion communicate about the maternal voice and experience? The selection of memories therefore requires our attention; we must consider how the material functions narratively, but also how it evidences the lost life. How do you evidence a life so short? What evidence and achievements remain? In her navigation of these concerns, Bette London concludes that "The works, indeed, are characterized by an excess of mismatched pieces", in an attempt to include all that the young man was and may have grown to be, London feels that there can be an excess of seemingly tangential material.[242] Yet to include all the remains with no perceivable filter is a choice in itself.

In contrast to the sense of non-selection identified by Bette London, Victoria Stewart claims that war memoirs "describe a life from beginning to end and therefore provide it with narrated closure," through the sense of order imposed upon the life by placing events in a logical sequence.[243] Furthermore, Stewart states that the form "provide[s] a way of reactivating or re-experiencing" the deceased through the inclusion of letters or private thoughts found within diaries.[244] In Stewart's view, the creation of memoir and the inclusion of life's trace materials is not a mismatched attempt to convey the whole of a person, but a demonstration of the desire to reach a state of closure through evoking and re-activating the life of the deceased. In Marie Leighton and Pamela Glenconner's memoirs for their soldier-sons, the narrative progresses from childhood through to their moment of death. However,

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[242] London, p. 288.
[243] Victoria Stewart, '"War Memoirs of the Dead": Writing and Remembrance in the First World War', *Literature & History,* 14 (2005), 37-52 (p. 45).
[244] Ibid.

through the paratextual material included, both authors ensure that the reader is aware of the tragic conclusion. Thus, the addition of literary remains from Edward Wyndham Tennant's childhood poetry, through to Roland Leighton's letters, becomes an act of re-forming the individual. In agreement with Stewart, this act allows the mothers to re-live the joys of motherhood they experienced with their son. The reader, learning of their death before reconstructing their individuality through the memoir and coming to 'know' them, must endure the agony of the mother's loss in the slow retelling of love and death. Therefore, the indiscriminate inclusion of archival remains in the literary grave, within the *lieux de mémoire*, provides a site to grieve and visit the dead, to commune with the ghost and the trace of the individual.

Narrating Grief

From childhood innocence to premonitions of death, the maternal authors of these memoirs sculpt a narrative of grief for the reader; we follow the wave of emotional torment as the author depicts their sons coming of age, interrupted by the cruel timing of the First World War which will rob these mothers of their sons. In rebuilding the life of their sons, the authors must confront their grief and acknowledge the son's absence. Glenconner's memoir moves through Edward's life, illustrated through the sections of the memoir which progress from 'Early Childhood', through his 'School Days', until he reaches his time in the war. His development is also marked through the interweaving of his literary remains; amidst the sections of narration there are two sections of poetry, one with childhood poems, and a later section in which he has matured. These poems allow an insight into Edward's intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual development. Readers can witness the coming of age of this young man, and the inclusion of his childhood handwriting in poems such as 'A Face' (Figure 11)

creates an illusion of familiarity – when we see the poem repeated in print a few pages later, we feel as if we belonged to the inner circle who saw its first draft. Furthermore, the emphasis upon encouraging the reader to come to know Bim as a child enhances the pity and sorrow of his loss. Glenconner articulates in several places within the text that Edward never lost his inner child, stating that if he "stayed on among us here as he was then, never, though he had lived till the age of sixty, would he have outgrown, in some things, the ways of a child".[245] She attests that "though no doubt he matured as we hoped during the last year of his earthly life, his heart remained till the end, the heart of a child".[246] Bim's childlike ways heighten the impression of his innocence and love – despite everything, his mother sees his innocence, she sees the child she raised from babyhood all the way to his final moments. As readers, we too see the child from the early chapters carefully woven throughout the narrative – witnesses to his development and growth. When his death is announced, we see his innocence and mourn the waste of youth. The memoir becomes a memorial for the soldier, the man, and most significantly, the child, instilling a sense of order through a narrated coming of age as the author attempts to integrate the trauma of losing their beloved son.

[245] Glenconner, p. 184.
[246] Ibid, p. 79.

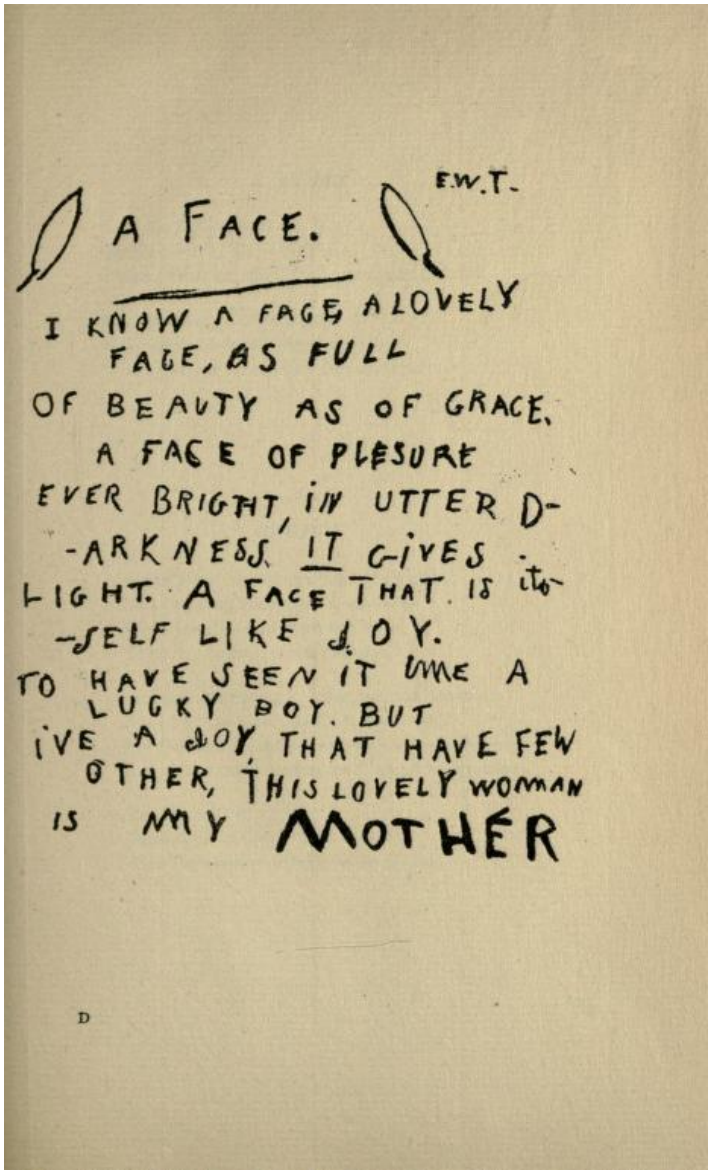

Figure 11 Scan of Edward Wyndham Tennant's handwritten poem, 'A Face'. (Pamela Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant,* p. 33)

Similarly, focusing on the fragility of childhood innocence, Leighton paints an image of the suddenness with which pain, danger, and loss can arrive:

> [H]e himself soon became a delight to the eye, with his big, brown velvety eyes, his exquisite skin, his mass of shining curls and his

> portly little body – so portly that it looked as if it were artificially inflated and a puncture by a pin might cause a collapse.[247]

Leighton depicts Roland's innocence and beauty in her angelic, cherub-like description of his round frame, perfect skin, and curly hair. The stereotypical image of the perfect child found in portraits and oil paintings, featuring cloth-clad babies sat on clouds with halos of curls, spring to mind. However, Leighton distorts this by shifting the focus onto the unnaturalness, highlighting the artificial perfection which lulls us into false security before it is destroyed before our eyes. This dynamic mirrors Leighton's belief that "In this world one never gets a good thing twice and the bolts of fate always fall from the bluest skies".[248] With Leighton's belief in Roland's childhood perfection, the "bolts of fate" are doomed to arrive and destroy the perfect scene, leading her to "pray night after night: 'Don't take him away from me, oh God! Don't take him away!".[249] The tragedy of these exclamations resides in the premonition of Roland's fate, and the clear desperation felt by the author. Leighton's description relies on an image of sudden destruction and violence to depict the pain and unexpected nature of loss. A puncture from a pin is a quick and explosive end, the choice of comparison mimics the piercing of metal upon skin. Leighton's depictions of destruction take on the characteristics of bullets and skin, embedding the knowledge of Roland's death within her memories. His imagined destruction in this image becomes a censored premonition of Roland's eventual death, foregrounding his innocence whilst hinting at the violence which will claim his life. Therefore, despite the narrator's lack of awareness in relation to Roland's death, the author's

[247] Marie Leighton, p. 29.
[248] Ibid, p. 21.
[249] Ibid, p. 30.

knowledge seeps through to the foreground, preparing herself and the reader for the horror of the revelation, easing the memoir towards the confrontation of loss.

These reminiscences of childhood innocence and fragility form just part of the memoir's task of memorialisation. Leighton makes explicit comments on the nature of memory itself, portrayed through the metaphor of images and film. Leighton states that as she thinks of the young girl who cares for Roland (Vera Brittain), "the cinematograph of the mind flashes a crowd of vivid pictures across the screen of [her] memory".[250] Memory is presented as fleeting and intensely sensory, something which comes without intention, and is beyond control. With the inability to rewind or pause the ephemeral flash of memory, the memoir provides a way to control and revisit these recollections. This imagery returns towards the end of the memoir as Leighton remarks that "It is strange how vividly all these pictures of his whole past life have flashed across my mind again as I have been sitting here waiting for him!", returning us to the central motif of the memoir – waiting.[251] This remark enacts a narrative function, reminding the reader that we remain within one place and time waiting for the return of her son, whilst also aligning the act of waiting with loss and remembrance. The outcome for which the mother waits will never arrive, and thus the reader must ask whether she will ever cease waiting – trapped within the tragic non-arrival of her son. However, in the creation of the maternal memoir the mother can construct a substitute body through which the spirit and memory of the son can be anchored and returned home.

Despite the presence of loss and tragedy in the memoir, the act of remembrance is rooted in memories of love and humour – providing a stark contrast to the reality of confronting death experienced by the Leighton family. In a letter to her brother, Vera Brittain

[250] Ibid, p. 25.
[251] Ibid, p. 219.

described the return of Roland's belongings and how his mother and sister, "were both crying as bitterly as on the day we heard of His death".[252] Brittain describes how the clothes depicted "the horror of war without its glory", stating that they held "the smell of graveyards & the Dead […] as though [the mud] were saturated with dead bodies".[253] In the vivid description Brittain provides of the clothes in which he was killed, the reality of Roland's death is stark:

> We discovered that the bullet was an expanding one. The hole where it went in in front […] was almost microscopic, but at the back, almost exactly where his back bone would have been, there was quite a large rent. […] they sent back a khaki waistcoat or vest […] which was dark and stiff with blood, and a pair of khaki breeches also in the same state […[Even the tabs of his braces were blood-stained too.[254]

Arriving just three weeks after Roland's death, the blood-stained clothing illuminates the violence and pain with which he may have died - a knowledge which is tactfully erased in the official wording of telegrams. According to Brittain, Marie Leighton responded by declaring that she "must either burn or bury them. They smell of Death; they are not Roland, they even seem to detract from his memory".[255] The graphic and bloodied clothing are the embodiment of death and as such Leighton attempts to attach funereal practices to them. She asserts that these items "are not Roland", they do not represent the life of the son she knew but the death which was inflicted upon him. The horror portrayed in these desecrated items does not align with how the family wish to remember their beloved, and as such we can read the memoir as

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[252] *Letters from A Lost Generation: First World War Letters of Vera Brittain and Four Friends*, ed. by Alan Bishop and Mark Bostridge (London: Virago, 2008), p. 211.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid, pp. 211-12.
[255] Ibid, p. 212.

an alternative form to assign Roland's life to. Not the war-soaked clothing, but the loving memories and reanimation of the man through the memoir's body. The memoir offers the writer and reader a cleansed yet personal account of the deceased, presenting a controlled confrontation with death free of "the smell of graveyards", allowing Leighton to navigate her loss through memory as a series of positive images, rather than an onslaught of sensory nightmares.

For Glenconner, the text acts less as an anchor and more as a tether. She insists on Edward's and her own beliefs in continuation. In one of his letters, Edward states: "I have the feeling of Immortality very strongly. I think of Death with a light heart and as a friend whom there is no need to fear".[256] Glenconner takes great comfort in this thought, stating early in the memoir that "He […] never doubted that we should live through Death".[257] Bim's statement of 'Immortality' features a second time as an epigraph, as though there is a need to reiterate Bim's bravery in facing death whilst also reaffirming that Bim has not ceased to exist. Several epigraphs within the memoir suggest that death is not final. The epigraph which opens Chapter XXII, in which Bim's death is announced, begins with a quotation from Tennyson: "That death whose truer name is Onward".[258] The chapter then goes on to announce that "On the 22nd September, 1916, Bim went on".[259] The imagery chosen in this quotation is an active denial of the finality of death; Glenconner presents the idea that Bim's spirit and life has not ceased to exist but has simply changed form or location. Indeed, Glenconner went on to write *The Earthen Vessel,* in which she records her attempts to communicate with Edward's

[256] Glenconner*,* p. 136.
[257] Ibid, p. 6.
[258] Ibid, p. 239.
[259] Ibid.

spirit.[260] These communications reportedly took place through Book-Tests, a method of communication in which the spirit will communicate to a medium the number of a page in a book along with the book's "numbered place on a given shelf in a bookcase […] which the medium need have had no access", but one which may be familiar to the communicator.[261] In following these numbered instructions, you would find a sentence upon the page which communicates the intended message of the deceased. The account of a Book-Test which was deemed successful attests to Glenconner's sure belief in continuation

> To attempt to describe the happy glow in the hearts of Bim's family circle when this Book-Message was read would be in cold print, impossible. There are, however, moments well known to all to which it may be likened: when a wished-for letter arrives; when a door swings open and a treasured presence is before one; when, in short, he who has been absent is at home again.[262]

Bim's absence, sorely felt by the family, is marked by their attempts to return traces of his persona to them. Glenconner seeks a tether to her son, believing him not to be gone entirely, but simply adrift – his life continuing in a transformed state. The memoir, published two years prior to *The Earthen Vessel*, deals with exactly that – the loss of the vessel which held Bim's spirit. Creating the object of the memoir allows the mother to negotiate the loss of Bim's physical presence, whilst *The Earthen Vessel* demonstrates her longing for a spiritual presence to remain.

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[260] Pamela Glenconner, *The Earthen Vessel: A Volume Dealing with Spirit Communication Received in the Form of Book-Tests by Pamela Glenconner with a Preface by Sir Oliver Lodge* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1921).
[261] Ibid, p. xv.
[262] Ibid, pp. 42-43.

In narrating their grief, these maternal authors often return to images which evoke the presence of their loved one, such as the departed's voice, belongings, or witticisms. However, in many cases the presence evoked is one which transforms into premonitions of soldiering and heroism, suggesting the inevitability of their fate. One way both mothers foreshadow this is through the description of footsteps, which later turn into the clamour of marching. Leighton describes "his brave little walk" and "brave, gay feet!".[263] This reminiscence of childhood innocence is later echoed in "that splendid sound of marching feet, so grand, so gay, and yet so heartbreaking!".[264] Similarly, Glenconner describes how "His Mother can still hear those nimble footsteps".[265] Later in the memoir, Glenconner meditates on the atmosphere created by "the quiet sound of feet, the measured beat of soldiers going by", whilst "Mothers lay awake and listened, feeling proud of their sons, and trying to realise what was before them".[266] Both authors utilise the evocative image of walking to conjure the milestone of a child's first steps. In the memories of their son's youth, these steps are marked by happiness and promise. However, when the footsteps return in their maturity the promise becomes conflicted, joy and pride become tinged with an ominous sadness. The young men are no longer walking into a world of possibilities, but towards their death; the sound of their footsteps, a sense of continuous motion onwards, pulls the reader and author forwards, unable to intervene. Marching towards grief, the authors can only feel the pained irony of the repeated milestone, and in allowing the narrative to walk towards death they may reach a sense of conclusion and peace. Through this sense of fate and inevitability, an atmosphere of comfort is evoked. It suggests that these deaths were unavoidable, assuaging the mothers of

[263] Marie Leighton, p. 32.
[264] Ibid, p. 123.
[265] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant,* p. 10.
[266] Ibid, p. 119.

any guilt regarding their ability to intervene. The march onwards is a march towards death, but also a march towards acceptance and closure.

However, the extent to which these mothers reach a state of acceptance is debatable as both Leighton and Glenconner utilise narrative strategies which prevent or delay acceptance of death's finality. Both memoirs form an ending upon the arrival at the son's death. For Leighton, the news of Roland's death does not arrive until the final two pages. Unlike Glenconner, Leighton's narrative voice writes without knowledge of Roland's fate. By placing herself within the narrative 'I' of the past, Leighton creates an illusion of safety to avoid the confrontation of her grief, or to remain in denial due to the control of authorship. Leighton's account of her reaction to the news attempts to record the unintelligible pain of the traumatic moment:

> For minutes that were like years the world became to me a shapeless horror of greyness in which there was no beginning and no end, no light and no sound. I did not know anything except that I had to put out my hand and catch at something, with an animal instinct to steady myself so that I might not fall. And then, through the rolling, blinding waves of mist, there came to me suddenly the old childish cry:
> "Come and see me in bed, mother![267]

This account of shock depicts a conflicting sensation of numbness and overwhelming emotion, displaying the effect of trauma upon the mind and body as it instinctively attempts to numb the body from a pain which is too intense to be felt within that moment. Cathy Caruth describes how trauma records "the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned", and in

[267] Marie Leighton, p. 220.

this moment of recall, Leighton's narrative 'I' attempts to translate the force of her emotional experience, and in doing so she integrates it into the narrative and her consciousness.[268] Suddenly, the narrator and reader share the knowledge of Roland's fate. Upon realising, the narrator's world decays and loses meaning – shapes, time, and colour disappear or mutate before her as they become "a shapeless horror of greyness".[269] The disappearance of light and sound robs her of sensory experience and returns the author to a primal state as her body threatens to collapse. As discussed, Leighton portrays memory through intensely sensory descriptions of images and light. Therefore, the lack of any sensory experience in this moment presents a denial of memory and an inability to attach the traumatic event to her consciousness. Even the description of her flowing tears is a sensory robbing of sight – she is blinded in her grief, untethered from the world around her. This retelling of her experience provides a method for understanding. In trying to communicate a void in sensory experience, Leighton connects image to the event, beginning the process of translating the force of the trauma into her own language of memory – images. Whilst the initial impact (the shapeless horror) cannot be fully defined yet, rolling waves of mist provide a clear depiction of overwhelming tears, suggesting that in writing her memoir, and in reaching this moment, Leighton has begun the work of integration and healing. However, upon imagining Roland crying out to her, she dedicates herself to looking after him and visiting his 'bed' in France. She declares that when "the war is over [she] will come and see [him] in bed – in [his] bed under French grass. And [she] will say good-night to [him]".[270] Using the language of sleep obscures death behind implications of comfort and peace, suggesting there will be an awakening and thus a return. This is a hopeful and avoidant image – it denies the whole truth

[268] Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed by. Cathy Caruth (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 151.
[269] Marie Leighton, p. 220.
[270] Ibid, p. 221.

of the event, suggesting that the work of grieving and accepting her son's death has only just begun. Therefore, Leighton's memoir provides a way of returning her son to her, recapturing his personality and voice, and embedding his spirit within the body of the text as a means of processing his death and reaching a sense of closure. However, this closure is slight, demonstrated through language which avoids the finality of death and the ending of the narrative in the moment of reaction – we are not privy to the next stages of the grieving process, as Leighton is yet to embark on them.

Ending the narrative at the point of highest emotion provides a method of narrative control which prevents the author and narrator from fully engaging and re-experiencing the psychological outcome of grief and trauma. This suggests that whilst the production of memoir is a process of memorialisation and confrontation with grief, it is also an escape from the agony of loss through the denial of death. Whilst Leighton's text ends with her dedication to visit Roland's grave, Glenconner performs an alternative method of narrative avoidance. Beginning with slips within the narrative voice between the narrative 'I' and the phrase 'His Mother', Glenconner avoids the topic of Bim's death within certain or personal terms; even within the introduction, which provides an account of some of the key details of his life, the reader is informed that Bim "passed on to the Fuller Life".[271] From the outset of the memoir the reader is encouraged to view Bim's death as a new life. By obscuring death in the guise of life, Glenconner seeks comfort and denies the finality of Bim's absence. In fact, Glenconner synonymises her son with life itself and finds comfort in the thought. She states that

[271] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant,* p. viii.

> [T]he very thought of Bim, now as before, means *Life;* and even in the moments of supreme suffering, moments that make long years, his Mother finds it in her heart to thank God for the life of her son.[272]

Glenconner refers to how time distorts, mimicking the moment of trauma recorded by Leighton. Whilst Leighton's account records the disorienting sensation of sudden loss, both authors identify the extension of time and the feeling of continuous suffering. Glenconner's "moments of supreme suffering" have distorted the passage of time, slowed the years, and emphasised the missing figure within them. Unlike Leighton's narrative, we gain glimpses of how Glenconner has sought comfort beyond Edward's death – expressed in this moment as religious gratitude for his time on Earth. Writing after the passing of a few years, Glenconner may have had the opportunity to sit with her grief and find respite within it – unlike Leighton's immediate rendering of grief, writing within a matter of weeks. As such, the narrative presented by Glenconner, whilst at times tellingly evasive, has a more reflective tone throughout – wondering what Edward's personality and experiences may have been, "Had Bim lived on here".[273] Despite admitting an ending to Bim's life within these wonderings, Glenconner circumvents the admission through the careful preposition of "here", implying that Bim's life continues in an alternative shape. Finally, when the narrative has worked its way from babyhood to the moment of his death, Glenconner's narrative voice disappears. His death is declared in the familiar way – direct, yet avoiding any language implying finality: "On the 22nd September, 1916, Bim went on".[274] From this moment, the narrative voice disappears and the structure of the memoir shifts. Glenconner's memoir transforms into an epistolary format in which friends and acquaintances provide testimony and condolences.

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[272] Ibid, p. 6.
[273] Ibid, p. 118.
[274] Ibid, p. 239.

Glenconner remains silent. Unable to communicate the weight of this final loss, or perhaps feeling at peace with all she has communicated already, the maternal voice is erased. Letter after letter, Bim's character and Glenconner's loss is evidenced, acting as a list of references to support the author's claims. Some of these letters even affirm her view of Bim's displacement, rather than death, stating that "he was needed in the other Life; needed in the War still, for we see only the earthly view of it".[275] Whether this perspective of death comes from religion, a belief in the afterlife, or a hopeful wish to ease grief, Bim's presence lives on. Glenconner forms this memoir and connects Bim's essence to the body of the text through the collection of literary remains, memories, and the reanimation of voice. In doing so, she creates a material monument to mark Bim's life, maintaining a connection to the deceased. With the ambiguity of death and what this means, where the spirit goes, the memoir provides a place of comfort and connection, creating certainty to overshadow uncertainty; whilst it is unclear what the afterlife may hold, there is a peace in knowing what remains of Bim is accessible in this material monument, tethered to a new 'earthen vessel'.

Memoir as Object and Location of Grief

Considering the depth of trauma and pain experienced by these mothers, and thus the challenge of engaging with these emotions directly, it is perhaps necessary to debate the role of the unconscious in the construction of these memoirs. Freud defines the unconscious conception as "one of which we are not aware, but the existence of which we are nevertheless ready to admit on the account of other proofs or signs".[276] He provides an example of

[275] Ibid, p. 262.
[276] Sigmund Freud, 'A Note on the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis', in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*, ed. by Philip Rieff (New York: Touchstone, 2008), pp. 33-40 (p. 34).

someone who has been told by a hypnotist to perform a particular action later that day; without knowing the reason why, the individual will perform the action requested during their hypnosis.[277] Planted in the unconscious mind, the behaviour and actions of the conscious mind are influenced by the thoughts and information of which we are unaware. As the mother's grief is beyond understanding and resists integration into the conscious mind, the knowledge and experience of their pain and loss is repressed into their unconscious mind. Existing in an unconscious state, the trauma influences thought processes and actions without conscious recognition. Therefore, the creation of the memoir may come as a result of unconscious motivations and perhaps achieve unintended outcomes; we cannot state with complete certainty that Leighton and Glenconner were aware and intending for their memoirs to form a substitute body and place of mourning – yet this is what transpired. The following discussion will argue that the memoir creates a substitute body through the collection of traces and recollections of the lost life, allowing the maternal author to attend to an unconscious need or emotion.

These texts are not simply literary works, but a product of physical construction in which each element has been selected and structured by the author. The reader can pick up, place, touch, and interact with the book in a material way. What meanings have been impressed upon the maternal memoir as object; do these impressions change or solidify the meaning of the memoir? What is the affective value of the maternal memoir, and what will it impress upon other objects and viewers? To answer these questions, the context in which the memoir is read must be established; the assemblage in which it exists for the purposes of this thesis will elicit new meanings in comparison to the relationships they form within other assemblages. The assemblage this thesis is concerned with sits between the materialist and

[277] Ibid.

expressionist assemblages. The objects within this assemblage are at once solid and tangible, made of matter and material, whilst being sewn together through the signs and expressions of loss, mourning and memorialisation. The memoirs are physical constructions fuelled by the expression of loss, 'sticky' with meaning impressed upon the object by both writer and reader. Additionally, both memoirs of concern within this study include textual material from other sources such as letters or poetry. These items carry with them their own meanings and emotions which transfer onto the new creation. These new creations, the materiality of the maternal memoir, can affect the individual reading the memoir after its creation, as well as providing a context through which the author can be affected by the writing process.

The physicality of the memoir, its construction and material, is fundamental to the 'Thing-Power' of the text. Marie Leighton's choice to publish *Boy of My Heart* anonymously obscures the authorship and thus hides her reputation as a serial novelist; her anonymity ensures that the work will be received without preconceptions, affording the memoir an opportunity to assert its own claim to genre despite the author's prior writing and public image. Anonymity allows the reader to hear the voice with neutrality, providing an opportunity to listen to the mother's rendition of loss without bias. The focus rests entirely on the eponymous 'Boy' in question, placing the reputation of the narrator and mother aside to ensure that this does not overshadow the work of the memoir – to mourn and memorialise her loss. Without her voice, the 'Boy' risks erasure. For Leighton, recording and remembering her son's life emerges as the central aim of her writing, and as such she subtly identifies Roland through details relating to his death. The focus on his death is enhanced through the design of the front cover, which mimics a headstone in its plain layout and the additional detail of a heart made of stars resting beneath the title. Within the stars, an inscription reads:

"Goodnight! |Though Life and all take Flight | Never Goodbye!".[278] The layout of the text not only mimics the appearance of a grave, but the same inscription was chosen for Roland's official headstone.[279] Despite Leighton's anonymity, the paratextual material enriches her text with intimate connections to her soldier-son. The modern reader, viewing the memoir within an assemblage of grief and death, can ascertain new connections and meanings from the relationship between the grave and text, thus enriching the affective and symbolic quality of the memoir.

The lines from the inscription are taken from a poem by William Ernest Henley, titled 'A Wink From Hesper', in which the speaker bids goodnight to someone far away.[280] Beyond echoing the popular mode of referring to a soldier's death as 'going to sleep' in France, this poem gestures towards Leighton's recollections within the memoir of putting her son to bed – transforming the poem into a marker of her memories with Roland as a child.[281] The poem reads as follows

A Wink from Hesper, falling
    Fast in the wintry sky,
Comes through the even blue,
Dear, like a word from you . . .
    Is it good-bye?

Across the miles between us
   I send you sigh for sigh.
Good-night, sweet friend, good-night:

[278] Marie Leighton, *Boy of My Heart* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916).
[279] Commonwealth War Graves Commission, *Lieutenant Roland Aubrey Leighton: War Casualty Details 117788, CWGC* (No Date)<https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/117788/roland-aubrey-leighton/>[accessed 24th June 2024].
[280] William Ernest Henley, *Poems,* 10th edn (London: David Nutt, 1907), p. 172.
[281] Marie Leighton, p. 39.

Till life and all take flight,
Never good-bye.[282]

It opens with a reference to Hesper, from the Latin 'Hesperus', meaning evening star, to identify the oncoming night and the distance between the speaker and their 'sweet friend'.[283] Noticeably, whilst the original text uses the conjunction "Till", in Leighton's adaptation of the poem the line becomes "*Though* life and all take flight [my emphasis]". By adapting this singular word, the line loses its original meaning. Whilst Henley implies that there is no good-bye *until* life is gone, Leighton suggests that *despite* the loss of life there will be no good-bye. The inclusion of this line in its altered state on both the headstone and memoir imparts a wealth of meaning into the object. The memoir is not only deeply connected to that grave across the sea in which Roland lies, but it is now a statement of existence and continuation after death – the soul and memory of Roland will live on within this item, as there will never be a final good-bye. Returning to the concept of the unconscious mind, we can see Leighton's trauma and her desire to maintain a connection to her son manifest within her editorial decisions. Leighton builds a direct connection to her lost son through the poetic allusion on the front cover, allowing her to locate Roland within the material of the memoir whilst removing the reputation of her authorship to ensure readers approach the writing without expectation. The item is enriched by the layering of objects within the assemblage; grave, poem, letter, memory, and memoir come to stand as one. In creating the memoir and connecting the object so intimately with Roland's burial site, Leighton performs (perhaps unconsciously) an imaginative return of the grave, and thus body, to the Home Front – addressing the unconscious mind's need to attend to her traumatic loss.

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[282] Henley, p. 172.
[283] Oxford English Dictionary, 'Hesper, N', in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2023)<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7011462815>[accessed 24th June 2024].

Contrastingly, Glenconner makes her authorship and subject clear through the memoir's title and the inclusion of portraits in photogravure, demanding for the subject and author to be recognised. Glenconner wills the connection between her son and the memoir through the eponymous title, urging the reader to view the memoir as a product of their loving relationship, claiming her parental role within the subtitle: "A Memoir by His Mother".[284] At once, the public and private mingle on the page. Whilst Leighton's removal of her name allowed the memoir to stand alone and be read without bias, Glenconner's provision of her name and identity alongside her son's name and image, could be interpreted as a claim to reputation. As a member of the aristocracy with notoriety and public image, providing these identities allows an intimate look at the inner workings of upper-class families. As notable names, their attachment to the memoir could have attracted more interest from the public, enabling her son's story to live on in popular memory. Contrastingly, the sharing of grief and mourning from someone in a higher status may act as a model or outlet for grieving mothers who do not have access to the same resources. The dedication of the memoir to "all those Mothers [*sic*]" experiencing the loss of their soldier-son, sets the memoir within a particular function.[285] The memoir encourages mothers to identify the traits of their sons in her own, and as Glenconner moves through the memories of her son's life in a bid to narrate closure to her loss, she lays a path for other mothers to do the same. In the raw and real details of her loss, she provides a tangible object through which to grieve – providing a sense of community in her grief, attesting to the reality and gravity of loss. Accompanied by portraits of Edward Wyndham Tennant, the reader is taken from babyhood to adulthood. Furthermore, cursive font sits beneath each image, mimicking handwritten captions within a family album.[286] There is a

[284] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant*.
[285] Ibid, p. v.
[286] Ibid, pp. 202-203.

private and intimately maternal mourning displayed as the reader follows the growth of her son and witnesses his youth in the year of his death. Whilst Glenconner may consciously include names and photographs as a loving gesture and method of illustrating her narrative, this is driven by an unconscious desire to create an object which is unavoidably 'real', an object which evokes the absent body of the image. Much like the portrait of O'Rourke (Figure 5), the presence of the deceased's image highlights the physical absence of the body itself.[287] Consequently, Glenconner's grief becomes tangible within the object as it forms a substitute body, drawing attention to the absent corpse through the memoir's presence. The mothers of her dedication can feel the loss which lingers on the pages and impart some of their own, comforted by the knowledge that this exceptionally personal grief is shared amongst a community of mothers. Therefore, whilst Leighton's memoir returns Leighton's grave to the Home Front, Glenconner's memoir similarly returns Edward's body through the claim to his personhood and the evocation of his physical body within the text itself. Through forming these substitute graves and bodies, the maternal author can enact their desire to return their son to the Home Front and begin attending to the unintegrated trauma residing in the unconscious mind. The mothers who share in this grief and are invited to view the son as mimicking their own, may find similar comfort through this wishful return.

A Corpse from a Corpus: Trauma and the Substitute Body

The writing process of the memoir requires the author to navigate their loss and revisit their simultaneously sentimental and painful memories, integrating the emotions residing in the unconscious mind into consciousness by narrating the life and death of their son. Vera Brittain

[287] London, National Army Museum, 'Lance Corporal Dennis Arthur O'Rourke, 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards 1915 (c)', NAM. 2022-02-2-1-1.

recorded in a letter to her brother, Edward, that after writing her memoir Leighton was visibly unwell, commenting that she believed "the book about Him took it out of her almost more than anything else".[288] Unmistakably, Leighton's memoir is born of trauma – the sudden loss of her son on the day of his intended arrival home on leave is a harrowing juxtaposition. Brittain states that "Two or three weeks after Roland's death, his mother began to write, in semi-fictional form, a memoir of his life, which she finished in three months".[289] The immediacy of Leighton's writing places this memoir within an emotionally charged stage of the grieving process whilst the semi-fictional form allows for abstract representations of distressing emotion and temporal flexibility in the narrative. Cathy Caruth describes how trauma is "an experience that is not fully owned" – the shock caused by the event, and the inability to understand it using your prior schemes of knowledge, results in a trauma which cannot be integrated into consciousness.[290] As such, it is not owned and controlled by the individual. Caruth explains how this lack of integration can manifest in traumatic nightmares and flashback, stating that trauma therefore "requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure".[291] For Leighton, the attempt to integrate trauma is manifested in the act of writing. By approaching the traumatic event through the control of authorship and the safety of fictional devices, Leighton attempts to integrate the trauma into her memory of the past in an attempt to fully own her experience. As she explores each memory from Roland's childhood, she controls the narrative and returns to the moment of waiting for his death, which the reader is aware of from the outset of the text through the statement that Roland "willingly and even joyously gave up his life".[292] As Leighton emerges

[288] *Letters from A Lost Generation*, p. 246.
[289] Brittain, p. 224.
[290] Caruth, p. 151.
[291]Ibid.
[292] Marie Leighton, p. 7.

from recalling memories into the moment of waiting, she enacts an attempt to weave together the present knowledge of death with the knowledge of the past and the hopes held for her infant son. However, her trauma resists narration. As she attempts to weave the events together, the writing emulates a resurgence and reminder of the trauma to come, a continuous return to the sorrowful suspense endured by both author and reader as the narrative escapes to the respite of memory once more, unable to confront the horror of the unexpected revelation.

Glenconner's text mirrors the traumatic recollections of Leighton's – structured from babyhood through to adulthood, Glenconner attempts to integrate her memories of the past with the knowledge of Edward's death. The text is similarly structured to ensure the reader holds knowledge of her son's fate from the outset – established through the dedication to the text, and fortified in the Introduction, which states that "he passed to the Fuller Life in the Battle of the Somme, on the 22nd September, 1916".[293] Much like Leighton, remaining in either past or present is fraught – there are several moments in which the narration runs ahead of the desired sequence, requiring the narrator to pull the reader back into the current moment of memory. For example, after including a series of letters, Glenconner comments on how "These letters have led me to anticipate. We must go back to the child leaving his first school".[294] The use of 'must' heightens the urgency attached to the return, whilst articulating the unintentional bleeding of emotion and uncontrolled trauma into the highly structured nature of the narrative. Glenconner slips between the memories and recollections of the past, into the knowledge and material of the present. For example, describing her son's game of drawing animated letters of the alphabet, the veil of memory thins as the narrator remarks how "His Mother has one before her now, as she writes".[295] In this one remark, the reader is

[293] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant*, p. viii.
[294] Ibid, p. 82.
[295] Ibid, p. 10.

confronted with the material fact of the memory through the tangibility of the evidence – this child existed and grew to be a man, and that man's existence is marked in the material traces which surround the author. In this moment, the author is distanced through the third-person identifier of 'His Mother', yet this does not remain consistent. Elsewhere in the memoir Glenconner's narrative takes the form of first person, drawing herself closer to the recollections than she does at this moment. The memoir's first chapters are predominantly presented in the third person, as though it takes a great effort to insert herself back into the retelling of her son and the confrontation of her loss, beginning only as the figure of 'His Mother' before emerging into her true role of self within the narrative. This fracture in identity suggests a resistance to the work of integration, opposing the driving desire to record and integrate the events of the past into the present. In producing a work of memory, both authors confront their grief and recall trauma; however, this often resists narration due to its intensity and this manifests through temporal fractures in which the instability of narrative sequence communicates what the maternal voice cannot express.

Not only do both authors slip between past and present but they both present a clear awareness of the reader, indicated by the forewords, dedications, and narrative voice. Discussing the role of readers and polyvocality in Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, Richard Badenhausen describes Brittain's writing as both "an attempt to reenact traumatic events as a way of understanding them and recovering from their devastating effects" and "an attempt to create a sympathetic communal body of listeners".[296] The creation of listeners, or witnesses, is a vital element of the processing of trauma and a readjustment in the role of reading created by trauma theory, in which it "readjusts the relationship between reader and text, so that

[296] Richard Badenhausen, 'Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Brittain's Testament of Youth', *Twentieth Century Literature,* 49 (2003), 421-48 (p. 424).

reading is restored as an ethical practice".[297] Providing W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) as an example, Anne Whitehead describes how a "community of witnesses which implicitly includes the reader" is created through the use of language and storytelling, "so that the very act of reading comprises a mode of bearing witness".[298] The role of witness is essential to trauma theory; the listener, often an expert, is tasked with the role of "return[ing] to the patient his or her own story" through bearing witness to their narration.[299] Badenhausen's conceptualisation of Brittain's community of listeners, and trauma theory's emphasis upon the role of listener and witness clearly intersect: through creating a community of listeners, Brittain can narrate her trauma and through these witnesses she may begin to recognise it as her own and integrate it effectively. This view can be applied to these maternal memoirs. Communities of mothers are called forward or directly addressed through Leighton's anonymity and Glenconner's dedication, creating a readership full of experts on the loss of a soldier-son. The reading of the memoir by these sympathetic listeners allows the mother's trauma to take on a solidity and tangibility which was inaccessible within the realms of the author's private emotional landscape. Enhanced through the solidity of the book itself, which transforms the unintegrated and traumatic instance, the "space of the memoir" becomes what Badenhausen terms "a safe location" in which trauma can "be worked through" due to the control the author feels within its creation.[300] The community of listeners bear witness to the trauma experienced by the authors whilst the physicality of the text attests to the trauma as a product of the event, a symbol of experience and grief to which the mother can return in an effort to confront and realise their grief.

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[297] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 8.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Badenhausen, p. 442.

The need to identify and locate the disembodied dead is attested to by the popularity of pilgrimages to the battlefields which "enabled relatives to confront their grief for the dead and to let go of the past. This did not mean that the dead were forgotten, but that they took their place in the memory of the bereaved".[301] David William Lloyd details how pilgrims would travel to the battlefields to locate and visit the grave of their loved ones, or the memorials to the missing, drawn by the presence of their loved one's name which "distinguished the individual from the thousands of dead".[302] Lloyd identifies the particular affinity felt by the bereaved with the name, stating that "Pilgrims took photographs of these names […] kiss[ed] the name" or in some cases even "traced a name on paper so that they could take it back with them".[303] The name acts as an anchor, a recognisable and individual mark which sets the stone apart and allows the viewer to see beyond the impersonal stone and locate the deceased within the material: "the last tangible link with the person and the personality that had motivated the pilgrimage".[304] In forming material monuments through their memoir, these mothers enact their own grief driven pilgrimage through the terrain of their son's life, arriving at the event of death once they have completed their journey. Adorned with the identifying features on their covers (Leighton's choice of poem, and Glenconner's title), the memoir becomes a tangible link to the deceased much like the names found in the battlefields. However, these memoirs allow the bereaved to attach their beloved to the object more thoroughly through the evocation of memories and the reanimation of personality and voice; simultaneously providing a substitute corpse to aid in mourning and creating a material monument to their being – preserving any remaining elements of self-hood. The mother creates the son's life

[301] David William Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), p. 86.
[302] Ibid, p. 85.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.

through both birth and death, creating a memorial to not only her son, but the undying yet utterly changed role of mother.

Creating Connection

To connect the individual to the physical text, and thus form the substitute corpse, these maternal authors embark on a journey of collecting the remaining scraps and memories which attest to the beloved son's existence and personality. Both authors, for example, share their pet names for their children and use these to refer to them throughout – inviting the reader into a realm of intimacy which they would be excluded from otherwise. In identifying their sons as Bim (Edward Wyndham Tennant) and Little Yeogh Weogh (Roland Leighton), the readers are drawn closer to their existence beyond their final roles as soldiers. In the small act of using childhood pet names, both Glenconner and Leighton recover a shred of the deceased's humanity, returning an essential part of their child from the grave. These authors have brought their son's name home (a key aspect of these pilgrimages); by evoking the essence of these personal names they have returned their son to the Home Front through an integral sign of familial intimacy. This is further emphasised through the brief references by both authors to the physical appearance of their son which enriches the text with individuality and a level of detail impossible to glimpse from an official headstone alone. From descriptions of gestures which "his Mother grew to know so well", to detailed accounts of mannerisms and appearance, both authors have a desire to record the particularities of the individual's presence.[305] Leighton describes how Roland was "beautiful" and "not like an ordinary child", creating an elevated and almost mystical air around the unnatural beauty of her son.[306] His

[305] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham* Tennant, p. 12.
[306] Marie Leighton, p. 20.

mystic quality is emphasised later when Leighton remembers that she has "not mentioned the boy's lucky white lock of hair before", described as "a queer little white patch in among the gold".[307] This supernatural lock on Roland's head intensifies the suspense of Leighton's narrative due to the dreadful irony of the oncoming devastation and the inability of the 'lucky lock' to prevent Roland's fate. Additionally, through the description of his hair Leighton leans into the familiar imagery of gold used by authors to portray youthful soldiers.[308] Through these ethereal and valuable connotations the soldier-son is further elevated and valorised to demand respect for the loss of the golden youth. The inclusion of these unique details assists in the memorialisation of Roland as a man, returning a sense of humanity to the act of remembrance instilled upon soldiers as figures of heroism and bravery. By including the identifying features of appearance and family stories such as the 'lucky lock', Roland's individuality is further recovered through the creation of the substitute body, allowing the stories to live on beyond Leighton's memory and into public consciousness.

Glenconner counters this approach, moving away from the ethereal descriptions of physical appearance and towards an appreciation of character. Glenconner describes her son's subtlety of mind and strength of character as follows:

> When the mind is subtle it is unusual to find simplicity the keynote of character. Yet there was this rare combination in Bim. He was as candid as the skies. This was shown in his excellent hand-grip, his

[307] Ibid, p. 70.
[308] For example, Katharine Tynan's *Flowers of Youth: Poems in War Time* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1915), includes several poems which feature golden imagery to describe the men or their experiences of battle. Some of these poems include: 'Joining the Colours' (p. 9), 'The Golden Boy' (pp. 14-15), 'The Temple' (pp. 29-30), 'A Lament' (pp. 35-36), 'Mid the Piteous Heaps of Dead' (pp. 39-40), 'Salutation' (p. 73), and 'Resurrection' (pp. 79-80).

> firm and open stride, and the unfailing benevolence in his countenance.[309]

This description not only implies his strength and benevolence of character, but it focuses upon actions and characteristics which would be unrecoverable in the literary remains of Edward's life. These aspects of his person survive within memory and by articulating those memories, Glenconner ensures that they live on outside of her immediate circle and thus she memorialises him by passing her memory on to future generations of readers. Furthermore, this passage reanimates the physicality of the deceased through the bodily focus. Each element of this description is connected to a part of his physical body, and thus Glenconner enriches the substitute corpse with the knowledge of the absent body's movements and gestures. Whilst handling the text between our hands, we read about the nature of Edward's own hands. Suddenly, that sticky feeling reappears. The reader becomes aware of the weight of what they hold, and the reality of Edward's absent touch. This intensely intimate knowledge, gained by the mother through childhood caresses or comforting squeezes at moments of reassurance, has been shared with us. Glenconner's grief is manifested in the conflicting absence and presence formed through the physicality of her descriptors, and through this emphasis the reader is reminded of Edward's absence, thus solidifying the memoir as a symbol of loss through which Glenconner can attempt to locate her absent son.

Unique, personal details are vital to the memorialisation of the deceased son as they enhance the ability to locate and recover the individual from the mass memorialisation of the period, reanimating their likeness to highlight their individuality. This unique presence found in the physicality of their sons is further located in their thoughts and voice, which

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[309] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant,* p. 4.

Glenconner and Leighton reanimate through the inclusion of writing such as letters and poems alongside the reimagination of childhood conversations or remarks. In this compilation of tactile fact and remembered utterances, the reader can create an impression of the individual through the son's own thoughts whilst also gaining an insight into the mothers' emotion through the perception of their son's meaning, found in the deliverance of these inner workings. There is something exceptionally fleeting about the human voice. When the producer of the voice has left, without a recording, there is no accurate way to truly hear that voice again – it is lost to time. One may witness the face in a photograph, but that photograph cannot recall the voice within. However, the writing left behind by the deceased provides an avenue through which memory can be aided; in reading these letters we read their phrasing, we imagine the cadences placed upon words, and we sit with the thoughts which the deceased created in their mind and marked upon the page. In using their letters, the authors allow the dead to speak once more. For example, Leighton's work uses a reproduction of a letter from Roland on the 10th December 1915 to set the scene in the first chapter, "Waiting".[310] In this letter Roland's voice is granted the role of providing exposition. He explains that he has heard his mother is not herself, expressing how this news has "troubled [him] much".[311] His genuine and detailed concern for his mother's wellbeing sets the stage for what the reader will learn is an intimate and deeply loving maternal bond; in the space of a single page, the reader senses the devotion this gentleman has for his mother, and thus we understand the mother's anguish more acutely. This letter also happens to detail his expected leave dates, providing key information in the tragedy of Leighton's narrative – he is set to land on the 25th December, when we know "the tragic coincidence of the news of his death" will reach his

[310] Marie Leighton, p. 15.
[311] Ibid, p. 16.

family.[312] Roland speaks from beyond the grave, providing an affirmation that his mother did indeed know and love him and can therefore speak of him in this capacity. The letter provides a shield for Leighton, daring readers to question the authenticity of a memoir which bears such material evidence. Through the evocation of Roland's voice, therefore, the connection between the object and the deceased is strengthened due to the implied inclusion or consent found within their words.

In Glenconner's memoir, childhood innocence is portrayed through the inclusion of re-imagined conversations or writing which features childhood mispronunciations and misspellings. Glenconner even goes as far as to include an image of Edward's childhood poem called 'A Face' (Figure 11) – a poem which was written about his mother.[313] The poem is handwritten, allowing the reader to deeply connect with the figure of Edward as a child as we spot the inaccuracies in spelling and the sloping lines caused by writing on unruled paper. By including the written copy of this poem, Glenconner not only demonstrates her devotion for her child through her preservation of the original copy from his youth, but the inclusion of these literary remains helps to establish his boyish innocence and therefore assists in the solidifying of the narrative's foundation. Furthermore, rather than using Edward's own words to attest to their loving relationship, she provides her own account of love through her often-poetic descriptions of his personality, describing his "singularly loving heart" and how his "wit was like the play of summer lightning; it irradiated without searing the object of his mirth".[314] These brief yet evocative descriptions of her son's personality add a loving reverence to the opening of the memoir, enhancing our understanding of the origin and purpose which drives its creation. Given her relationship with the subject, there is an

[312] Ibid, p. 7.
[313] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant*, p. 33.
[314] Ibid, p. 3.

inevitable bias in the representation of Edward's life and achievements. However, throughout the memoir Glenconner roots the text in evidence and fact to counter the possibility of bias. In her description of Bim's time at public school, she declares that "To make this part of Bim's history representative it must be said that he chafed under the salient characteristics of public-school life".[315] Her insistence upon making this 'representative' echoes the collection and preservation of everyday objects within the archive – the most *representative* objects of the soldier's existence, sticky with emotion through their proximity to the individual and event. The term 'representative' defines something which

> [S]tands in the place of a person or thing; *spec*. (*a*) that serves as a sign or substitute for; symbolic; (*b*) that speaks or acts on behalf of a wider body or group of people.[316]

Within the context of this chapter, we ascertain that Glenconner intends to make her description of his time at school an accurate stand in for his real experience; to extend this to the entirety of the memoir is to create a substitute corpse, something which substitutes the body and communicates the life story they did not get the chance to share themselves. Glenconner's choice of memoir, as opposed to fiction, provides her with the opportunity to create an accurate representative which attests to the truth of her son's existence and the extent of her love. In forming something felt to be representative, she returns her son to the Home Front.

Additionally, Glenconner shares a clear sense of relief and joy in having evidence which allows her to present the best of her son whilst remaining factual. For example, she

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[315] Ibid, p. 98.
[316] Oxford English Dictionary, 'Representative, Adj. & N', in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2024)<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6753272964>[accessed 2nd September 2024].

relays how Edward spent time with "his uncle George Wyndham, who now saw him a youth, no longer in childhood".[317] This brief description is fortified by the fact that "The impression Bim made [was], happily, recorded".[318] Testimony to Bim's impression and character then follows in the form of letters, written by George Wyndham during this period, which seem to support the impression Bim had made. Later in the memoir, Glenconner includes letters which "bear record to his happiness" during the days of his leave – once again repeating the language of evidence, record, and fact.[319] It is this claim to fact which Glenconner uses to assert the reality of her son's existence and thus the weight of the memoir as a substitute body is strengthened through the truth conveyed by the narrative. Marie Leighton's use of Roland's letter in her opening enacts the same purpose by using his own words to ground the narrative in reality. The connection of the deceased to the memoir as substitute body is strengthened by the inclusion of literary remains, the material traces of impressions and events which support the mother's record. In forming a narrative supported by fact, the authors encourage the reader to view the memoir as material monument. Much like a war memorial, which declares the existence of historical event and marks the deaths of those involved, the memoir declares the existence of the deceased through the solidity of the object's presence and truth – a monument to their life formed of loving anecdotes and material traces.

Beyond literary remains, which embed the existence of the individual within the memoir, both Leighton and Glenconner include references to personal items and locations. As explored previously, objects can become an intimate connection to the individual through repetitive use or touch, or through the importance and sentimental value held by the item. The evocative nature of objects belonging to the deceased is emulated through their descriptions

[317] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant*, p 109.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Ibid, p. 159.

within these two memoirs. Much like viewing an artefact within an archive or museum in which it cannot be physically touched, the presence and impression of the object remains palpable in its 'thingness'. Leighton's work is littered with objects due to the propensity Roland had for gift giving. However, it is his personal belongings and spaces which build the greatest connection between the deceased and the memoir. For example, Leighton describes how Roland had purchased a dagger for "hand-to-hand work in the trenches".[320] When asked what she thought of the dagger, Leighton makes a request: "When it's done its work bring it back to me without cleaning it. I shall want to keep it always like that".[321] The dagger becomes symbolic of Roland's bravery and experience in warfare, a tangible piece of heroism which Leighton wishes to hold onto, but which reminds the reader of the violence Roland will participate in and experience. In its symbolic value, the dagger is reminiscent of Frampton's shrapnel (Figure 8), marking violence, experience, and survival. Requesting for the dagger to remain unwashed implies that there is something more honest and evocative about the remnants of warfare which might be found upon the blade. Glenconner uses the phrase "war-worn" to describe the condition of Bim's books when returned after his death, and it is these war-worn objects which solidify the realisation that these men experienced the horrors of warfare.[322] As Glenconner admires these returned texts, she remarks that one manuscript bears lines which "are so like Bim […] they almost conjure up his living presence as you read them" – the content of the book itself, handled and loved by Bim in his time as a soldier, has become so intimately connected to his presence and persona that to read what he read, is to call forth his presence.[323] Likewise for Leighton, to hold Roland's dagger is to share in his emotion and lived experience. The inclusion of items such as these mirror the presence of

[320] Marie Leighton, p. 216.
[321] Ibid, pp. 216-17.
[322] Glenconner, *Edward Wyndham Tennant*, p. 213.
[323] Ibid, p. 214.

similar objects in museum displays and archives such as the IWM; there is an impulse to retain evidence of the reality experienced in warfare with objects which feel deeply connected to an individual. For example, Private C. F. Jenkinson's broken and fractured compass (Figure 12), found on his body when he was located by stretcher bearers, remains cared for within the IWM.[324] The bloodied jacket of Second Lieutenant Harold Cope (Figure 7), bearing evidence of the distress caused by his wound can be found on display within the museum.[325] These items mark the experience of warfare. Whether the soldier survived or was killed, the object remains and testifies to their experience, calling an echo of the past into the present. The object is the only witness close enough to the soldier's body to speak of what they experienced. Closely pressed against each other in moments of high emotion, the object retains the impression of violent warfare, and the emotions felt by the soldier. Therefore, Leighton's desire to retain the object unwashed, is arguably a desire to retain the part of her son which existed alongside the item. To wash and cleanse the item of the mud and blood, is to cleanse the item of her son's touch and emotion, to rob it of the heroism she believes he participated in. Much like an archive, the maternal memoir aims to preserve an accurate version of the object, person, and event so that people may learn, revisit, and remember them; they exist as a product of memorialisation.

[324] London, Imperial War Museum, Equipment, 'compass', EPH 9315.
[325] London, Imperial War Museum, Uniforms and Insignia, 'Jacket, Service Dress, 1913 Pattern: Second Lieutenant, Border Regiment', UNI 10830.

Figure 12 'compass' © IWM (EPH 9315)

War-worn objects provide a necessary reminder of the son's soldiering. However, both authors desire to connect the man to the memoir – not just the soldier, but the person they were before, and the person they will be in the memories of those who knew them. As such, they build a connection to this version of the individual using childhood objects and personal effects. Leighton conducts this act of connection most effectively in Chapter IV, titled "The Boy's Treasures and Other Things".[326] In this chapter, Leighton explores Roland's bedroom – a common trope of remembering the soldier within First World War literature.[327] She describes the "consecrated room", embedding the space with a sacred and holy meaning in

[326] Marie Leighton, p. 46.
[327] For example, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*.

which you can feel something beyond the natural world.[328] It seems to breathe his existence, the "bed had an air as if it were waiting for him".[329] Hung in a state of perpetual waiting for his return, the bed parallels the waiting taking place in the narrator – as Leighton awaits her son, his belongings do the same. Leighton remarks that, "All his little personal ways came back to [her] as [she] moved about his room".[330] As a deeply personal space, the bedroom and its contents are brought to life by imagining and remembering the owner's presence within it – each area of the room is connected to a memory or personality trait which is called forth in their inclusion. For example, the mirror in his room becomes a means of identifying Roland's vanity and preference for looking well put together.[331] The objects within the room become personified in their knowledge of Roland; they are so intertwined and evocative of his presence that it is as though his "books spoke to [her] of him as [she] glanced at their titles".[332] The more Leighton walks around the room, looking at the beloved items, the more "his room went on speaking to [her] of him!".[333] In including these items, and their associated memories or traits, Leighton provides a bridge between the object and the reader over which the object can speak to us too. We can build a clearer image of Roland's private existence through this inclusion, allowing us to better understand the man behind the soldiering. In forming this image, the absent son is further returned to the Home Front and preserved, much like the sacred space of his bedroom which remains frozen in time. Paralleling the qualities of an archive, the bedroom is captured in a location which fights the effects of time and therefore

[328] Marie Leighton, p. 65.
[329] Ibid, p. 46.
[330] Ibid, p. 50.
[331] Ibid, p. 49.
[332] Ibid, p. 51.
[333] Ibid, p. 53.

Leighton can resist the eroding of memory and confront her grief through the controlled approach to his death.

In both Glenconner and Leighton's memoirs, we see a continuation of the desire to return the deceased to the Home Front, whilst evidencing and recording their individual humanity and personhood. In writing memoir, they create a substitute body or a literary grave in which the textual remnants of a life (such as poems and letters) are collected and retained within the vessel of a book. In forming this vessel they bury the body, enacting a mourning ritual which attends to the absence of the physical body through scraps sticky with their emotion and presence. Consequently, the literary grave and memoir allows the mother to begin the challenging task of integrating her trauma. Whilst this may not be completed within the realms of the text, often resisting narration, it acts as a starting point for a complex emotional and psychological task.

Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to articulate how mourning during the First World War was navigated by mothers in a time when bodies were absent, destroyed, or missing in action. It has proposed that in the wake of corpselessness, substitute bodies were sought and created by the bereaved to enact an imaginative return of the dead. For the mothers whose writing is explored here, this took place in the creation of maternal memoir – a space which immortalised the life and characteristics of their son through the embedding of material which formed intimate connections to their love and personhood. Through observing the similarities between actors within an assemblage of loss, the affective nature of objects, archives, and texts reveals that within processes of mourning they seek out sticky matter. Without the coffin or corpse, individuals search for items with 'Thing-Power' to externalise their grief, provide witness to their trauma, and thus advance their mourning process.

Critical conversations about death and mourning in the First World War have tended to frame their analyses through the lens of the male body and experience, resulting in alternative perspectives being comparatively underexplored. This project has aimed to address this disparity in critical conversation through a focused analysis of maternal voices and objects of loss. As outlined in the 'Introduction' to this thesis, the common themes identified in the work of critics such as Winter, Price, and Bourke revolve around love for the soldier, identifying a desire to return or to maintain a connection to the deceased. This thesis has contributed to discourse about mourning during the First World War by exemplifying how this is evident in the experiences of grieving mothers, and how we see this reflected still in our processes of remembrance and memorialisation. By moving away from the male body as a primary concern, and towards the maternal body and object, this project has shed light on the deeply

complex and affective nature of sticky objects, and their role in grieving and the ability to process trauma. Extending into the archive itself, there is a clear desire to preserve the dead through objects and narratives which bear witness to the cultural wounds of the First World War. Sticky objects and the narratives which either form or are connected to them, retain the residue of traumatic experience, allowing the modern world to come closer to the emotions experienced within the cataclysmic years of the First World War whilst preserving evidence of a life once lived.

Despite the growing historical distance between the First World War and the twenty-first century, the impact and persistence of what Samuel Hynes has labelled the "Myth" of the First World War remains palpable.[334] Hynes describes how the Myth is "the story of the war that has evolved, and has come to be accepted as true […] a tale that confirms a set of attitudes, an idea of what the war was and what it meant".[335] This Myth details a divide in time between before and after the war, identifying a shift in perspectives and feeling within post-war society that they could never return to pre-war life.[336] Remembrance within post-war society has added to the reverence of the Myth, building a concept of what the war was through public ceremonies and representations of sacrifice and honour in the form of memorial statues and plaques. However, as time progressed away from the immediacy of the war's aftermath, a need arose to diversify the initial accounts of the conflict which prioritised the soldier's experience. This thesis has contributed to the need to diversify existing literature and research on the conflict. There has been an urgency to record and preserve a range of voices from the First World War. This impulse was particularly evident as the world marked

[334] Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1992). VLeBooks.
[335] Hynes, p. 6.
[336] Ibid.

the centenary between 2014 and 2018. Countries across the globe sought ways to mark the occasion and acknowledge the legacy of the conflict. For example, the Imperial War Museum ran a digital project titled 'Lives of the First World War' in which

> [M]ore than 160,000 people collaborated to piece together the lives of people who experienced the conflict, through sharing anecdotes and digitising material that has been hidden away in attics until now.[337]

The lives recorded are diverse and attend to the need to expand our understanding of what the period of 1914-18 was like for *all* who lived through it. In projects such as this an acknowledgement of our shared responsibility to expand remembrance beyond the soldiers of the memorial statues is evident. Furthermore, this marks a shift away from public and official forms of mourning towards an interest in looking at individual, private grief. The sheer volume of contributions speaks to a widespread desire to maintain a connection to the past and to remember the impact of the conflict in personal ways; this project contributes to this established need. As a comparatively underexplored perspective, the maternal experience is worthy of remembrance and enriches our understanding of the depth and complexity of loss. The twenty-first century fear of forgetting the past is akin to the fear of forgetting attended to in the collection and creation of objects to form substitute bodies. In the archival drive of the IWM's 'Lives of the First World War' project, we see a continued desire to collect and retain sticky objects to maintain a connection to past lives. In the preservation and collection of these objects we return the dead not only to the Home Front, but to living memory.

The objects discussed in this project (memoirs, wounded objects, and personal effects) are crucial in maintaining connections to the individual soldier; they evidence how early

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[337] Imperial War Museum, *Lives of the First World War* (No Date) <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk/about>[accessed 17th September 2024] (para. 2 of 3).

twentieth century mourners sought to return the soldier to the Home Front, whilst their preservation in modern times suggests a desire to retain and maintain a connection to the past which these objects represent. However, the desire to imaginatively return the soldier is evident beyond the collection of personal objects. The need to return the soldier was seemingly a universally understood phenomenon in post-war society, demonstrated through the fact that "symbolic gestures of the return of the fallen were made in many countries".[338] Winter has argued that the intense need "to put the dead to rest, symbolically or physically, was pervasive", leading to a preoccupation with commemoration after the War.[339] Out of this need came the memorial in which unknown soldiers were interred in major locations across the globe such as Westminster Abbey in London, or the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.[340] The interment of a symbolic body offered an attempt at comfort, an attempt to aid the bereaved through a series of gestures and acts which would traditionally encompass the mourning process which had been made inaccessible to them. However, this gesture was about more than a state of grief and reconciliation on a national, political level. The act of interring symbolic bodies catered to an immense need to externalise grief and hence account for the psychological and emotional pain felt by nations of grieving families. To survive the isolating nature of their emotional pain, the pain itself had to be externalised and made visible in a way that would usually be met by the presence of a gravestone. The gravestone or body is a visible marker of death and a life lost. Its tangibility in the world and the processes of grief associated with it through funereal processes enact a ritual in which the death, and hence the pain, is acknowledged and thus realised, making the emotion less isolating. Even without the presence of a physical wound or body, "pain 'surfaces' in relationship to others, who bear witness to

[338] Winter, p. 27.
[339] Ibid, p. 28.
[340] Ibid.

pain, and authenticate its existence".[341] The death, and the need to mourn it, is thus existent regardless of the body's material presence. This thesis has demonstrated how the need to authenticate the existence of pain or loss seeps through into attempts to form symbolic markers of death, or substitute corpses. In creating substitute corpses, the death of a loved one is authenticated, and the mourner's intensity of bereavement and pain is validated, enabling the bereaved to begin the work of processing their trauma.

Glenn M. Vernon discusses the sociology of death, arguing that:

> Even after death the experiences which the living have had with the deceased are usually not allowed to come to an abrupt halt. Rather, they are symbolically continued and terminated in a nonhasty manner with what are considered to be appropriate afterdeath ceremonial behaviours.[342]

Without the body, afterdeath ceremonial behaviours are displaced onto symbolic representatives of the deceased to allow the fulfilment of the social processes connected with death. These symbols can and do exist without the soldier's body being present. As Vernon states, "Man can see and experience what a label calls for even though the referent may not be empirically present […] he responds to what he believes is there […] rather than merely to that which actually is there".[343] Even with the body present, symbolism enriches afterdeath rituals. Without the body, these symbolic processes must become more deeply entrenched in order to satisfy the sociological and psychological need to process death and engage in afterdeath behaviours. Vernon argues that the function of bereavement behaviour is to

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[341] Ahmed, p. 31.
[342] Glenn M. Vernon, *Sociology of Death: An Analysis of Death-Related Behaviour* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1970), p. 3.
[343] Ibid, p. 5.

"validate the fact of death".[344] In finding and forming objects which encapsulate and mark the end of a life, a validation takes place through the symbolic object which gestures to the absence of the physical body. These gestures allow the bereaved to move towards an acceptance of death. The validation of death becomes displaced, and the possibility of denial amplified by the corpse's absence. The language of 'bringing back' the dead within the memoirs of Leighton and Glenconner suggests that a denial of death lingers beneath the surface of these constructions. Whilst at times the mother's acceptance of death seems ineffective, or overshadowed by statements which deny death's finality, mourning is a complex process which is never linear and often moves fluidly between stages. Despite phrases which depict a denial of death, the authors nevertheless continue to navigate the intensely emotional subject matter of their memoir – suggesting a motivation to reach acceptance and peace. Through the role these memoirs play in validating the son's fate, the mourners pursue a path to acceptance. Therefore, symbolic objects not only provide a means of engaging in afterdeath behaviours, but they also bear witness to the complexities of the mourning process.

The significance of objects in death is not generated from death alone but begins with the connection objects form to the living. As discussed in Chapter Two, Cresswell specifically examined the relationship between absence and anxiety for mothers in Australia during the First World War, noting how items such as letters were markers of survival, if not safety.[345] The lived experience of soldiers, and the assurance of their living, breathing presence on the earth, becomes embedded into the objects and texts they interact with. The existence of a letter in the son's handwriting is encoded with a subconscious assurance that the soldier is

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[344] Ibid, p. 156.
[345] Cresswell, '"Sunday Is the Hardest Day to Bear": Absence and Anxiety of Soldiers' Mothers During the Great War'.

alive and thinking about home, creating a tangible connection between home and trench, described by Erika Kuhlman as "knit[ting] the presumed divided fronts together".[346] To continue the metaphor established by Kuhlman, it is arguable that the existence of the letter, even after the death of the author, knits the living world to that of memory and the deceased, a concept which Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey have examined, stating that "Material objects […] acquire capacities in sustaining memory relations between survivors and the departed".[347] Furthermore, they state that "Preserving connections between persons and objects become more urgent in conditions of distress and trauma".[348] The object becomes a thread holding the living and dead together in a time of upheaval and emotional distress. There is an urgency to remember which is strengthened by the survivors' desire to maintain a connection to the deceased and thus regain an illusion of control over their everyday lives. Furthermore, Erika Quinn explains how mourning was often a silent and rarely expressed activity – an approach which was reinforced by prescriptive texts of the period which "called on women to practice 'quiet grief'".[349] Objects allow for the expression of quiet grief through their inanimate status whilst allowing the bereaved to maintain a sense of connection to the departed through the stickiness we find upon them. The loss of the bereaved becomes synonymous or paralleled in objects of loss, markers of a life once lived. Objects allow grief and trauma to be externalised and thus witnessed, providing a psychological and emotional support to surviving family members.

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[346] Erika Kuhlman, 'War Widows' Dilemma: Emotion, the Myths of War and the Search for Selbständigkeit', in *Women Writing War*, ed. by Katharina von Hammerstein, Barbara Kosta, and Julie Shoults (Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), pp. 289-304 (p. 289).
[347] Hallam and Hockey, p. 26.
[348] Ibid, p. 42.
[349] Quinn, p. 276.

The psychological impact of catastrophic loss and trauma is evidenced in the *type* of objects which remain in archives, and which have (consciously or unconsciously) become substitute bodies. These deeply meaningful and sticky items are affective – in witnessing these objects, we see the wounds, injuries, and losses of the conflict. The experience of corpselessness was so deeply engrained in society, that it became necessary to find evidence of death and absence – a witness to the reality of loss. Take for example, Rifleman W. S. Main's cigarette case (Figure 13). [350] With ragged holes in the front and back caused by shrapnel, the interior pink elastic is visibly damaged, allowing us to imagine the devastating effects upon the innards of the human body - miraculously, Main survived his injury and was back at the front after treatment. The object sits in the IWM with its own wounds – in the object's ruptured outside and torn pink innards, we see the potential fate of the soldier. It acts as a witness to the event, attesting to the violence enacted upon human and non-human bodies. Not only was the object present at the scene, but it holds the wounds of service, acting as a testimony to the horrors of war at the front. In items such as these, the distance between Home Front and active combat is reduced, and with it the violence which soldiers themselves found inarticulable can be conceptualised. Whilst Main survived, the item is nevertheless evocative and sticky with horror – the item affects us, and we take with us the residual meanings which rest on its surface. Items such as these, and substitute corpses, therefore, hold an importance which stretches beyond the immediate processing of grief and desire to return the body to the Home Front. They also play a crucial role in processes of remembrance, allowing future generations to feel the emotional consequences of the First World War. In handling and viewing these items we are impressed upon by them, they leave their mark upon

[350] London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and ephemera, 'Cigarette Case: British', EPH 1308.

our skin and our psyche. In saving these items, the past is brought into and lingers in the future – an archive of pain and loss to guide future generations.

Figure 13 'Cigarette Case: British' © IWM (EPH 1308)

Maternal memoir is further proof of this and allows us to witness the trauma and depth of feeling experienced by mothers in a way that has been inaccessible in prior fictional and non-fictional accounts of motherhood. The memoir records and evidences the life of the soldier son, ensuring their memory lives on and that their death is marked in a formal, loving way. Death, in these memoirs, is an ambiguous and destabilising event – particularly without the presence of a body to evidence the tragedy. As a result of the inability to return the physical body to the Home Front, these mothers collate memories, objects, and literary remains to form a substitute corpse which simultaneously acts as symbolic body, literary grave, and material monument – preserving what is left of their son. In the confines of the memoir, the son is safe; their life is memorialised, and their presence captured in the loving

reminiscences and reanimations of voice, action, and thought. Crucially, the individual is remembered beyond their status as a soldier – the memoir memorialises the personhood of the individual, recording the life of the child and loved one. In design and contents, the memoirs create a tangible and psychological connection to the deceased which performs an imaginative return of the soldier-son. Through the creation of these material monuments, the maternal author can begin to navigate their grief and explore the psychological impact of such a sudden and young death. They memorialise and reanimate their beloved son and share his life with the reader – ensuring that their memory lives on within their substitute body, a tangible connection to the individual and the past in this vessel of remembrance. The mother's voice impresses upon us and asks us to remember her son, and to remember the love she bore for him. As we handle these memoirs, and touch the objects of the archive, we are brought into relation with the deceased and asked to acknowledge the emotional traces of bereavement. We leave, sticky with the personal details and intimacies which are not our own, but which live with us in our memory. In touching the assemblage of loss, we take it with us – acknowledging the pain of grief, witnessing the mother's trauma, and unveiling the inhumanity of war through the humanity recovered in the maternal memoir.

In combining literary and material culture studies, this project has addressed a gap within First World War criticism. Through detailed textual analysis of fiction and non-fiction texts this thesis has argued that the presentation of mothers during the First World War relied upon ideologies which aligned with pro-war sentiments. As such, our modern understanding of the varied emotional landscapes of grieving mothers of the period has been limited, and in re-examining the maternal figure through both text and objects this research has challenged these limiting presentations. Furthermore, this research has contributed to the critical conversation about mourning and memorialisation – expanding existing analysis which

focuses on the soldier's perspective by identifying how mothers and civilians on the Home Front navigated the absent soldier's body. Through this project's focus upon objects such as memoir, personal effects, and textual remains, this research has demonstrated how viewing the maternal figure through an assemblage of loss can provide a rich and diverse understanding of how mothers navigated their trauma and loss in a society bereft of bodies. This project has attended to the identified need to diversify First World War studies, with the aim to strive towards understanding the impact of war on all who lived through and witnessed the devastation. Archive, object, and memoir represent a cultural need to retain, evidence, and memorialise significant historical events and personal losses. The objects and texts within this thesis present an innate need to avoid the catastrophe of forgetting. Unable to save their beloved from their fate at the front lines, the creation of archives and memoirs allows survivors to preserve the memory of their loved one for future generations to access. By forming substitute corpses, the love, pain, grief, and memory of the departed sticks to the surface, ensuring that whilst they could not save their beloved's physical body, they can ensure their memory lives on.

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London, Imperial War Museum, Equipment, ‘compass’, EPH 931

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘Cigarette Case: British’, EPH 1308

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘mirror’, EPH 9794

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘Next of Kin Memorial Plaque’, EPH 2114

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘Next of Kin Memorial Plaque, mounted’, EPH 499

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London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘shrapnel, piece of’, EPH 4693

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘Tie pin’, EPH 10942.2

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London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, 'Leather Wallet', EPH 4691

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘Next of Kin Memorial Plaque’, EPH 4407

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘Next of Kin Memorial Plaque’, EPH 9313

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘pen knife, horn handled’, EPH 9314

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘pipe cleaner’, EPH 9317

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘scissors, pair, ‘Bona Fide’, EPH 9793

London, Imperial War Museum, Souvenirs and Ephemera, ‘tobacco pouch’, EPH 9790

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