

The Forbidden Zone Writers: Femininity and Anglophone Women War Writers of the Great War

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THE FORBIDDEN ZONE WRITERS: FEMININITY AND ANGLOPHONE
WOMEN WRITERS OF THE GREAT WAR

by

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ABSTRACT

THE FORBIDDEN ZONE WRITERS: FEMININITY AND ANGLOPHONE WOMEN WRITERS OF THE GREAT WAR

Sareene Proodian, B.A., M.A.

Marquette University, 2018

This dissertation examines the texts of Anglophone women writers from the First World War. Women's roles in the war—volunteer nurses, ambulance driver, munitions workers, and land girls—gave them the opportunity to leave the protection of their homes and enter the masculine dominated public sphere. In this dissertation, I examine different genres of women's writing from the war and trace three aspects of simultaneity as these writings explore the new freedoms, and new and old constraints, that the war brought to women. The three principles of simultaneity explain the conflicting emotions women feel over what the war means for them in terms of gains and losses in freedom: the freedom to leave the private sphere and enter the public sphere, offset by the inability adapt to the heavily male-dominated public sphere, one in which rejects women's entrance; the freedom to be in a place where the ideals of femininity need to be abandoned, offset by the expectation to maintain those ideals; and finally, the freedom to shake off the controlling hands of their families and engage in life-altering and dangerous experiences, while being exposed to traumatizing and dehumanizing consequences. I trace these instances of simultaneity in Vera Brittain's *The Testament of Youth* (1933), Irene Rathbone's *We That Were Young* (1932), Enid Bagnold's *The Happy Foreigner* (1920), Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929), and Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...* (1930), concluding with Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) as she reflects on women's rights and roles after the Great War. This particular group of authors has not been studied as a group, and by doing so, I hope to demonstrate how they collectively show that, for women, the war liberated, failed to liberate, remade, and destroyed them, all at once.

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Sareene Proodian B.A., M.A.

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INTRODUCTION

The canon of World War I literature is dominated by men's writing: Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Graves, and Erich Maria Remarque. These authors describe the horrors of trench warfare, mustard gas, and shell shock. Our literary understandings of the first "total war" are dominated by the images these male authors have provided us. The writings of women, particularly the women who served in war as women only could—ambulance drivers, nurses, and munitions workers—have been largely ignored. The popularity of men's poetry and memoirs immediately after the war solidified men's experience as the only authentic representation of war. Ernest Hemingway had said that women's lack of experience "forced them to borrow their evidence from men who had the experience" (Higonnet, "Art and Authenticity" 101). This, of course, is an ironic claim considering the fact that Hemingway's war experience was the same as 450 women who held the same job in the Belgian, French, and British armies (Lee 2). Yet, the myth of the soldier poet still dominates our collective understanding of the First World War. Paul Fussell's pivotal study, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), argues that the literature of the Great War has provided us with a myth of the war, a myth created by the aesthetics ("modern" literary tropes and motifs) of the Great War writers, particularly the poets. Though a few literary critics and historians, like Jay Winter, have criticized Fussell's text for ignoring the experiences of soldier-writers who found "traditional" 18th and 19th century "images and metaphors" as the only way to accurately depict their experiences, many scholars continue to perpetuate that myth by continuing to study the same literature—the canon of the Great War—in the ways suggested by Fussell (Winter 5). Fussell's study has played an influential role in the

ways Great War literature is read and since he focuses solely on male writers, female writers have been largely ignored.

Within the last thirty years, feminist scholars and historians have begun work to recover women's writing from the war to highlight women's contribution to art and history. Ariela Freedman, in her 2002 article on Mary Borden, claims that the "myth of the soldier-poet as the privileged chronicler of World War I may have finally been laid to rest" (110), but the general trend contradicts Freedman's claim. While some scholars have intervened in the Great War literary scholarship by writing about female war authors, literary studies still privilege the male authors and combat literature.¹ Several scholars, including Angela Smith, Dorothy Goldman, and Margaret Higonnet, discuss the error in defining authorial legitimacy with combat experience, and yet the writings of women are marginalized because combat experience is still privileged as *the* legitimate form of experience. Books on Great War literature seldom cover women authors and, if they do, there is only one chapter covering several female writers. The latest *Cambridge Companion to the First World War*, edited by Jay Winter, has one chapter (four articles) in the third volume that addresses gender and women's roles in the war. This exclusion ignores the reality that the Great War was fought on a scale like none other, that its effects were massive and far-reaching, and that noncombatants were just as much a part of the war as the soldiers. This leaves room for us to study and understand how the war intervened in the lives of English women and how they write and depict this intervention.

¹ Even in popular culture, lists of the "greatest war poems/novels" are dominated by men's writing. For examples, see *All Women's Talk* blog post, "7 Most Excellent Novels Set in World War I" and *The Guardian's* list "Top 10 War Poems." These are a few examples among many such lists, especially as the Western world commemorates the 100-year anniversary of the war.

A study into women's war writing can contribute to this understanding and help fill the large gap that still exists in literary scholarship. Some feminist literary scholars have written books that give us a cursory look at women's writing from the war, separating each chapter by theme. Angela Smith's *The Second Battlefield* focuses on women's private (diaries and letters) and public writing, bringing to light texts that are no longer published. Dorothy Goldman has edited several books on women's writings from the First World War. *Women's Writing on the First World War* (1999) collects writings from British, French, and American women. These are excerpts from books, diaries, and letters. In her introduction to *Women and World War I: The Written Response* (1993), Goldman writes:

The anguish of the trenches, still reverberating in Western culture, has meant that to pay attention to anything else appears to demean that suffering; because they were not part of the physical agony, women have not been listened to, their own revolution has been forgotten. [...] The disregard of women's war writing carries dangerous implications. If it is conceded that it was women's lack of battlefield experience that excluded their writing from literary consideration, then we grant warfare a central determining cultural significance; and if, conversely, women's writing is to be forgotten because women remained true to their war experiences, seldom wrote about mud, did not describe life in the trenches, then we enshrine men's perception of men's experience as the single determinant of literary culture.

(2)

By perpetuating the myth of the trench poets as the only authentic experience of the war, we are essentially erasing not only the works of women, but also their experiences. As

Goldman argues, by continuing to ignore women's work we are either valuing war and the military apparatus above all other human experiences or we are placing value on only one narrative as a form of authenticity. Though Goldman wrote this in 1993, literary scholarship has not improved as much as it should on this issue. Research on Irene Rathbone may bring no more than five results; she may be tangentially referenced as Richard Aldington's mistress. Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* is the best-known text from a noncombatant, though the most recent movie adaptation simplifies Brittain into a romantic simpleton instead of an intellectual woman navigating the complexities of what she wants for herself and the society that deems those desires unacceptable for a woman of her class. It is Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* that are usually discussed in the canon of First World War literature, but neither Woolf nor West served as noncombatants and their texts focus on men's experiences and how those experiences affect the women at home.

In this dissertation, I examine different genres of women's writing from the war and trace three aspects of simultaneity as these writings explore the new freedoms, and new and old constraints, that the war brought to women. The genres I discuss are the autobiography, the traditional novel, and the modernist text. As I began to trace the trend of representing struggles with femininity through the women's war works, I realized that the trend transcends genres, showing us just how prevalent this struggle was. Vera Brittain used the autobiography, *The Testament of Youth* (1933) to reflect on her war experiences, because of the assumption of truth that many associate with the genre. Irene Rathbone and Enid Bagnold fictionalize their experiences in novels, *We That Were Young* (1932) and *The Happy Foreigner* (1920). Mary Borden, in *The Forbidden Zone*

(1929), and Evadne Price, in *Not So Quiet...* (1930), use modernist narrative techniques, such as fragmentation and non-linear narratives, to mimic the chaos of war. As useful as it is to look at the ways in which these different genres depict how women expressed conflict, I find commonality between the texts in the ways in which the authors express the nature of that conflict.

The nature of the conflict is that of simultaneity, as women experience different and even mutually exclusive reactions to being thrust into this war, at this juncture in sociocultural history.² Looking at the texts written by and about female noncombatants, I argue that there are three principles of simultaneity that explain the conflicting emotions women feel over what the war means for them in terms of gains and losses in freedom: the freedom to leave the private sphere and enter the public sphere, offset by the inability to adapt to the heavily male-dominated public sphere, one which rejects women's entrance; the freedom to be in a place where the ideals of femininity need to be abandoned, offset by the expectation to maintain those ideals; and finally, the freedom to

² Margaret and Patrice Higonnet's "double helix" model works best to explain this concept. They write:

The metaphor of a double helix evokes the paradoxical progress and regress that has characterized women's status and representation during the two world wars. When the homefront is mobilized, women may be allowed to move "forward" in terms of employment or social policy, yet the battlefield--preeminently a male domain--takes economic and cultural priority. Therefore, while women's objective situation does change, relationships of domination and subordination are retained through discourses that systematically designate unequal gender relations. (6)

Essentially, while there were some advancements for women--like being able to leave the home--the power structures remained the same. Women may now play an active role in the public sphere, but they were still subordinate to men. Sharon Ouditt makes a similar argument, claiming, "While their *experience* contradicted gendered stereotypes, it was contained within an immediate framework that made strategic use of conservative definitions of femininity, and within a cultural system that showed few signs of revolutionising its patriarchal principles" (33).

shake off the controlling hands of their families and engage in life-altering and dangerous experiences, offset by exposure to traumatizing and dehumanizing consequences.

The Ideal of Victorian Femininity

The ideal of Victorian femininity was a construct—like all gender norms—that dominated the latter half of the 19th century. Obviously, there was no perfect woman, but these gender norms gave women an ideal to strive towards and standards to comply with. Looking historically at Victorian ideals help us understand the expectations the authors in this project are reacting to in their struggles in finding their femininity in the new century. When scholars examine the ideal of Victorian femininity, Coventry Patmore’s 1854 poem “Angel in the House” is usually cited as the epitome of what a wife, especially a middle-class wife, should be. She is docile, graceful, and maternal. Patmore reiterates the dichotomy of the public and private sphere when he writes, “His skilful suit, which leaves her free./ Gives nothing for the world to name./ And keeps her conscience safe, while he./ With half the bliss, takes all the blame” (38). The woman’s place is in the home, where she can be protected by her husband from all the evils that take place in the public. He goes on to write, “Her will’s indomitably bent/ On mere submission unto him;/ To him she’ll cleave, for him forsake/ Father and mother’s fond command:/ He is her lord, for he can take/ Hold of her faint heart with his hand” (40). The ideal woman is submissive and sees her husband as her lord. In explaining the poem and its implications, Deborah Gorman, in *The Victorian girl and the Feminine Ideal*, writes:

The cult of domesticity assigned to women both a separate sphere and a distinct set of roles. Victorian conceptions of the idealized role of women are epitomized by Coventry Patmore’s poem *The Angel in the House*, the title of which captures

its essence. The ideal woman was willing to be dependent on men and submissive to them, and she would have a preference for a life restricted to the confines of home. She would be innocent, pure, gentle and self-sacrificing. Possessing no ambitious strivings, she would be free of any trace of anger or hostility. (4)

Gorman's word choice, "cult of domesticity," captures the essence of the gender norms. There was the push for creating a separation of spheres in order to keep women in their "correct" place, not just physically, within the house, but also as subservient to the men in their lives. The power dynamic Patmore portrays was an idea perpetuated by the science of the time.

Examining the ideals of Victorian femininity, Joan Perkin in *Victorian Women* traces the idea of women's inferiority to the "biological" differences that scientists saw between the sexes. She quotes a famous physiologist, Alexander Walker, writing in 1840: "It is evident that the man, possessing reasoning faculties, muscular power, and courage to employ it, is qualified for being a protector; the woman, being little capable of reasoning, feeble, and timid, requires protection. Under such circumstances, the man *naturally* governs; the woman as *naturally* obeys" (1, emphasis added). The science of the 19th century argued that because women were "naturally" physically weaker than men, then it was only "natural" that men would be the dominating sex, the protector. Some even believed that men and women were two different species (Perkin 1).

Scientific theories about the differences of the sexes bled through into society's ideologies of gender and were used as justification for keeping women in a subordinate position. In *War Girls*, Janet Lee writes:

According to ideal notions of late-nineteenth-century womanhood, feminine nature was passive, submissive, emotional, irrational and self-sacrificing: ideals deeply rooted in biological, anthropological and medical theories of innate female inferiority. They justified woman's "natural" concern with reproduction and mothering and made the case for her subordinate position in society. [...] "Scientific" theories, while being barely disguised justification for patriarchal domination, circumscribed women's lives squarely within the confines of domesticity: the home was a haven, separate from the vicissitudes of the public world. (24)

The implications of the theories on women's inferiority are that they would not be able to handle the "dirtiness" of the public sphere. Women were too emotional and irrational, so they needed to be protected and in the private sphere, and thus out of the positions that could possibly give women power.

It was not only science that perpetuated the idea of women's inferiority; religion also played an important role in shaping the time's gender norms. The Victorians were insistent in reinscribing traditional Christian understandings of gender. We are reminded that Eve was created from Adam's rib, therefore not his equal. Perkin writes, "Divine providence held that women should be subordinate and resignation to her lot, with true Christian humility, was the only proper response of a good woman" (Perkin 1). Christianity was one of the tools used to keep the patriarchy in place, "to justify female subordination" (Murdoch 40). A family's religious observation was seen to be the woman's place, part of her role as the homekeeper. The book women read most to their children was the Bible, or other Christian texts such as *Pilgrim's Progress* (Murdoch 43).

Though church attendance fluctuated throughout the century, religious ideology still dominated the understanding of morality and, thus, dictated not only women's actions, but also their place in society. With women and girls being seen as inferior to men, the rules about what women could and could not do shaped the Victorian gender norms, particularly in the upper- and middle-classes.³ It is these rules and norms that the authors of this dissertation depict themselves and/or their characters as struggling against.

The authors discussed in this project came from middle-class families, and it was this particular class that placed a great deal of pressure on their children to abide by the Victorian ideals of gender. As Perkin argues, though middle-class families from the mid-19th century and on could afford to hire nannies to educate their daughters, many mothers preferred to do the work themselves to “see ‘proper’ values instilled” (17). From a very young age, girls were taught that their place was in the home and that their goals should be to have a home and family of their own. In order to reach this goal, a young woman should always be “gentle, loving, self-sacrificing and innocent” (Gorman 37). Any education she received was just enough for her to be an amiable hostess who can engage in lively conversations on the appropriate topics. Gorman writes:

³ The middle-class was better known for their religiosity, whereas the upper-class saw religion as a tool for “keeping the masses in order” (Perkin 100). Perkin writes:

[T]here was little need in their [the upper-class'] opinion for *them* to have a personal saviour. [...] But religious belief really mattered to the middle class. Even though religious observance was riddled with divisions and petty snobberies, and critics said that the women went to church only to show off their clothes. Those who lost their religious faith often went through agonies of conscience, as can be seen from the writings of George Eliot. (100).

Even if actual piety did not matter, the *appearance* of it for both classes did. Whether it was being present at church on Sundays or hosting a bishop for dinner, being seen as religious dictated the actions of many families, including how they raised their daughters.

Even in the early and mid-Victorian decades, it was acknowledged that a girl would need some education if she were to provide her future home with ‘the refinements of intellectual culture.’ But early and mid-Victorian advice books took pains to emphasise to girls that they should always keep in mind the ultimate purpose of their education; it was to make them pleasant and useful companions to men, and responsible mothers to their children. In order to achieve this goal, girls were told that their attitude towards their studies was as important as anything they might learn. (102)

A girl’s education, then, was dictated by the wants of men. An education for a girl was to create a more marriageable woman, one men could feel they can patronize but still engage in a conversation.

While the influence of these ideas remained strong, by the 1890s we see the beginnings of change just as many of the women who participated in the First World War were growing up. With more access to education outside of the home, even if it was only for a few years, young women saw the world outside of the home and this opened their eyes to possibilities. Discussing the changes in education of middle-class women in the 1850s and 60s, Perkin writes:

New types of private day and boarding schools grew and flourished, in response to changing social and economic needs, offering a commitment to academic achievement and meritocratic values. There were two very different sources of support for these new schools. One came from wealthy business and professional men who wanted educated wives and daughters with the leisure and knowledge to pursue aesthetic and intellectual interests and be the standard bearers of culture.

They rejected the idea that it was desirably feminine to be ignorant and to waste time on trivial pursuits. The other group wanted middle-class women educated to earn their own livings. (35)

Even though these changes in education were dictated by the wants of men, they still benefitted the young women who wanted to be educated outside the home. Still, too much education was still seen as undesirable in a young middle-class woman, harming her chances of marriage, which was the goal for many families. An educated young woman might not be as demure and submissive as was the ideal for a daughter and a wife.

Of course, as much as society aimed to reach these ideals of femininity, they were just that—ideals. The reality was complicated as many women fought against these arbitrary laws by fighting for their rights to an education and to a profession. The image that permeates our cultural understanding of Victorian womanhood is a myth, even though many families tried to make that a reality. It is this effort to make the ideal a reality that caused the struggles that the authors in this project depict. Education, or the lack thereof, was one of the sites on which the ideal of femininity was contested. If a woman's place were at home as a wife and mother, then why would she need much schooling? The goal of girls' education in the Victorian era, particularly in the middle- and upper-classes, was to create an accomplished lady—one who could play the piano, sing, recite poetry, speak French or German, and draw or paint. For the middle-classes, many families also focused on religious education. By focusing on these aspects of education, women's subordination was reinforced. They would never be smarter than the men. Vera Brittain highlights this dynamic in *Testament of Youth*, when she fights with

her father after he bought her a piano. The idea of the piano is that a young woman should be able to play and sing in order to entertain company and perhaps impress a suitor. Brittain was upset that her father had no problem spending the money on a piano, but saw paying for Brittain's higher education a waste of money. Money for education needed to be spent on her brother, who was expected to take over the family business. This was the common thought among middle-class families. Education was seen as an "investment in a boy's future," and a deterrent of marriage for girls (Perkin 31).

With marriage and family as the goal imposed on women, innocence and purity was highly valued. Sex was not a subject on which proper young women were informed. Many of them did not know until their wedding night that sex, and what it entailed, was needed for procreation. Perkin argues that the push to "civilize" sex "by ignoring it had begun in the early decades as part of a puritanical drive to change the manners and habits of both rich and poor" (51). The idea was that if people—mainly women—were kept ignorant about sex, then they would be less likely to engage in it before they were told about it, usually the day of their wedding. As Patmore's poem shows us, the ideal bride was virtuous and chaste, i.e. a virgin. Lydia Murdoch writes, "Moralists, preachers, educators, and reformers hailed women as symbols of moral and physical purity. Stereotypical women fell into two extremes: they either lacked all sexual desire or were fully 'fallen' and corrupted by their sexuality" (134-35). Passion and any enjoyment from sex were also frowned upon in women. Through diaries and letters of upper-class women, there is clear evidence that many women enjoyed sex, but the public ideology was that women did not have the same sexual passions as men, even though Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first American female doctor, was writing in the 1870s that female

sexuality was as strong as men's (Perkin 64). The "fallen" woman was one who was discovered to have not been chaste (even if that meant being seen kissing a man) and was publicly ostracized. It is true that, as with educational opportunities, these strict ideologies loosened up somewhat towards the end of the century as more young women left their parents' homes to seek some independence and had the freedom to meet with men in public. However, with relations between the sexes, like education, we are justified in imagining formidable cultural rigidity. Examining advice books and columns from the end of the 19th century, Gorman finds that though there was more freedom for young women to meet men outside of the home, there was still the pressure for women "to observe the proprieties in their relationships with young men, and urged them to exercise extreme care in their choice of mate" (117).

The societal expectations of women's behavior towards men that dominated most of the 19th century followed women to the front lines of World War I. Irene Rathbone shows her characters freely engaging in social activities with their officer friends as if such interactions were not a problem, but Vera Brittain and Evadne Price discuss the unfairness they perceived in the way that women's moral behavior was policed. If a woman was discovered in a compromising position with a soldier she can be dishonorably discharged, whereas the man will get a slap on the wrist.⁴ At a time when

⁴ The military's double standards on sexual relations spread beyond class, affecting the upper-, middle-, and working-classes. Only women who were noncombatants would be sent home. There were prostitutes at the Front and the biggest worry with prostitutes was not their honor, but their health. As medics saw the spread of venereal diseases, the British government tried to fix the problem by adding regulations to the Defense of the Realm Act. Regulation 13A gave military authorities the right to "expel prostitutes from specific areas" (Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* 71). Regulation 40D "forbade" women with venereal disease "from soliciting or having sexual relations with soldiers" (Grayzel 71). Women who were caught breaking this regulation could be taken into

soldiers and nurses were needed, this double standard of sexuality and the Victorian ideals for women's sexuality spanned the Channel and, as will be seen in the following chapters, affected the work of many female volunteers.

Though the mid-19th century saw a few women outwardly reject the ideals of femininity and achieve goals previously unavailable to women, the end of the 19th century and the war created an unprecedented space for more women to explore their femininity and decide for themselves the type of femininity they wanted to embrace. There are many public instances of women fighting the ideals of their time. Elizabeth Garret had the help of her father, a male governor of a hospital, Prime Minister Gladstone, and other influential men to be admitted to lectures at Middlesex Hospital. The male medical students had her thrown out of the exam room and London University rejected her application to matriculate. She eventually passed the exam for the Society of Apothecaries and opened a small dispensary for women and children. Her success prompted the Society to pass a resolution banning women to take their exam. Eventually, Elizabeth received her medical degree from the University of Paris, taking the exams in French. Garret's experience highlights the struggles of women and their dependence on men in order to break down the structural sexism; simultaneously her story shows the slowly changing ideas on women's education *because* so many men, including her father who was originally disgusted by his daughter's wishes, advocated for her (Perkin 39). As the authors in this project show, "more and more middle-class women wrote of the confinement, claustrophobia, and belittlement they had felt when growing up" (Perkin 73). The feelings of confinement and claustrophobia are what, in part, spurred the drive

custody for a week and forced to have a medical examination. If they indeed had a disease, they could be subject to imprisonment and a fine.

of upper- and middle-class young women to join the Red Cross as a volunteer nurse or ambulance driver.

For most upper- and middle-class women, joining the Red Cross and the Voluntary Aid Detachments was their first time leaving their family homes and their country. Women's participation led to some anxieties about gender roles and norms—namely the possible dissolution of the family. Addressing these anxieties, Susan Grayzel writes:

Whether or not the war actually changed women's behaviour, as some seemed to think, or whether some of the changes observed were already set in motion by the previous activities of the “new woman”, the mobilisation of women in volunteer and waged work served as a catalyst in many places. For instance, it increased the presence of unchaperoned middle-class and upper-class women in more and more public spaces. (62-63).

As Grayzel hints, the rise of the “new woman” at the end of the 19th century had already to some degree changed the public behaviors of women. Bicycling, smoking, and wearing shorter dresses, the “new woman” prized the growth, or perceived growth, of her independence. But many women were still under the strict rules of their parents, which is why many scholars—historians and literary critics alike—cite the war as a crucial, decisive step in women's path to freedom.

Women's War Work, Experiences, and Trauma

Much like the writing of male soldiers and officers, women's war writing was based on their and their peers' experiences. Vera Brittain, Mary Borden, Irene Rathbone, and Enid Bagnold were all volunteer nurses and/or ambulance drivers and used their

experiences to write their texts, whether the texts are fiction or nonfiction. The writers in this project who stand out as different from this group are Evadne Price and, in my conclusion, Virginia Woolf. Price wrote *Not So Quiet...* based on the now lost diaries of Winifred Young, an ambulance driver. Not much is known about Price herself; she claims to have been born in Sussex, whereas some sources claim she was born at sea or Australia. We know that she was a journalist and made some stage appearances, but there's no evidence she participated in the war as a non-combatant.⁵ Virginia Woolf, we know, was not a noncombatant-participant and stayed in England during the war. It is perhaps ironic that *Mrs. Dalloway* is seen by some scholars as Great War fiction, its author being both a woman and a civilian. Woolf depicts shell-shock through Septimus Smith, whose suicide affects Mrs. Dalloway; the exploration of shell-shock, or PTSD, is Woolf's contribution to Great War literature. And yet, it makes sense to include Price and Woolf in this study, despite their lack of actual war experience. With *Not So Quiet...*, Price vividly depicts the sense of simultaneity I argue is a common thread through these accounts of women's war experiences, and with *Three Guineas*, Woolf offers her perspective on women's experiences and their roles within the patriarchal society that promotes war culture. Woolf, like Price, helps present an important picture of how the young women of the First-World War generation struggled finding their place in the new world created by the war. Within the last thirty years, historians have studied the roles women played in the Great War, the work they did as non-combatants, and the trauma they suffered, bringing light to a part of history and literature that has been ignored.

⁵ The most in-depth look into who Evadne Price was is a paper published on a blog by George Simmers titled, "Helen Zenna Smith, and the Disguises of Evadne Price."

At the start of the First World War, it was believed that England's role in the war would be over by Christmas 1914, so the idea of women participating as non-combatants was not deemed necessary, let alone something the War Office wanted. Appropriate women's war work was knitting for the soldiers, rolling bandages, and actively trying to recruit men (Grayzel 19). However, many women wanted to play a more active role in the war as they saw their brothers, friends, and lovers eagerly join up to serve their country. There were not many opportunities for women, especially through the War Office, but the Red Cross called for volunteers and many young women joined up. For many women, this was an opportunity not only to play a more active role, but also to escape the confines of their home. Nursing was an acceptable occupation as it spoke to the feminine traits valued by Victorian and Edwardian society: nurturing and caring, and playing the role of the ministering angel. Historians argue that because middle- and upper-class women were working as nurses, as opposed to "canaries," factory workers, or land girls, the military apparatus and the government was able to ensure that traditional gender roles stayed intact. Grayzel writes, "The opportunity to serve as a wartime nurse was presented to women as offering them a way of directly helping the military and, by extension, the nation. It kept women subservient to male doctors and it drew on their allegedly natural capacities for caring and nurturing. In short, it did not offer a direct challenge to conventional gender roles" (Grayzel 37).⁶ Of course, just by entering the

⁶ We will see that traditional gender roles were in fact challenged by the nurses, but it is also important to note that there were a few female doctors—a rarity at the beginning of the 20th century—who challenged those roles not only by fighting for their medical degrees, but also by playing a very active role in the war effort. Dr. Jane Walker became the adviser to the Ministry of Food and Ministry of Munitions; Dr. Louisa Garrett Anderson and Dr. Flora Murray co-founded the Women's Hospital Corps and opened a military hospital from 1915-1919, serving about 26,000 patients. Dr. Elsie Inglis, founder

public sphere by volunteering to be nurses through the Volunteer Aid Detachment or First Aid Nurse Yeomanry (ambulance drivers) young women were already in an important sense challenging the traditional gender roles.

The Volunteer Aid Detachment was an organization that was run through the Red Cross and the Order of St. John. Later, it was registered with the War Office “as part of a scheme for national defense” and officially became part of the military. This meant that the volunteers had to follow military etiquette in order to be accepted and go abroad (Ouditt 9). Volunteers were called “England’s Splendid Women” and “dutiful daughters.” As part of the military, and therefore the public sphere, they were “forced to negotiate between the power granted to them by their class and patriotic endeavor and the subordination that was the product of their gender and voluntary status” (Ouditt 10). At the beginning of the war, the War Office rejected the help of the VADs and the Red Cross. The idea that the war would end by Christmas was still prevalent. However, the Red Cross was still able to send VADs to France and Belgium in October 1914 as an independent organization. But in England, many, like Emmeline Pankhurst, believed that women deserved an official place within the military. In July 1915, Pankhurst, leader of Women’s Social and Political Union, with the support of David Lloyd George, demanded women’s “right to serve” (Grayzel 27). By 1915, the War Office “recognized” that there were not enough trained nurses, especially as the casualty numbers were greater than the powers-that-be expected them to be, and so suggested that VADs be sent abroad as “probationary nurses to be paid and housed by the military authorities” (Ouditt 15). Once

of the Scottish Women’s Hospital, raised money to open hospitals in France, Russia, and Serbia. More than 1,000 women served under the Scottish Women’s Hospital because they were “allowed to perform medical and surgical work,” work that was forbidden in England, Ireland, and Wales (Grazyel 38).

a part of the military, VADs were paid, but the pay was minimal—less than servants and a great deal less than the women who worked in the munitions factories. Because VADs were mainly from middle- and upper-class families, it was believed that “patriotism should be its own reward,” an ideology resented by many volunteers, not only because of the presumptions made on their labor, but also because it clearly indicated that their work was not as valued as anyone else’s (Ouditt 15),

Katherine Furse, founder of Voluntary Aid Detachment, wanted women’s war work to be respected and recognized. Ouditt writes that Furse wanted “equal recognition for women’s war work, an efficient, centralized method of recruitment and training for women as leaders” (15-16). Furse saw her organization as one that should be seen as a legitimate organization that is equal to men’s organizations. However, because the organization recruited mostly middle- and upper-class women there were assumptions made on their labor and their behavior. The young women were seen to represent the “best” of England and serve as a reminder to the soldiers what they were fighting to protect. Ouditt writes, “The VAD recruitment campaign worked on the assumption that middle- and upper-class women would be seen best to represent England; working-class women would not. The appeal was to that class whose static, Victorian value system could overcome, by sheer ‘character’ and ‘breeding,’ any of the possible dangers that might affront the woman on active service” (20). The advantages of recruiting only middle- and upper-class women was that they were raised with the ideals of Victorian femininity that dictated women be subservient to men. This meant that that these women would not question authority and do what was asked of them, because they were trained to respect authority. It was also assumed that the same value system that kept women

from questioning authority will also keep them from disregarding the ideals of their femininity, by remaining chaste.

Because most nurses were from the middle- and upper-classes and were in a position to be physically intimate with a soldier, society was “suspicious of their morals and behaviour” (Grayzel 41). Yet with honor and chastity being an important value for women in the middle- and upper-classes, the War Office believed that these women would be less likely to “become romantically entangled with the men” (Ouditt 23). As the authors discussed in this project show, there is no universal narrative in how women reacted to the freedoms of being in such close quarters with men. On the one hand, women were expected to keep up with the ideals and expectations that they were raised with in terms of remaining chaste and acting appropriately with the men they had to be in close contact with. On the other hand, the war created opportunities of sexual freedom that women had never experienced before and some women reveled in it. Goldman writes, “During the war there was a loosening of sexual constraints, both heterosexual and homosexual. Sex became for many an escape from the horror of war, a way of affirming life in the face of death” (23). For some women, it seemed either silly or impossible to keep up with the ideals that they saw as belonging to another world. The war, and the horrors they witnessed, showed them a different world, one in which their feminine ideals could not last, but new ones were just being discovered.

Women’s participation in the war as non-combatants was disregarded when the organizations they volunteered for were demobilized. By 1920, two-thirds of women who worked during the war—including engineers, mechanics, and electricians who were working for the Women’s Royal Auxiliary Air Force—had left their jobs (Goldman 17).

As men returned, they needed their jobs back and any woman who did not want to leave her well-paying job was seen as unpatriotic. With England losing so many men, it was seen as women's job to help repopulate the country. Deborah Thom quotes a Ministry of Labour leaflet claiming

A call comes again to the Women for Britain, a call happily not to make shells or fill them so that a ruthless enemy can be destroyed but a call to help renew the homes of England, to sew and to mend and to cook and to clean and to rear babies in health and happiness, who shall in their turn grow into men and women worthy of the Empire. (314)

While women wanted the world to see that the war was a “tragic opportunity” to show that women's political importance was vital, once the war was over England wanted to go back to its post-war status quo, including the traditional gender roles where women were back in the private sphere raising good English children (Grayzel 79). But going back to that pre-war ideology was difficult for many women, because they were given a taste of what life in the public sphere was—and certainly also because many of the noncombatants were themselves traumatized by the war and the horrors they witnessed.

Nurses and ambulance drivers were not at the Front but just behind the lines, so any neurosis they had was not taken any more seriously than just feminine hysteria. Many soldiers were diagnosed with shell-shock, or what we now know as post traumatic stress disorder, because of what they lived through at the Front, though sometimes those who truly suffered were seen as cowards instead of actually sick. Just as women's war literature was not seen as authentic because of the liminal space they occupied as noncombatants, so too was their trauma. It can be easy to forget that casualty clearing

stations were at times bombed by the enemy. Nurses and ambulance drivers on both sides were killed from indiscriminate shelling and bombing. But because women were seen to be on the *outside* rather than *in* it, then their trauma and experiences were disregarded until feminist scholars began publishing on women's war work. As Ouditt argues, "Women were not asked to fight, although they were expected to mop up the ghastly effects of fighting. They were not asked to die, although their friends, lovers, and brothers continue to be killed around them. The result is a profound sense of alienation and uselessness, a kind of spiritual death" (Ouditt 45). Women saw and dealt with terrible things; the descriptions Mary Borden, Irene Rathbone, and Evadne Price give in their texts about the sights and sounds of dying men show just how horrifying women's experiences were. Christine Hallett expands on women's experiences when she writes:

There can be little doubt that nursing the wounded of the First World War was an arduous—and at times a dangerous—occupation. Some women's historians have emphasized the trauma suffered by nurses themselves. Working close to the firing lines and enduring danger and hardship could create a sense of anxiety and a loss of control which could predispose nurses and other women-workers, such as ambulance-drivers, to their own forms of war neurosis—their own type of "shell shock." But, even if they were not in direct danger, nurses experienced the distress of witnessing the suffering of their badly-injured and sometimes irreparably-maimed patients. Those who wrote later of their wartime work described feeling "haunted" by their experiences. (Hallett, *Veiled Warriors* 101)

Because our narratives on war have been so dominated by stories of the trench warfare and its horrors, we've forgotten that many noncombatants, including male orderlies and

female cooks, lost their lives at the Front as well. The horrors of war were not experienced just by one group, but on many sides. The First World War was considered the first “total war,” the war that affected not just soldiers, but also noncombatants and civilians. Trauma was not only experienced in many different ways but also by people within each of those groups.

Trauma theory does not compare traumas; trauma is by definition experienced differently by people. The same event that could traumatize one person, may not traumatize another. Trauma also manifests differently in everyone. Looking at war literature shows us not only how trauma was experienced, but also the different ways in which authors wrote about their trauma. While many soldiers suffering from shell-shock showed physical effects like shaking and mumbling, others internalized the pain and were affected mentally. Many questioned their ideals and identities, a common aftermath of trauma. In addressing women’s trauma, Ouditt writes:

The trauma of the daily experience of nursing—especially on the Western Front—destabilized for some women what had come to be their way of identifying themselves. The complexity and ambiguity of those women’s experiences was largely owing to the violent clash between the conservative ideologies that enabled them to get out to the war and the failure of those ideologies to mediate or account for the trauma that later beset them. (36)

Women experienced trauma because of what they experienced and witnessed, and from having their ideologies about the world debunked. Many women questioned their place in the world and their femininity. Their pre-war identity was shattered.

Trauma theory can be drawn on to describe this strand of simultaneity.⁷ In *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, Susan Brison explores the ways in which trauma can completely change the way one sees oneself and one's relation to the world. She calls the traumatic event a "surd," a "nonsensical entry [...] into the series of events in one's life, making it seem impossible to carry on with the series" (103). The war, then, can be seen as the surd that disrupted the lives of millions of people, and coming home to people who are not interested in listening to your experiences can damage the recovery process and hinder the process of recovering your identity.

Studies on war and trauma, including the First World War, show that a way of surviving the war, or dealing with a surd disrupting one's life, many people repressed their humanity. Repressing, or even ignoring, the human emotions helped some to deal with the incredible loss of humanity that they witnessed.⁸ They were dehumanized. This

⁷ The pivotal study on trauma is Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1997). Cathy Caruth's anthology of essays, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), features important work on testimony, memory, and insidious trauma by Dori Laub, Laura S. Brown, and Kai Erikson. Nigel C. Hunt's *Memory, War, and Trauma* (2010) examines PTSD within veterans and the range of its effects and manifestations. For more specific work on nurses and the First World War, Christine E. Hallett's *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War* (2009) takes an in-depth look at nurses—both professional and volunteer—at clearing stations and near the Front. Victoria Stewart examines trauma and personal narrative, including the works of Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf, in *Women's Autobiography: War and Trauma* (2003).

⁸ Discussing dissociation, repression, and trauma, Herman writes:

When a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather altering her state of consciousness. [...] Sometimes situations of inescapable danger may evoke not only terror and rage but also paradoxically, a state of detached calm in which terror, rage, and pain dissolve. Events continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meanings. (42-43)

When the authors discussed in this project write about becoming machines or automatons, they are detaching themselves from their emotions in order to survive the war.

dehumanization is a common thread throughout the texts examined in the following chapters. Brittain, Borden, Rathbone, and Price all use the image of the automaton or the machine to describe their late war-time selves. When the world around them is chaos, nurses had to block out the noises of the war, including the screaming of injured soldiers, in order to work. By using the metaphor or the image of the automaton, these authors show us that stifling one's humanity was the only way to survive the war. Through trauma theory, we now can understand this as repressing one's trauma in order to not let the surd disrupt one's series of events in life.

In order to recover from these traumas, many sought writing, whether for private or public, to rediscover their humanity. Writing is one of the ways in which trauma theorists believe recovery can occur. It is a way for one to take control of the narrative, even if one cannot control what happens in one's life. Brison writes, "narrating memories to others (who are strong and empathetic enough to listen) enables survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma. [...] a speech act [...] diffuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self" (71). This is a theory that makes more sense when one looks at the plethora of books published after the First World War. Even books by women, like Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* and Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...*, had good sales. People wanted war stories for a while and survivors wanted to write them. In her preface to *Testament of Youth*, Brittain writes that an autobiography was the only way she can write about her experiences; Borden finds that her truth is best written in the form of "impressions," because these reflect the chaos of war. Rathbone and Bagnold thinly disguise themselves in their characters in order to

tell their stories without public shame. But with these women authors, by working through their trauma they were also working through their identities and feminine selves.

In her 1983 article “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War,” Sandra Gilbert argues that the war swung the pendulum of power from men to women; men became powerless as they were wounded and/or killed, whereas women discovered power as they entered the public sphere and gained access to professions they previously had no access to. She argues that a “number of texts by men and women alike suggest that the revolutionary socioeconomic transformations wrought by the war’s ‘topsy-turvy’ role reversals did bring about a release of female libidinal energies, as well as a liberation of female anger, which men usually found anxiety-inducing and women often found exhilarating” (436). The war was experienced differently by the genders and the Front became a place of paralysis for men who were stuck in trenches and a place of freedom for many women who were happy to leave the confines of the home. Men’s resentment of women is clear in Siegfried Sassoon’s “Glory of Women,” Wilfred Owen’s “Greater Love” and “Last Laugh,” and Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*. Gilbert argues that men were resentful of women’s new position of power over their injured and “invalid” bodies. But did the war give women as much freedom as Gilbert argues? Most literary scholars, like Goldman and Ouditt, disagree with Gilbert’s assessment.⁹ In this dissertation, I argue that while women gained some freedoms, like a “release of libidinal energies,” there were also many set backs; a price was paid for those freedoms, and in many respects they were curtailed or even canceled out.

⁹ See note 2 for Ouditt’s argument on how little changed for women during the war.

What ties the texts I discuss in this project together is how the authors depict women's freedoms, and their conceptions of their freedoms, throughout and after the war. After a freedom was gained, there followed a tragic consequence; there is simultaneity in the gains and losses of freedom. The three main aspects of simultaneity I argue exist are: women feel free to enter the public sphere, but also find the public sphere, defined and dominated by men, foreign to women, and hardly worth admittance; they feel free to be in a place where they can let go of the traditional gender roles, but they find they are also expected to be bound to the old-fashioned standards of femininity that seem impossible to live by at the Front; and finally, they feel free to seek exciting and dangerous adventures as they discover themselves, but are also made vulnerable to the dehumanizing and traumatic. The characters in these texts—and some of the authors themselves—try to navigate the new world they have gone into, one created by the war, and have a variety of responses.

In my first chapter, I look at one of the most well-known First World War texts by a woman, Vera Brittain. Her autobiography, *Testament of Youth* (1933), covers her early education, her war years, and post-war years up until 1925. As a young woman, Brittain shunned the ideals of Victorian femininity by fighting with her father to study at Oxford. Her studies were interrupted by the war and she joined up as a VAD, first at Devonshire Hospital, then Malta, and lastly France. She returned to Oxford after losing her fiancé, Roland, her brother, Edward, and two close male friends. In her book, Brittain dissects her experiences to highlight the struggles of a young Edwardian woman who wants a life that does not align with the ideals of Victorian femininity. Instead, she wants to live an independent life as a writer. Meanwhile, she also deals with the trauma of seeing the

horrors of war, including nursing men whose bodies are mangled, losing her fiancé and her brother, and coming home to a country that does not care about women's work.

Brittain uses her autobiography to negotiate her identity as a middle-class Edwardian woman who rejects the ideals of femininity demanded of her.

My second chapter focuses on the novels by Irene Rathbone and Enid Bagnold. Rathbone's *We That Were Young* (1932) follows four young women throughout the war as YMCA canteen workers, VADs, and munitions factory girls. Having four female noncombatants shows the reader the various experiences of women while also showing the commonality in those experiences, such as loss and horror. Rathbone highlights the ways in which women handled, or tried to handle, being abroad and away from home, discovered their sexuality, and faced loss and pain on levels they did not expect. These women lose brothers and friends to the war, lovers to the loss of illusions, and ideals to the horrors of war; but they also have moments of freedom and enjoyment *because* they were abroad and away from home, hence the simultaneity that existed in women's wartime experiences. Bagnold's *The Happy Foreigner* (1920) is about her experiences as a driver in France following the Armistice. The main character and narrator is named Fanny, which is a reference to F.A.N.Y., First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, the organization for volunteer ambulance drivers. *The Happy Foreigner* follows Fanny's love affair with a French officer, already breaking many of the rules of the organization that aimed to keep the traditional gender roles in place. Fanny sneaks out to meet Julien and has sex with him, even after learning he has a woman at home. By depicting a character so brazenly rejecting the ideals of chastity, Bagnold openly rejects traditional femininity. But Fanny's romance has the backdrop of a country ravaged by war and through this juxtaposition,

Bagnold shows the simultaneity of women's sexual freedom; it took a world war for some women to accept their sexuality.

In my third chapter, I look at the modernist texts by Mary Borden and Evadne Price and how their narrative techniques mimic the chaos and the confusion of the war and femininity as felt by the authors and volunteers. Borden uses short "impressions" in *The Forbidden Zone* (1929) to capture the chaos of the war. In her stories she highlights how nurses are seen as objects to be admired, how a volunteer's ideals of the world can be shattered by witnessing the after effects of the war, and how gender and sex cannot exist as bodies are being torn up by bombs. Borden spends more time showing the breakdown of gender instead of focusing on transgressions on the ideals of Victorian femininity, but still critiques the expectations of those ideals. In contrast, Price in *Not So Quiet...* (1930) spends a great deal of her narrative shaming the older generation, the Victorians, not only for shamelessly sending her generation to be killed, but also for trying to force young women to keep up the expectations of femininity as they see death all around them. Like Borden, Price questions how the soldiers and noncombatants can maintain their humanity as they see the destruction around them. At the end of her text, her narrator decides that becoming a machine and killing all the emotions inside her is the only way to survive the war. These authors have us question the significance of gender ideals, showing us that while many women found some happiness and freedom at the Front, many were dehumanized by the experience.

My conclusion focuses on Virginia Woolf's version of simultaneity, as she reflects on the First World War in the course of arguing how to stave off the Second. In 1938, Virginia Woolf published her most political text, *Three Guineas*. Woolf reflects on

women's roles and their lack of access to the public sphere, examining how opening up the public sphere and patriarchal institutions could help prevent another war. The text answers a letter by a lawyer asking how women can help to prevent war. Woolf uses women's First World War activities to show that as long as the patriarchy withholds access to education and non-domestic jobs from women, then tyranny will reign. She ties the tyranny of the patriarchy to the tyranny of fascism and suggests that women need access to education and jobs while simultaneously rejecting the patriarchal ideals of those institutions in order to prevent war. Woolf calls for dissociation, not participation, which is what we saw in the First World War. I use Woolf's text to show the reactions to women's war work. Woolf's sense of women as simultaneously free and unfree has room for neither war nor for traditional standards, and so she can help us see how our other authors' reactions were more complex.

Looking at these authors together shows that there was a commonality of experience for noncombatants. Tracing the principles of simultaneity throughout the different genres highlights the significant impact the war had on women's understandings of their femininity and their place in the world. Because literary scholarship of women's war writing is relatively new, there are many gaps to fill. Literary scholars like Angela Smith, Margaret Higonnet, Sharon Ouditt, Dorothy Goldman, Carol Acton, and Jane Marcus have done a great deal of work recovering women's writing from the First World War; they've written on women's published and unpublished works. Jane Marcus, especially, has worked to recover texts like Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...* and Irene Rathbone's *We That Were Young*, both republished by CUNY Feminist Press. Historians have also worked to bring attention to women's contributions, particularly Susan

Grayzel, Susan Kingsley Kent, Christine Hallett, Virginia Nicholson, and Elizabeth Shipton. Their texts examine the work of women from all classes, not just the middle- and upper-class volunteers, providing a rich history to a group whose work during the war have been passed over. While so many feminist scholars have written important texts on women and the First World War there are still areas that require greater scrutiny. This particular group of authors—Vera Brittain, Irene Rathbone, Enid Bagnold, Mary Borden, and Evadne Price—has not been studied *as* a group, and by doing so, I hope to demonstrate how they collectively show that, for women, the war liberated, failed to liberate, remade, and destroyed them, all at once.

CHAPTER I

Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933) is the best-known woman's text from World War I; published four years after the golden year of war memoirs and novels, *Testament* received critical acclaim for depicting the experiences of an upper-middle class volunteer. Even Virginia Woolf said she could not put down the autobiography.¹⁰ In *On Being an Author* (1948), Brittain attributed the success of *ToY* to "the elementary but hitherto ignored circumstances" that "women as well as men had endured war experiences, which had led them to certain common conclusions about the state of the world" (qtd. in *ToY* 165). Brittain's text became a bestseller. In his introduction to the text, Mark Bostridge writes that by the end of day of its release, *Testament of Youth* had sold out of the 3,000 copies that were printed; by the outbreak of World War II, the book had sold 120,000 copies (v). Brittain's autobiography covers her youth till 1925, giving the readers a look into post-war England. Much like the other authors in this project, Brittain's text covers the issues of femininity and feminism during the war, and the genre of autobiography allows her to provide a close look at the pre-war, wartime, and post-war life of an upper-middle class woman dealing with her femininity and feminism. Since the genre tends to demand such a scope, Brittain's work provides us with context and background as we examine the ways in which other middle- and upper-class women dealt with their femininity during the war.

¹⁰ In her diary, Woolf mocks Brittain's experiences about "how she lost lover and brother, and dabbled hands in entrails, and was forever seeing the dead, and eating scraps, and sitting five on one WC" (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 177, qtd. in *ToY* v-vi). However, she admitted that she stayed up to finish the book and later wrote to Brittain to say how much the book interested her (*ToY* vi).

Scholarship on Vera Brittain, while limited in terms of quantity, covers many different areas of literary analysis: genre, trauma theory, feminist and gender theory, and biography. Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge's 1995 biography of Brittain is hailed to be the authoritative biography; however, Deborah Gorman's 1996 biography, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*, focuses on Brittain's evolution into a feminist, highlighting the typical struggles of an upper-middle class woman who can enjoy the privileges of her class while seeking independence. Gorman also wrote *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (1982), which helps shape our understanding of the culture/societal norms Brittain was fighting against. Maroula Joannou criticizes the view of Brittain as a feminist, arguing that Brittain's focus on her class and her apparent dislike of other women while claiming to show the "typical" life of a VAD shows a disregard of feminist values. Joannou uses Brittain's closest female friend, Winifred Holtby, as an example of a 20th century feminist, a woman who writes about the working class and had a great deal of female friendships in her short life. Meg Albrinck, on the other hand, argues that Brittain successfully shows the realities of being a woman in the war, that she uses her text to show how women had to negotiate between the official discourse of their gender roles and their femininity and the reality of being close to the Front. Albrinck argues that by rejecting "the patriotic mother," "one of the most powerful figures of war," Brittain rejects the femininity she was raised to embody (285). Jennifer Shaddock also points out Brittain's rejection of that femininity by arguing that Brittain (among other female war writers) uses the trope of the Victorian fallen woman to show how the war changed her. In "Bad Girls of the VAD: World War I Fallen Women in the Forbidden Zone" (2007), Shaddock argues that these writers show how the war made them "dirty," that this

experience represents women's "fall" from grace which changed them from innocents to cynics, leading to a spiritual (and at times physical) death (168). Shaddock argues that by seeing the death, disease, and destruction of war, these women are seen as tainted, but the authors use that metaphor to criticize both the Victorian feminine ideals and the socio-political atmosphere of the Edwardian period that allowed the war, and their "fall," to happen. While few scholars have discussed Brittain's feminism, such as Joannou, it is written about in isolation from the war and from Brittain's rejection of Victorian femininity. Like Albrinck and Shaddock, my analysis examines Brittain's fight against the Victorian feminine ideal, while showing how this fight and her feminism are tied to her thoughts on and experiences at the Front. Like other first-wave feminists, Brittain's feminism focused on women's suffrage and desire for a place in the public sphere where women could work and be independent of male relatives. Joining the war effort was Brittain's, and many of her peers', first time entering the public sphere and it is this experience that drives her feminism.

Vera Brittain's feminism was tied to her class and education, a stance feminists in the late 20th century and current feminists criticize as too exclusive. However, because the leaders of the suffragette movement were upper- and middle-class women, it is no wonder they focused on their own rights. Brittain's feminism came through as she fought for her right to go to Oxford. In order for women to be "the equal and respected companions of men," women, according to Brittain, should be allowed to pursue a higher education and be free to work to earn their living. These "rights" are not necessarily the ones that working-class women sought, but they reflected Brittain's understanding of her world. Joannou, perhaps Brittain's harshest critic, argues in "Vera Brittain's *Testament of*

Youth Revisited,” that feminist scholars should reconsider hailing Brittain as a feminist writer. Comparing Brittain to Winifred Holtby, Joannou argues that Brittain’s preoccupations with the middle-class, the educated class, and the men in her life are counter to feminism, whereas Holtby’s championing of the working class and ability to have many female friendships epitomize feminist ideals. Feminists contemporary with Brittain can identify with her “attempts to break free from home, to be allowed to leave Buxton and to escape the living death of provincial young lady-hood,” which can help explain Brittain’s popularity above other war writers (Joannou 49). Storm Jameson, another war writer, wrote in *The Sunday Times* that Brittain’s story “is the story of a generation – of mine and it may be yours. It recalls that moment of time in which we grew up” (qtd. in Joannou 49). Yet Joannou argues that because Brittain’s work can be only relatable to women of her class, then she, Brittain, should not be hailed as a feminist, while acknowledging that Holtby’s feminism was extraordinary for her time. However, in *Testament*, Brittain shows us a woman who works hard and argues with her father in order to seek freedom and higher education, rejecting the Victorian values placed on women of her class and embodying the ideal of her generation’s feminists. She writes in her diaries that she was not interested in marriage; she was interested in being an active participant in society (*Chronicle of Youth* 30).¹¹ Therefore, if Brittain fails in representing women of all classes, she still succeeds in presenting the lives and struggles of upper- and middle-class women who themselves sought freedom from the restrictions of their Victorian homes, and feminism and the war gave them that opportunity.

¹¹ Brittain’s diaries from 1913-1918 were published in 1982 under the title *Chronicle of Youth*. Her autobiography relies heavily on her diaries and she makes several references to her entries.

Brittain's feminist ideals of equality are shown in her choice of genre for her story. Brittain dared to write in a genre that was dominated by men post-WWI, and dared to show that women too suffered from a form of shell-shock, or as we know now, post-traumatic stress disorder. In his article, "Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*," Richard Badenhause argues that Brittain uses the genre of autobiography to recreate the trauma of the war. By doing so, Brittain, according to Badenhause, is able to find a community that understands her pain, though that community is of the men she loved who died in the war, and thus is able to heal from the trauma. Badenhause uses Brittain's experiences of post-war Oxford to argue that because she felt shunned by other women, those who stayed at Oxford or who were too young to join the VADs, she needed to create a community for herself and the genre of autobiography allows her to do so. In this chapter, I take on the scholarship of Shaddock, Joannou, and Albrinck, along with historians who studied feminism and the war (namely Susan Kingsley Kent and Jean E. Kennard) to argue that Brittain uses her autobiography, a genre she believes best shows the truth, to show how her war experiences made her reject the ideals of femininity that she was beginning to question, while simultaneously showing the conflict of this rejection as she was still tied to and expected to behave based on the values of home.

The memoir and pseudo-memoir was a popular post-war genre for male writers, which makes Brittain's autobiography almost revolutionary.¹² Robert Graves' *Goodbye*

¹² Elizabeth Foxwell in "*Testament of Youth: Vera Brittain's Literary Quest for Peace*" writes:

To be accessible, Brittain said, autobiography required a quality of universality with its readership, a smooth transition from event to event and an analysis of the impact of each upon the author and a conscious effort to shape the product as 'a

to *All That* and Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* were bestsellers in 1929 and 1930, respectively. As soldiers and officers, the male authors had a claim to legitimacy in writing about their first-hand experiences of the war. Many female authors who volunteered as noncombatants were not allowed that legitimacy by the public. It is not their stories that people wanted to read about, since the popularity of the Trench poets—Sassoon and Wilfred Owen—solidified the myth that the only *true* experience of the war was the soldier's. In "Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*: In Consideration of the Untrenched Voice," Liane Schwarz argues that the division between trench autobiographies and others is a gender division, especially because it was the trench narratives that the public thirsted for. She writes:

The "myth of the lost generation" would invariably become the story of all those young men at the Front who fought and died on behalf of democracy [...]. That this was an ideology as much perpetuated by the literature itself as by the cold facts of the war-time casualty lists was of little concern to the public at large, for in the end it was what they wanted to believe—that the only 'truth' of war had emerged from the fighting young men in the trenches. (238)

work of art.' Most of all, she felt the ordinary person's autobiography to be far more representative than a monarch's, politician's, or military officer's—typical authors of traditional autobiographies. Thus, Brittain viewed this revamped genre as a form of self-empowerment [...] valuable as a vehicle for artistic self-expression and interpretation. (179)

While current feminism would question Brittain's idea of herself as an "ordinary person" because of her class privilege, it is important to note that she does want to differentiate her narrative from those of the military officers that were flooding the marketplace. If not the story of an "ordinary person," Brittain's text does provide the *woman's* perspective, which was just as inaccessible then as the ordinary person's. Like Foxwell, Liane Schwarz also argues that Brittain's choice of genre is "remarkable," because it "defies the usually equation between World War I autobiography and trench narrative by insisting on another (female) perspective" (240).

Brittain daring to write in a genre that those officers were shows us that she believed her experience to be as significant and valuable as the soldier's experience. Women's war work was all but ignored when soldiers returned and needed their jobs back. Women also did not die in the terrifying numbers that men did, so their sacrifices are not on the same level. The popularity of the trench autobiography, along with the lack of interest in women's work, led to the public almost completely discounting all women's work, something Brittain herself wanted to correct. Writing for the *Manchester Guardian* in 1929, Brittain expresses her worry that women's writing of the war would be forgotten. Angela Smith writes, "She feared that historical perceptions of the war would subordinate women's experience, no matter how diverse; that it would be buried by the enormous popular appeal of the numerous and often successful men's war narratives which flooded the commercial market in the late 1920s" (*The Second Battlefield* 105). By inserting her narrative in a form that, at the time, was popular for men's narratives, Brittain could be seen equating her narrative to those of the "successful men's war narratives." Unlike Brittain, many women used the novel as a way to write about their experiences, a genre that allowed them to tell their stories without claiming the same legitimacy as men. However, Brittain could not write anything *but* an autobiography. While trying to write a novel that fictionalized her story, she felt she was being insincere. In her foreword to *Testament of Youth*, Brittain writes about trying to write a novel: "To my dismay it turned out a hopeless failure; I never got much further than the planning, for I found that the people and the events about which I was writing were still too near and too real to be made the subjects of an imaginative, detached reconstruction" (12). Brittain's need to not

mask the truth behind a “detached reconstruction” speaks to the importance of the genre in which she chose to write and how highly she valued truth as she saw it.

The assumptions of truth that plague the genre conventions of the autobiography, as Brittain sees it, suggests that her readers would read Brittain’s *Testament* as historical truth—a true account of the life of a volunteer nurse; however, much like fiction, autobiography uses rhetorical techniques and plays with memory. In “Borderline Women,” Meg Albrinck argues that Brittain’s narrative choices get us closer to the “truth of war.” She writes, “Brittain uses a collage technique, bringing together letters, diary entries, poems, and first-person narration to create as comprehensive a view on the war as possible. Such a technique suggests a faith in language’s ability to report the truth. [...] Brittain’s use of multiple genres thus seems to be documentary—approaching ‘the truth of war’ through multiple perspectives” (281). To Albrinck, Brittain’s techniques heighten the level of truth and give the reader a description of women’s service experiences in the war. In *Reading Autobiography* (2010), however, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that

Although it [autobiography] can be read as a history of the writing/speaking subject, however, life narrative cannot be reduced to or understood only as historical record. While autobiographical narratives may contain information regarded as “facts,” they are not factual history about a particular time, person, or event. Rather, they incorporate usable facts into subjective “truth.” (13)

While Brittain’s autobiography covers historically important moments in history, and is a representation of her life, we must remember that it is the subjective truth she is presenting, like any novelist might wish to do. Because there can be a very fine line

between autobiographical truth and imaginative truth, we can approach Brittain's text as we would any work of fiction as we analyze the representations of femininity and feminism.

Throughout the text, Brittain simultaneously critiques the value system that tries to dictate a woman's place in society and her worth, while implicitly reinscribing the same value system that the men in her life fought to uphold. In her article, Joannou argues that Brittain's privileged position as someone in the upper-middle class dictates the ways in which Brittain views the war and women's place in it. Because Brittain comes from an educated class, her ideas about the war are similar to those of the officers and authors who wrote their autobiographies. Joannou argues that Brittain's work differs greatly from other women's autobiographies "due in part to Brittain's passionate identification with the young men from the highly educated sections of her own social class who died in the 1914 war. The desire to commemorate the ideals for which Brittain believes these men voluntarily sacrificed their lives produces a self-image that is less diffident and more assertive than many images of self in women's autobiography" (52). Joannou's argument is that a feminist autobiography focuses on the self but moves towards representing the larger picture as well, emphasizing the social group (in this case, other women). However, Brittain speaks only for those women in her class, ignoring the work of women in the lower classes. Comparing Brittain's work to Holtby's, Joannou concludes that Brittain does not go far enough as a feminist. While Brittain critiques aspects of the patriarchy, those that directly affect her, she does not criticize the class system that is so closely related to the patriarchal system that oppressed women like Brittain and the many others who were not in the middle- or upper-classes. Brittain's

focus on her class makes Joannou question the feminist label given to *Testament of Youth*, which, ironically, helps us see more clearly the struggles of femininity that Brittain herself had. What Joannou criticizes—Brittain’s resistance to the patriarchy in terms of holding up the ideals of Victorian femininity while simultaneously upholding the same patriarchal structure that brought on the war—is what I see as the main struggle within Brittain’s text and the other texts in this project.

With autobiographical conventions calling for a chronological storyline, *Testament of Youth* traces Brittain’s intellectual growth as she starts questioning the feminine ideals her parents want her to fall into up until she has found some independence as a writer. By following the chronological timeline, Brittain gives her reader an in-depth look at the pre-war femininity that she struggles against as she tries to find more meaning in her life. Brittain brushes over her early youth, but writes about her teenage years till she was in her late 20s in 1925, thus establishing her experience as a prime example of the upper-middle-class female. Brittain presents herself, or rather constructs a version of herself, in a way to show the reader that the young Vera knew well enough to push back against traditional femininity. Albrinck writes that by focusing on her pre-war life, Brittain “construct[s] [her] speaker as typical young women according to ‘received’ discourse. [...] Even though she breaks provincial scripts of ‘ladyhood’ by attending Oxford, she remains wholly feminine (for the reader) by appearing at her interview in delicate clothing” (279). As Albrinck implies, Brittain can look like the typical middle-class lady while breaking the “ladyhood” code. Brittain makes it clear from the beginning that she is interested in being more than an “ornamental young lady” (*ToY* 32). While she was allowed to go to school up until her

late teens, one where her aunt was a principal, she believes she wasn't given the best education. She writes, "No doubt my father's persistent determination throughout my schooldays that I should be turned into an entirely ornamental young lady deterred both my aunt and Miss Heath Jones [the other principal] from the efforts that they would otherwise have made on my behalf" (*ToY* 32). Brittain implies that an education that aims to teach young girls beyond the basics of grammar and finishing school, where they learn to sew, paint, and be a hostess, would make a woman undesirable as a wife. The role of a young woman is to look pretty and know how to run a household, because her goal is to find a suitable husband. More education could create a woman who has opinions and speaks out against her husband, something that would make Brittain an unsuitable wife. However, she makes it clear that she yearned for an education and an agency beyond what her mother, the perfect Victorian/Edwardian wife, has. Because of these ambitions, Brittain distanced herself from her contemporaries at school. Her desire to go to Oxford for her own sake was foreign concept to other young women. She writes:

My classroom contemporaries regarded my ambitions, not unnaturally, with no particular interest or sympathy. Many of them were fashionable young women to whom universities represented a quite unnecessary prolongation of useless and distasteful studies, and they looked upon my efforts to reach the top of form, and my naive anxiety to remain there, as satisfactorily exonerating them from the troublesome endeavour to win that position for themselves. (33)

Brittain's ambition to do well in school and to pursue higher education makes her stand out from her classmates. In *Chronicle of Youth*, Brittain makes clear that this difference, her desire for a life not dictated by marriage, is something she is happy to work towards.

On February 24, 1913, she writes, “Not for anything would I change a nature that is restless with search & strife, hard & often bitter though it may be, for one that is passive, complacent & easily satisfied with the small issues of life” (*CoY* 30). This quote from her diary parallels the sentiments in her autobiography: the urge for self-improvement as she continues to distance herself from her contemporaries.

Brittain’s need to show herself as a woman who is different from the other women in her generation becomes clear as she establishes her ideas on marriage and her desire to not follow in the footsteps of other bourgeois women. To achieve her goal, Brittain must distance herself from marriage, but doing so will upset her family and risk her financial security to pay for higher education. She is critical of the upper-middle class lifestyle and the class expectations on women, particularly that a young woman’s life is never her own. She writes:

Before the War, the occupations, interest and most private emotions of a young woman living in a small town were supervised from each day’s beginning to its end, [...]. The parental habit—then almost universally accepted as ‘correct’ where daughters were concerned—of inquisition into each day’s proceedings made private encounters, even with young men in the same town, almost impossible without a whole series of intrigues. (*ToY* 120)

Here, Brittain presents the readers with the basics of Victorian morality: the parents must have knowledge and control over their children’s lives. Any interaction with the opposite sex seemed heavily policed.

The fact that young women were kept under supervision made the war seem like a path to freedom, since these women would have been a country away from their parents.

But Brittain had ideas on freeing herself and staying free before the war. Besides wanting to get a higher education, Brittain had ideas about living a life as a single woman. She writes, “the desire for a more eventful existence and a less restricted horizon had become an obsession, and it never occurred to me to count on marriage as a possible road to freedom. From what I already knew of men, it seemed only too probable that a husband would yet further limit my opportunities” (*ToY* 53). The Victorian and Edwardian woman was taken care of by her father until she had a husband to take over. Brittain makes it clear that marriage is not the path that will provide her with the freedom and independence she seeks. In her biography of Brittain, Deborah Gorman writes that Brittain’s father was temperamental and he made all the decisions about the family. While this setup is typical of the Victorian/Edwardian patriarchal family, Brittain’s early distaste of marriage implies that she perhaps saw her mother as her father’s prisoner and was too independent and ambitious to end up like her mother. And yet, as Brittain admits, the only path to the type of power that comes with education and self-sufficiency for men can only be obtained through marriage for a woman. She writes, “It was, of course, typical of the average well-to-do girl of the period to assume that the desire for power, which is as universal among women as among men, could only be fulfilled by the acquisition of a brilliant husband” (*ToY* 35). Brittain’s language when discussing how the rules of femininity, or at the very least, the *expectations* of femininity, has overt tones showing her feminist tendencies and depicts a young woman who understands how inhibiting her position is and who is ready to fight against these expectations.

Brittain shows how feminism informed her decisions about how she was going to live her life, and this included shedding the bourgeois expectations of femininity. Early

on in the text, Brittain credits Olive Schreiner's 1911 book, *Women and Labour*, for her acceptance and understanding of feminism. She writes, "that 'Bible of the Woman's Movement' which sounded to the world of 1911 as insistent and inspiring as a trumpet-call summoning the faithful to a vital crusade—was due my final acceptance of feminism" (41). Schreiner's book helped Brittain's "determination to go to college and at least prepare for a type of life more independent than that of a Buxton young lady" (41). We can see here the concrete connection between feminism and the rejection of many aspects of Victorian femininity; it is first-wave feminism that tells women they can do more with their lives than what their mothers did.¹³ When Brittain writes that she "visualized in rapt childish ecstasy a world in which women would no longer be second-rate, unimportant creatures that they were now considered, but the equal and respected companions of men," she's imagining a life outside her home, a life different from that of her mother (41). To her, this life included an education from Oxford and an apartment in London, being self-sufficient with her writing. An independent, self-sufficient life was contrary to the image of womanhood that bourgeois society expected of young women in the early 20th century.

An important change in how Brittain expressed her stand against traditional femininity can be seen in how Brittain represents her relationship with her mother, showing Brittain's rejection of the Victorian feminine role her mother upholds. In her autobiography, Brittain does not write much about her relationship with her mother.

¹³ It is important to note that first-wave feminism (late 19th and early 20th century) focused on middle- and upper-class women, who had the leisure of not *needing* to work to help their families survive. Many working class women were forced to work long, hard hours in order to feed their families, but the suffragette and feminist movements did not represent those a women, an issue many third-wave feminists today rightly take umbrage with.

Brittain shows how she struggled with her father's expectations of her role as the daughter of a manufacturer, the arguments they had as he refused to pay to send Brittain to Oxford, and his absolute refusals to let her play a role in his paper manufacturing business (though he had often told her she had the skills for it, unlike her brother). Brittain rarely mentions her mother in her text, but when she does her mother is used as a symbol of the type of woman Brittain does not want to be. Deborah Gorman, in her biography of Brittain, uses Brittain's letters to show that contrary to what Brittain presents in *Testament*, she actually had a close relationship with her mother. Gorman writes, "Brittain's conflictual relationship with her mother stands as an early example of what would become a central experience for many twentieth-century feminists. She was a woman whose aspirations caused her to reject her mother's way of life, but who, on the other hand, felt the force of a strong, —if not always easy—attachment to that mother" (44). This conflict with her mother epitomizes the conflict that is present all throughout the text. She simultaneously wants to reject her mother's values and lifestyle, but is also intrinsically tied to that value system. It was with her mother's help that Brittain was able to join the VADs at the Devonshire hospital with two friends. Brittain's life at the hospital gave her freedoms she had not expected to find and her description of her life there shows how she thinks of her life divided between what she can do and what her mother would approve of. She writes in a letter to Roland Leighton, her brother's friend and her fiancé:

I picture to myself [...] Mother's absolute horror if she could have seen me at 9:15 the other night dashing about and dodging the traffic in the slums of Camberwell Green, in the pitch dark of course, incidentally getting mixed up with remnants of

a recruiting meeting, munitions workers and individuals drifting in and out of public houses. It is quite thrilling to be an unprotected female and feel that no one in your immediate surroundings is particularly concerned with what happens to you so long as you don't give them any bother. (*ToY* 213)

Leaving the protection of her family and living far from the watchful eye of her mother opened Brittain's eyes as to how an independent woman could live. This is one example of how she thinks about her current situation in relation to how it would shock her mother. It is through this comparison that Brittain is able to gauge the level of her rejection of Victorian femininity as a way of being able to live her life. Brittain writes, "After twenty years of sheltered gentility I certainly did feel that whatever the disadvantages of my present occupation, I was at least seeing life" (213). By accepting a VAD position, leaving her family home, and working, Brittain hopes to abandon her parents' image of a dutiful Victorian daughter who will stay home and marry well, and through this abandonment, Brittain discovers freedom. However, this freedom comes at the cost of trauma that she later experiences as a VAD.

One of the ways in which Brittain represents her burgeoning feminism and rejection of the Victorian ideal is through her fight to get a higher education and attend Oxford, which would give her the tools to live an independent life. Middle- and upper-class society did not expect women to attend any schooling after the basic grammar school, except perhaps to be sent to finishing school, "to be shaped yet more definitely in the trivial feminine mould" (52). Brittain had a steep mountain to climb if she wanted to attend Oxford. Her father claimed to have "spent quite as much on [her] education as was necessary, and that 'little girls' must allow their elders to know what was best for them"

(52). Finances were not the issue, as Brittain's father bought her an expensive piano and paid for music lessons, encouraging his daughter to embody the Victorian ideal of the "accomplished lady." Brittain was eventually successful in convincing her father to send her to Oxford. But to achieve this, Brittain had a long, uphill climb to get into Somerville, the toughest women's school to be admitted into, and to do so with a scholarship. Not wanting to ask her father to pay for tutors, Brittain spent several months studying by herself. Describing her regimen Brittain writes, "The morning I have the Scholarship examination, getting up every day at six o'clock and working steadily till lunchtime" (69). After lunch, Brittain would spend the rest of the day studying math and Latin. Getting the necessary books was a challenge, so Brittain used "the greatest part of that autumn's tiny dress-allowance" on the necessary books for her studies. Placing more value on those books instead of her attire already shows Brittain's values differed from that of the "provincial" young women she attended grammar school with. Already her decision to attend Oxford caused a stir in her neighborhood and she, along with her mother, was shamed for making that decision. Brittain writes:

Had I possessed a gift for drawing and wanted to study in Paris; had I been, like Edward [her brother], a potential musician, and contemplated a career beginning at the Royal College of Music [...] my parents' acquaintances would probably have thought me interesting and even wonderful. But so unpopular at the time was the *blue-stocking* tradition, and so fathomless the depth of *provincial* self-satisfaction, that my decision to go to an English town to study the literature of my own language caused me to be labeled "ridiculous," "eccentric," and "a strong-minded woman." [...] she [her mother] was invariably tackled by one or

two *stalwart middle-class* mothers who did not hesitate to tell her how deplorable they thought my future plans, and to identify her acquiescence in them with her abandonment of all hope of finding me a husband. (73, emphasis added)

One can easily see the criticism of class Britain makes in this passage; her use of negative terms to describe the socio-economic class she belongs to highlights her distaste of that class' values. The language Britain claims that was used against her—“ridiculous,” “eccentric,” and “strong-minded”—speaks to how other women in her class, especially those of her mother's generation, saw Britain's desire for higher education. Were she an artist or musician, pursuing school for that would have been accepted, because those focus on training for a talent; going to school to study English literature is seen as a waste of time and money. There is no talent, according to these women, in critical reading, and thus pursuing such a course of study taints Britain for the marriage market. The values placed by middle- and upper-class women on education and ladyhood are tied to the expectations of proper behavior. As this passage shows, the “stalwart middle-class mothers” expect a young woman to not go to college and to focus on finding a suitable husband; Britain, by attending Oxford and seeking higher education, is rejecting those values. Education was Britain's escape from the “provincial young-ladyhood,” but the war brought along another opportunity.

While many women saw the start of the war and their possible participation in it as a way to freedom from the constraints of the home, Britain at first saw the war as an interruption of the woman's movement and her desires for higher education. She writes, “the war at first seemed to me an infuriating personal interruption rather than a world-wide catastrophe” (93). Britain was slated to start at Somerville and was looking forward

to being at Oxford with her brother, Edward, and his friends, Victor Richardson and Roland Leighton, the latter who was also her suitor. While Roland was the only one able to join up soon after England declared war, Victor and Edward went into the reserves. Brittain went to Somerville, but soon understood its isolation. In a letter to Brittain, Roland writes that he is happier to be training to go to the Front than hiding behind the walls of Oxford. In response Brittain writes, “‘Women get all the dreariness of war, and none of its exhilaration,’ [...] ‘This, which you say is the only thing that counts at present, is the one field in which women have made no progress—perhaps never will’” (104). Brittain is offended by the implication that staying at Oxford is either cowardly or willful indifference to the current situation. But she also points out the unfairness of women not being able to participate in the war effort. While Brittain had no interest in joining the VADs yet, she did grow tired of playing the only role a woman could: knitting socks and rolling bandages.¹⁴ This role reinforced the stereotype of the feminine ideal: staying in the private sphere at home while the men were “out there” to do their bit. The freedom some women hoped for was not yet attained.

Brittain is critical of Victorian society’s unwritten rule that women were to be kept in the private sphere, the world of domesticity, and should not be exposed to the

¹⁴ In her diaries, Brittain makes reference to feeling somewhat useful by knitting, because it is better than doing nothing. On August 6, 1914, so soon after the declaration of war, she writes, “To-day I started the only work it seems possible as yet to women to do—the making of garments for the soldiers. I started knitting sleeping-helmets, and as I have forgotten how to knit, & was never very brilliant when I knew, I seemed to be an object of amusement. But even when one is not skillful it is better to proceed slowly than to do *nothing* to help” (CoY 89). Brittain also shows interest in helping in any way she can when she can no longer knit. She writes on August 14, 1914, “This morning as it happened the knitted helmets had to be given in to Mrs Heathcote, & we have no more materials in the house at present, so I had no sewing for the War to do at the time. I occupied myself in learning up parts of the First Aid book, and practicing what bandages I could do single handed” (CoY 92).

public sphere—the land of business and politics—where men were in charge. The focus on the private sphere is evident not only with the roles women took on in 1914, but also in the attitude her generation had about international matters. Brittain uses the private and public sphere dichotomy to explain the indifference she felt at the start of the war. She writes:

To me and my contemporaries, with our cheerful confidence in the benignity of fate, War was something remote, unimaginable, its monstrous destructions and distresses safely shut up, like the Black Death and the Great Fire, between the covers of history books. In spite of the efforts of Miss Heath Jones and other intelligent teachers, “current events” had remained for us unimportant precisely because they were national; they represented something that must be followed in the newspapers but would never, conceivably have to be lived. What really mattered were not these public affairs, but the absorbing incidents of our own private lives—and now, suddenly, the one had impinged upon the other, and public events and private lives had become inseparable. (98)

Because a woman’s role was within the private sphere, knowing what was going on outside the home, let alone outside the country, was not seen as important. Also, Brittain is writing about her teenage self—a time when the importance of social activities surpassed the importance of the world at large. In fact, young Brittain took no notice of Franz Ferdinand’s assassination. She writes, “I entirely failed to notice in the daily papers of June 29th an account of the assassination, on the previous morning, of a European potentate whose name was unknown to me, in a Balkan town of which I had never heard” (84). So while she might take offense to Roland’s comment about those staying at

Oxford, she also does not pretend to claim that her nineteen-year-old self knew the politics of war. While Brittain uses youth and her gender to excuse her priorities and her ignorance, she does take a more critical view of women who *could* be proactive and help, but did not take their role seriously.

At the start of the war, upper- and middle-class women set out to do their “bit,” but, as Brittain points out, what they really did was to make the war effort about themselves. She claims that the “ladies of the Buxton élite had already set to work to provincialise the War” (101).¹⁵ To make themselves feel useful, the older women, including Brittain’s mother, set about to highlight the feminine skills they had: sewing. But the truth, as Brittain points out, was that these upper- and middle-class women never really had to sew non-decorative pieces before. Their one feminine role is, almost comically, useless. Brittain writes that the women met up to work on these projects but in reality it was a place where “helpers” went to listen to the gossip that would otherwise have been carried on more at home:

They wasted so much material in the amateur cutting-out of monstrous shirts and pyjamas [*sic*], that in the end a humble dressmaker whom my mother employed for our summer cottons had to be called in to do the real work, while the polite female society of Buxton stalked up and down the hotel rooms, rolled a few bandages, and talked about the inspiration of helping one’s country to win the War. (101)

¹⁵ Brittain conveniently defines what she means by “provincialise” when she writes that “provincialism stood, and stands, for the sum-total of all false values; it is the estimation of people for what they have, or pretend to have, and not for what they are” (55). In this case, she’s arguing that these women were more interested in being *seen* to be helping, and not interested in actually *doing* something.

It is ironic that the feminine skill these women were expected to have had to be pawned off to someone in the lower class. This quote also highlights the absurdity of the ideal of the Victorian woman. She is supposed to be skilled in running a household and in such lady-like activities as knitting and sewing. But those skills are attained only in the private sphere and are purely decorative. They cannot apply those skills to the public sphere, cannot make things that are actually useful, thus their need to send out the work to a dressmaker. This class and sphere divide becomes even starker when Brittain heads to Devonshire hospital for her first term as a VAD.

Leaving the family home to nurse meant experiencing a whole new aspect of life that many of the volunteers, with their privileged positions, had been sheltered from, including the daily life aspects such as making tea and cooking one's own breakfast. While becoming volunteer nurses meant abandoning the private sphere, the home, it also meant embracing a domestic responsibility they had never had because of their social standing. Brittain, while critical of the "Buxton élite," was herself unable to perform simple, domestic tasks when she was stationed at her first hospital. The role of the woman is to *manage* the household staff that performs those duties, but she does not have to do any of them herself. Now, as nurses, the young women had to change how they perceived their feminine roles (again, the issue of class is important here) and could be embarrassed by their privilege. Brittain writes of one particular instance of being humiliated by her lack of knowledge of boiling an egg. She writes:

What did profoundly trouble and humiliate me was my colossal ignorance of the simplest domestic operations. Among other "facts of life," my expensive education had omitted to teach me the prosaic but important essentials of egg-

boiling, and the Oxford cookery classes had triumphantly failed to repair the omission. I imagined that I had to bring the saucepan to boil, then turn off the gas and allow the egg to lie for three minutes in the cooling water. The remarks of a lance-corporal to whom I presented an egg “boiled” in this fashion led me to make shame-faced inquiries of my superiors, from whom I learnt, in those first few days, how numerous and devastating were the errors that it was possible to commit in carrying out the most ordinary functions of everyday life. To me, for whom meals had hitherto appeared as though by clockwork and the routine of a house had seemed to be worked by some invisible mechanism, the complications of sheer existence were nothing short of a revelation. (165)

Brittain acknowledges her ignorance and how her status afforded her the luxury of that ignorance. But to keep working as a nurse, even if it meant serving the officers their breakfasts, she had to break away from the expectations of middle-class ladyhood. Young women like Brittain who wanted independence from their families were not taught to *be* independent. Middle- and upper-class women had no need to learn how to cook; there were servants for that. Being in the public sphere and out of the safety of the home, ironically, means learning how to do some basic domestic tasks. While the domestic is so closely tied to private sphere, there is a class divide within that sphere, which is why while young women were trained to stay within the sphere, “domestic” for them means the upkeep of the household staff. Thus, we see the conflict of women’s experience being in the public sphere while not knowing some of the basics of domesticity. Brittain’s experiences are so closely tied to her privilege and we see this not only in the work of domestic tasks, but also in her interactions with the male body as a nurse.

VADs were exposed to men and the male body in a way that they, as middle- and upper-class women, would never have been back home, and Brittain writes about her experience to show the change in how she viewed sex and intimacy and how that change was so intrinsically tied to her relationship with Roland. Young women were never allotted any privacy; courtships were supervised by chaperones and sexual activity commenced after marriage. But now, the same women who were not allowed to kiss their suitor in public had to unclothe the men, bathe them, and clean up after bodily functions. Exposure to such intimacies could have easily shocked Brittain and her contemporaries. It was beyond the realm of the reality and the morals they were raised with. However, perhaps because of the forced circumstances, Brittain found the experience less shocking. She writes, “Although there was much to shock in Army hospital service, much to terrify, much, even, to disgust, this day-by-day contact with male anatomy was never part of the shame. Since it was always Roland whom I was nursing by proxy, my attitude towards him imperceptibly changed; it became less romantic and more realistic, and thus a new depth was added to my love” (166). Her love of Roland helped ease her discomfort of dealing with the male body. Brittain joined the VADs on the romantic notion that she will be able to nurse Roland if he is injured, and if not him directly, then—as she mentions above—by proxy through the other soldiers. Their nakedness was Roland’s (though presumably she had never actually seen him naked); their wounds were his. Besides the shock value, Brittain is thankful for her exposure to men in the war, because it was a form of education that the “Victorian tradition” forbade. She writes:

Short of actually going to bed with them, there was hardly an intimate service that I did not perform for one or another in the course of four years, and I still have

reason to be thankful for the knowledge of masculine functioning which the care of them gave me, and for my early release from the sex-inhibitions that even today—thanks to the Victorian tradition which up to 1914 dictated that a young woman should know nothing of men but their faces and their clothes until marriage pitchforked her into an incompletely visualized and highly disconcerting intimacy—beset many of my female contemporaries, both married and single. (165-66)

Brittain, looking back on her experience, can see value in being placed in a position that could have easily shocked and bothered her ladylike sensibilities. By being placed in such intimate contact with the men, Brittain's perspective on the feminine ideals that she was raised to follow changes. She feels better prepared for marriage and feels like she knows more about life than she would have if she stayed in her sheltered home. The upbringing Brittain references—the lack of sex education, lack of any knowledge of the male body—explains why women like her felt liberated working as nurses; their work with men's bodies, though not always sexualized, showed them things they would never see in the private sphere. Yet, with this liberation of education also came sexual liberation and the resulting consequences.

The war threw daily life into disarray, nevertheless behavioral standards, especially between the sexes, had to be maintained. This meant that even though women were now seeing the naked bodies of men, their relationships must be kept professional. Middle- and upper-class women had to maintain their innocence, which is ironic since war shattered the innocence of an entire generation. Brittain herself does not discuss enjoying the company of men, whether flirting or sexually active, but she does speak to

what she sees as absurd methods used by the Sisters, trained nurses, to keep the sexes apart and the results that followed. It was important to the Army, to the Red Cross, and to the Sisters to keep the non-wounded soldiers and the VADs away from each other. The social rules of home needed to be upheld abroad, but these endeavors were not successful, and only made the participants, especially women, keener to explore the freedoms they were being denied. On her way to Malta on the *Britannic*, Brittain witnesses this and writes:

she [the Sister] and the Matron of the *Britannic* nursing staff—a sixty year old “dug out” with a red cape and a row of South African medals—ordered a rope to be stretched across the main deck to divide the V.A.D. sheep from the R.A.M.C. [Royal Army medical Corps] goats; by this expedient they hoped automatically to terminate the age-long predilection of men and women for each other’s society. [...] the guardians of virtue were astonished and pained beyond measure when one or two couples, being denied the opportunity of normal conversation on deck, were found in compromising positions beneath the gangways. (295)

Brittain mocks the work of the Matron and Sisters, suggesting that the newfound freedoms discovered by the young men and women, particularly those of having no parents or chaperons around, would overpower any of the rules the Army tried to impose. She sees the inevitability of men and women being discovered in “compromising positions” and blames the rules placed by the “guardians of virtue.” Having the freedom to interact with the other sex in a setting free of their families and the commonality of experience, it is natural that the two groups would want to interact. Brittain’s mockery

suggests that the rules of Victorian society cannot exist in these new circumstances, no matter how hard the powers-that-be tried.

The rejection of Victorian values and morals, especially pertaining to sex, can be seen in Brittain's musings on her experiences in Malta, particularly as she works out what we see in Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...*—the issues of morality and the value of women's work. Mixing with the other sex when not nursing them was against the rules of the Army and the hospital. Female volunteers were expected to act as they would if they were home—they had to avoid being alone with men and honor their chastity. But war changes the way people view their lives and their values, so even the “proper” middle- and upper-class women sought freedom and pleasure while abroad. Brittain refers to these incidents in passing, suggesting that sex among VADs and soldiers was the norm. She writes, “we too had our sex-incidents and some of them were as crude, and as time-worn, as the one described by Edward” (327). That brother and sister wrote to each other about the “sex-incidents” and that Brittain calls these stories “time-worn” implies that these incidents were happening frequently and no longer held the scandalous element that they might have ten years before. But while sex was becoming the norm among her generation, the older generation—including the Sisters—did not approve of these actions. The onus was on the woman, reminding us of the historical (and present) idea that the woman is responsible for restraining her sexuality while the men are “just being men.” If a couple was caught in a compromising position, the woman would be sent home, while the man would continue to serve. Brittain alludes to this injustice when she writes, “To confess guilt [in regards to a VAD being caught with a soldier] meant being sent home under a cloud certain to eclipse the chances of further war-work, at a time when every

intelligent person who had acquired the efficiency and staying-power only attainable after long experience was a strong link in the forged chain of active endurance” (328). Brittain sees the absurdity of sending a woman home, with a shadow cast over her war work, when there is a strong need for people who are willing to stay and keep working. Brittain, though acknowledging how often her peers were having relations with men without criticizing them, still had a prudish attitude, claiming that she never joined the “minor intrigues” her friends and peers were involved in. Instead, she avoided these as “mixed parties had not tempted [her] to desire a reputation” (321). Through these passages, we see Brittain’s struggle with her generation’s sexual freedom. Intellectually, she sees it as a matter of equality, especially when it comes to how the Army treats the women who have “transgressed.” Yet Brittain is not interested in taking advantage of the newfound sexual liberation. Perhaps she is still too tied to the Victorian morals she was raised with, but even without participating in this newfound sexual freedom, Brittain sees the importance of not sending hard-working women home, much like Tosh in *Not So Quiet....* This could be attributed to her feminism, her beliefs in equality. While Brittain herself does not participate, she calls out the inequality of punishing women at a time when women’s war service was needed.

Brittain, whose closest friends were men, points out the absurdity of trying to completely separate the sexes, an argument which shows her rejection of the public and private spheres as well as the separation of the sexes. Despite what those in authority wanted to believe, separating the sexes did not stop them from interacting. While the rejection of this separation can be passed over as a “youths will be youths” idea, it is a sign that the war brought the sexes together and the divide between generations grew.

Robert Graves refers to this as “two distinct Britains” in *The Long Week-End* (4); there were those at or near the Front who were being traumatized by the war and those at home who continued to spew “patriotic” rhetoric without understanding the consequences of war. To Brittain, these outings and friendships helped normalize life in Malta. Through her recollections, she shows how important these outings were for morale. She writes, “Although we were at the opposite end of the compound from the Sisters’ quarters, the medical officers’ block was next to ours on the extreme point of the peninsula. This convenient contiguity made pleasantly possible some unofficial afternoons of tennis and conversation without much likelihood of discovery by the Matron” (332). These pleasant afternoons provided moments of normalcy in the otherwise chaotic world of the war. What Brittain sees as unfortunate, though, is that to seek some comfort meant breaking the rules. She continues to write:

Agreeable teas, with vermouths and whiskies at the officers’ mess, followed these stolen games. Quite what would have happened had we been found so blatantly breaking the sacred rule of segregation, I never troubled to inquire. The medical officers were not, upon closer acquaintance, a collection of earth-shaking personalities, but the pleasant, normal afternoons that we spent with them saved us from the neuroses that spring from months of conventual life, and gave us a vitality which was well worth the sacrifice of our afternoon sleep. (332)

What is interesting to note, is that Brittain finds pleasure in the very upper- and middle-class activities of playing games, drinking whiskey, and having conversations. Unlike some other authors, including Irene Rathbone, Enid Bagnold, and Evadne Price, Brittain rarely speaks about finding sexual freedom. She was engaged to Roland by the time she

joined the VADs, but she does not devote a great deal of time to the sex lives of her peers, therefore ignoring some of the strides women made towards sexual freedom. She does, however, remind her readers that separating the sexes, while trying to maintain “proper” society’s rules, could not work while the war forced her generation to question the same value system that imposed those rules and was desperately seeking some normalcy in the chaos of war.

Brittain’s acceptance of, or perhaps apathy toward, her peers’ sexual activities speaks to how her feminism shapes itself as she learns more about women’s position in the Army and the ways in which these roles are accepted or rejected. When the war first started, women were told that their services were not needed abroad. Brittain writes, “when the group of medical women who later organized Women’s Hospitals in France and Serbia had offered their services to the War Office in 1914, they had been told that all that was required of women was to go home and keep quiet” (195). As someone who was told that going to college was not very feminine and would make it more difficult to find a suitable husband, Brittain understood the sexism prevalent among women in non-domestic and public roles. But seeing women doctors working side-by-side with male doctors in Malta showed her that a future equality was possible. Brittain writes, “In Malta we often envied the women doctors, whose complete freedom to associate with their male colleagues appeared to result mainly in the most determined chastity. At St. George’s the staff included quite a number of medical women, since the War office, having at last decided to employ them, evidently regarded Malta—where there was so little serious illness—as a suitable place for such a desperate experiment” (328). Even though on this small island female doctors were given the freedom to work as equals (or near-equals),

their personal lives were held up to the same standards as the nurses and VADs. Perhaps *because they were under pressure to show themselves as equals to the men, they downplayed their femininity and mimicked the men.* Brittain sees this as a problem when she writes, “But most of them [female doctors] apparently belonged to the coat-and-skirt species, with an official manner and the traditional belief—which is fast being abandoned by more recently qualified women—that their wisest course was to model themselves upon their male predecessors, thus tending to repeat some of men’s oldest mistakes and to reproduce their lop-sided values” (328). Brittain shows us the struggle of femininity for female professionals. On the one hand, embracing femininity could help the rejection of the medical “boy’s club,” and perhaps even improve medicine by not making the same mistakes; on the other hand, the only way to be respected was to reject one’s femininity and mimic the work of the male doctors. Similar to what Woolf will argue in 1938’s *Three Guineas*, Brittain sees the importance of asserting one’s femininity instead of downplaying it; however, what is important to Brittain rejecting the patriarchal assumptions of femininity completely and embracing their own understandings of their roles as female doctors.

Being a young woman from an upper- and middle-class family meant that your first responsibility was to your home, an ideal Brittain shows her readers that she was frustrated with from a young age. In *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, Deborah Gorham writes, “The good daughter would always put the claims of home and obligations to her father first, before any outside concerns” (38-39). This seems an exaggeration, but in Brittain’s text we see this become a reality. The worry is present in the minds of Brittain and women of her class that they will be called home to help their

families. Already, when at Malta, she was called home because her mother was “ill.” Yet, when Brittain came home, she found her mother in “bad spirits” because there was a lack of “good help” (261). This angered Brittain, and when she finally went back home she was very conscious of her divided roles: a daughter and a volunteer nurse. Brittain writes:

This despondency at home was certainly making many of us in France quite alarmed; because we were women we feared perpetually that, just as our work was reaching its climax, our families would need our youth and vitality for their own support. [...] as the War continued to wear out strength and spirits, the middle-aged generation, having irrevocably yielded up its sons, began to lean with increasing weight upon its daughters. (401-02)

With this observation, Brittain not only sets up the reader for her own experience of being called home, but also criticizes the newly self-contradicting role of young women in this society. As they entered the public sphere, young women were torn between two very different expectations. The Army, which the VADs answered to, expected the same discipline of the volunteer nurses as they did the soldiers, but it seems, according to Brittain, that the families back home did not. They were expected to be at the bid and call of their families. She writes:

Forgetting that parents who had been brought up by their own forebears to regard young women as perpetually at the disposal of husbands or fathers, could hardly be expected to realise that Army discipline—so demonstrably implacable in the case of men—now operated with the same stern rigidity for daughters as for sons
.... (261)

To go home meant breaking the contract with the Army and Red Cross, which Brittain had to do, not once, but twice. After being in France for almost a year, she was once again summoned home, again by her father. Her father writes to her that “As your mother and I can no longer manage without you [...] it is now your *duty* to leave France immediately and return to Kensington” (421, emphasis added). As Brittain observes, her father sees her duty to the family as more important than her duty to her country, or at least, to her signed contract. And though the Army allowed women to go home, a luxury not provided to the men, their reluctance to do so indicates that even the Army struggled with the changing roles and expectations of women. Brittain writes, “I only knew that no one in France would believe a domestic difficulty [her father’s reason for Brittain to come home] to be so insoluble; if I were dead, or a male, it would have to be settled without me” (421-22). Brittain has no choice but to go home and play the role of the dutiful domestic daughter, because that was her responsibility according to her father, a fairly representative member of patriarchal society.

Duty for a young Edwardian woman was tied to the domestic and the home, reinforcing the private and public sphere dichotomy. Brittain’s family saw her duty to family first, not country—whereas for men, especially British public school men, duty to the country came first. Brittain, however, did not appreciate being told where her loyalty should lie. Going back home to take care of her mother, who was suffering from bad nerves, made her feel like a “cowardly deserter” (424). Brittain felt her duty lay not with her family, but with the soldiers, whom she saw as stand-ins for Roland, and her fellow VADs. While reminiscing about writing to her friend, Sister Hope Milroy, Brittain writes, “I felt myself a *deserter*, a *coward*, a *traitor* to my patients and the other nurses” (433,

emphasis added). Her language here could be used to describe soldiers who tried to leave the army or men who did not join the army at all. She continues, “My comrades of the push had been frightened, hurt, smashed up—and I was not there with them, skulking safely in England. Why, oh why, had I listened to home demands when my job was out there?” (433). Brittain saw her fellow VADs and Sisters as comrades, a similar relationship to the ways in which Sassoon and Graves wrote about their relationships to their fellow soldiers.¹⁶ Brittain knew that even though women were told to go home and keep quiet at the beginning of the war, by 1915 VADs and other volunteers were needed. The country, then, expected women to put country first, even if the older generation did not. Brittain writes, “To my last day I shall not forget the aching bitterness, the conscience-stricken resentment, [...] when every day brought gloomier news from France, I read Press paragraphs stating that more and more V.A.D.s were wanted, or passed the challenging posters in Trafalgar Square, proclaiming that my King and Country needed me” (435). “King and Country” is the language public school teachers used when inspiring the male students to join the army.¹⁷ The national language seems to be changing when it comes to the expectations of women, demanding that king and country, their duty to the public, come before the family, their duty to the private, at least for the duration of the war.

The end of the war brought a great deal of change to how Brittain saw herself. While she never presents herself as a “typical” Victorian/Edwardian woman—a docile,

¹⁶ See Sassoon’s “Aftermath” (1919) and “A Letter Home” (1917), and Robert Graves’ “Last Day of Leave” (1916).

¹⁷ Brittain admits to not listening to the Headmaster’s speech at the Uppingham Speech day where her brother, Roland Leighton, and Victor Richardson attended, but she does mark the “slow, religious emphasis upon the words: ‘If a man cannot be useful to his country, he is better dead.’” (*ToY* 89).

obedient, and pleasant young woman—Brittain makes note of changing into something that surprised her. Like Mary Borden and Evadne Price, Brittain uses the words “automaton,” “mechanical,” and “machine” to describe her post-war self. The desire to no longer see oneself as human can be easily explained by the trauma she, and others like her, experienced. In four years, Brittain loses her brother, fiancé, and closest friends, and comes home to people who cannot, or are not willing to, understand her experiences. While the war might have provided a temporary break from social responsibilities, women were expected to go back to their pre-war selves, being the amiable, dutiful daughter and wife. Even before the war is over, Brittain sees no other way to survive without turning off her emotions. She writes, “My only hope was to become the complete *automaton*, working *mechanically* and no longer even pretending to be animated by ideals. Thought was too dangerous; if once I began to think out exactly why my friends had died and I was working, quite dreadful things might suddenly happen. [...] On the whole it seemed safer to go on being a *machine*” (450, emphasis added). Shutting down her mind and giving up on her ideals is very different from the pre-war Brittain who valued her mind through educating herself; however, after being a witness to the horrors of war and being traumatized by them, shutting down her emotions was the only way she could continue her work as a VAD. While Brittain does return to Oxford after the war and continues to write about feminism and pacifism throughout her lifetime, she, like the rest of her generation, is permanently damaged by the war. She notes the permanency of this change later on when she writes:

Having become, at last, the complete *automaton*, moving like a *sleep-walker* through the calm atmosphere of Millbank, I was no longer capable of either

enthusiasm or fear. Once an ecstatic idealist who had tripped down the steep Buxton hill in a golden glow of self-dedication to my elementary duties at the Devonshire Hospital, I had now passed—like the rest of my contemporaries who had survived thus far—into a permanent state of *numb disillusion*. (453, emphasis added)

Brittain's observation about her change is very similar to other war writers. Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Erich Maria Remarque, and Ernest Hemingway, along with several Modernist writers, all refer to the Great War as the historical moment in which their views on the world changed. To see a women author exhibiting the same sentiment shows us not only how steep of a price women also paid, but also, for the purposes of this project, shows how the war killed the Victorian ideal of femininity for the new generation of women. Deborah Gorman describes the ideal Victorian woman as “innocent, pure, gentle and self-sacrificing. Possessing no ambitious strivings, she would be free of any trace of anger or hostility” (4). Yet while Brittain claims to be an automaton and numb, her tone in both these passages hint at both anger and bitterness. In fact, when Brittain reminisces and writes about going back to Oxford, she writes, “I was sore and angry and bitter, and I wanted desperately to be comforted and restored” (475). The tragedy for Brittain and her generation is that most are never comforted or restored. While the British government and society tries to forget about the war and go back to living their pre-war lives, that of the Edwardian summer, Brittain and many others who served could not forget and could not move on. This permanent damage is significant not just for the soldiers, but for female non-combatants as well.

As a returning noncombatant, Brittain faced a great deal of rejection regarding her experiences, especially back at Oxford where many of the female students had stayed throughout the war. Returning female noncombatants were not as respected or revered as the returning soldiers, though we can see in not only Brittain's writing but also that of other female authors that they suffered as much mental damage as the men. From the beginning of the war, women's war work was not seen as important. Albrinck writes that women's work

was deemed less important than that of men; they were not to measure their progress by 'the actual nature of the social activity' they were allowed to perform (since the similarity between men's prewar work and women's war work would suggest equality), but instead, they were to see 'its relative value' in the new system—a system in which men's work in the trenches was more important than all types of women's work. (273)

Mourning the lack of credibility for female noncombatants Brittain writes, "Obviously it wasn't a popular thing to have been close to the War; patriots, especially of the female variety, were as much discredited in 1919 as in 1914 they had been honoured" (490).¹⁸

¹⁸ In "The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the Demise of British Feminism" (1988), Susan Kingsley Kent writes:

Millicent Garrett Fawcett, president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), noted in 1925 that "there was not a paper in Great Britain that by 1916-17 was not ringing with praise of the courage and devotion of British women carrying out war work of various kinds and on its highly effective character from the national point of view." She quoted Minister of Munition Montagu as having proclaimed, "It is not too much to say that our armies have been saved and victory assured by the women in the munitions factories," while Winston Churchill, for his part, declared that "without the work of women it would have been impossible to win the war." (234-35)

Kent also quotes Herbert Asquith, a staunch anti-suffrage, rescinding his position in March 1917 when he said "How could we have carried on the War without them? Short

Brittain saw this change of thought affect her work when she went back to school. She was treated differently from the ex-servicemen and as a pariah from other women.

Service and experience in the public sphere inspired Brittain to change her career path and continue working within the public sphere. Instead of following through with her English Literature studies, Brittain changed her focus to history. Feeling betrayed by the war and by the Treaty of Versailles, Brittain saw it as a personal challenge to understand how the war came about in the hopes of understanding why it had been necessary.¹⁹ She writes:

It's my job, now, to find out all about it [the war], and try to prevent it, in so far as one person can, from happening to other people in the days to come. Perhaps the careful study of man's past will explain to me much that seems inexplicable in his disconcerting present. Perhaps the means of salvation are already there, implicit in history, unadvertised, carefully concealed by the war-mongers, only awaiting rediscovery to be acknowledged with enthusiasm by all thinking men and women. (471)

It seems, perhaps, a bit arrogant of Brittain to think that through her studies she may be able to stop another war, but her intentions were sparked by the trauma of losing every one she cared about. And, as a feminist, Brittain saw this as her way to enter the public

of actually bearing arms in the field, there is hardly a service which has contributed, or is contributing, to the maintenance of our cause in which women have not been at least as active and as efficient as men, and wherever we turn we see them doing ...work which three years ago would have been regarding as falling exclusively within the province of men" (235).

¹⁹ On the Treaty of Versailles Brittain writes, "when the text of the Treaty of Versailles was published in May, after I had returned to Oxford, I deliberately refrained from reading it; I was beginning already to suspect that my generation had been deceived, its young courage cynically exploited, its idealism betrayed, and I did not want to know the details of that betrayal" (*ToY* 470).

sphere and political discourse. Jean Kennard's "Feminism, Pacifism, and World War 1" (1985) argues that while some prominent feminists, namely Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, supported the war effort and placed their fight for suffrage on hold, others, including Sylvia Pankhurst, argued against the war. While these prominent women were already in the public sphere arguing for women's suffrage, the war brought out many other feminists who felt it was their duty to speak out against the war. Brittain's personal experience of supporting the war by participating in it mimics the larger context of feminism at the time. Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the Suffragette movement in England, decided that the threat of Germany was more important than the fight for women's rights. Looking at the Pankhursts and feminism in the early years of the war, Susan Grayzel writes that "In July 1915, Emmeline Pankhurst, Women's Social and Political Union, with the support of David Lloyd George, demanded the women's 'right to serve'" (*Women and the First World War* 27). Of her three daughters, only Christine agreed and stayed with her mother. The other two, Sylvia and Adela, were pacifists who left their mother's Women's Social and Political Union.²⁰ This public and familial split of an important feminist movement can be seen within Brittain. The Vera of 1914 realizes that she cannot stay isolated in Oxford while all the men she cares about are abroad and fighting; the Vera of 1933 has seen the damage of war and criticizes the politicians who made the war possible. For young Vera, joining the war effort was not necessarily supporting it the way Emmeline and Christine Pankhurst did (Christine is known to have passed out white feathers to men who had not signed up as soldiers), but being there—

²⁰ For more on the Pankhursts, their familial and political split, and the fight for suffrage during WWI, see Angela K. Smith's "'That silly suffrage...': The Paradox of World War I" (2000) and Susan Grayzel's *Women and the First World War* (2002).

either in a hospital in England or the Front—for her fiancé, her brother, and her friends was important to her. Having lost all those men who mattered to her and experiencing the trauma herself turned Brittain into a pacifist. With women over 30 years old getting the right to vote and with the work of both factions of the Pankhursts, women were more visibly and audibly in the public sphere. Getting her degree in History, studying the path that led to war, and experiencing the war first hand gave Brittain the necessary background to write and speak for peace, particularly for the League of Nations.

Women's participation in the war opened up opportunities back home for women's independence; even though women lost the jobs they had during the war to the returning soldiers, some women, like Brittain, used their experiences as a justification to leave the family home and live independently. Even her father, who was portrayed as a typical Victorian patriarch, saw the folly of his single daughter still living with her parents. Brittain writes:

From the moment that the War ended I had always known, and my parents had always tolerantly taken for granted, that after three years at Oxford and four of wartime adventure, my return to a position of subservient dependence at home would be tolerable neither for them nor for me. They understood now that freedom, however uncomfortable, and self-support, however hard to achieve, were the only conditions in which a feminist of the War generation—and, indeed, a post-Victorian woman of any generation—could do her work and maintain self-respect. (536)

Brittain's perception of understanding of her role as a Victorian daughter has changed greatly because of the war and her education. Living abroad in foreign countries for two

out of the four years of the war showed women like Brittain a life that is different from what they were expected to lead. This change infected some of the older generation too, as we see in Brittain's parents' attitude towards Brittain's decision to live independently. The change Brittain depicts, however, is not the societal norm. Women who returned from the war were expected to go back to their pre-war occupations; this meant that working-class women left their better-paying jobs at factories for the returning male soldiers and upper-class women went back to their sheltered lives. Because of the casualties Britain suffered, there was also a pronatal push; women were expected to go back home and produce children to replace the generation lost to the war. By choosing to live a single and independent life, Brittain rejected British society's expectations of women.

Living life in the public sphere continued the education of Brittain about the world that the war had shown her. Leaving the seclusion of the private sphere and Oxford, Brittain and Holtby, lived in Bloomsbury and worked for their living. Brittain tried private teaching, but most of her time was spent on writing and lecturing for the League of Nations. Experiencing the trauma of the war and losing her fiancé, brother, and close friend made Brittain question the need of the war and the values that led to it, hence her desire to study history and work to prevent another war. Lecturing for the League allowed Brittain an active role in the public sphere and the political world, perhaps ironic since she was still too young to vote.²¹ Lectureship sent Brittain to places in England she had never seen, showing her the world beyond Buxton. She writes, "for the greater part of

²¹ In 1918, Britain gave women over the age of thirty who met property qualifications the right to vote. Ten years later, in 1928, all women over the age of 21 were given the right to vote.

the next three years [1922-1925] and sometimes four times a week, I made speeches or led discussions on the League in almost every London Suburb and in numerous small towns and villages all over the South of England and the Midlands” (553). The war sent Brittain to Malta and France, but she had not seen life in England outside of the little bubble she lived in. She did not know how people outside of her class lived until she entered the public sphere. Her rejection of the bourgeois and Victorian values, which kept women in the private sphere, are what allowed her to see and even understand the country she lived in. She writes, “For the first time, during those General Elections of 1922 and 1923, I came into intimate contact with the homes of the poor, and I learnt, as my provincial middle-class upbringing had never permitted me to learn, the semi-barbarous conditions—intensified by the War and its consequences—under which four-fifths of the population are obliged to live in a confused and suffering world” (575). Being sent to and spending time in other places of England, as a political player, are what showed Brittain the consequences of war that are not directly related to her. She understood the consequences of war as it related to her life—she lost people she loved and she felt alienated at Oxford because she decided to participate in the war—but now, while working within the public sphere, she saw how the war affected people outside of her class. This is an education she would not have received if she did not reject the life that she was supposed to lead as an Edwardian woman of the middle class. Brittain’s experience shows us the significance of being in the public sphere and participating in the politics of the time. Later on in this project, we will see that this is an idea Virginia Woolf rejects and argues against as the Second World War looms close, but one cannot ignore the significance Brittain’s decisions and the effects these decisions had. This education

and the realization of the wider effects of war are arguably the most significant outcome of Brittain's rejection of Victorian and Edwardian feminine ideals.

Brittain's autobiography shows us that the war not only created a path to freedom from the stifling feminine ideals forced onto young middle- and upper class women, but also created a space to explore and challenge the public and private sphere dichotomy. Brittain traces her growth into a feminist and a figure within the public sphere, highlighting the struggles some women faced as they rejected the feminine ideals their parents expected them to live up to. Schwarz agrees and writes, "From the very beginning, with her days at Oxford, when she perceives war as a terrible intrusion upon her private life, to her career as a lecturer for the League of Nations, which she views as a happy compromise between public and private obligation, there is always a sense that, for Brittain, this tension between public and private identity was as much a formative experience as the war itself" (246). Women were already fighting to enter the public sphere before the war started, but by 1915, women were being *asked* to participate instead of being shunned for wanting to. Brittain's text gives her readers a perspective of the war that is rarely seen: a women's perspective, not just the experiences of a non-combatant, but also her post-war struggles with PTSD, her identity, and her femininity. Ultimately, Brittain settles for a safe in-between. Her text ends with the mention of a possible engagement, implying Brittain's acceptance of the role of a wife and mother and thus the private sphere, while still actively writing and lecturing for the League of Nations. This compromise is one way women dealt with the rejection of Victorian and Edwardian feminine ideals; in other texts we see women on either extreme by either deciding not to marry or embracing the feminine ideals by becoming a version of their

mother (Irene Rathbone), embracing the freedom of being abroad by being sexually active (Enid Bagnold), or rejecting not just their femininity, but also their humanity by embracing the automaton they realize they've become (Mary Borden and Evadne Price).

CHAPTER II

Standing apart from the depictions of horror from the Front and the anti-war sentiments that Vera Brittain, Mary Borden, and Evadne Price depict are Irene Rathbone's *We That Were Young* (1932) and Enid Bagnold's *The Happy Foreigner* (1920). With the lack of descriptions about the horrors at the Front, these novels have a different tone as they present the complicated relationship of female volunteers to their femininity and feminism. Neither Rathbone nor Bagnold focus on the larger context of the war like Brittain, write in detail about soldiers' mangled bodies like Borden, nor have several pages dedicated to an anti-war rant like Price. Instead, these authors focus on the day-to-day lives of female noncombatants as they deal with being in the public sphere and the mixed feelings of being liberated in some ways, particularly in their relationships with men, and being constrained in other ways. With this shift in tone and focus, we do not see the metaphor of the machine or automaton that Borden, Price, and Brittain provide. These machines come through because of trauma and while Rathbone depicts some trauma, the trauma is personal and not political *and* personal. Like the other authors, however, Rathbone and Bagnold depict femininity as fraught with complications: women have experienced sexual freedom but at the cost of heartbreak or humiliation; women have the freedom to be in the public sphere, but at the cost of personal trauma.

Scholarship on these authors is more limited than any of the other authors in this project. There are two biographies of Enid Bagnold—Lenemaja Friedman and Anne Sebba's both published in 1986—though scholars on Bagnold have tended to overlook *The Happy Foreigner* as it was not received the same way as *National Velvet* (1935),

the novel that made her famous and which later became a film in 1944 starring Elizabeth Taylor. Rathbone also did not see much success with her war novel, which she accounts to the fact that she did not write an autobiography like Vera Brittain (Lynn Knight “Introduction,” xxii). Geneviève Brassard presents the most in-depth analysis of Rathbone’s diary and novel in her 2003 article, “From Private Story to Public History: Irene Rathbone Revises the War in the Thirties.” In *Second Battlefield*, Angela Smith examines the shift from the private writing to public and, thus, focuses on Bagnold’s *A Diary Without Dates* (1918). The publication of Bagnold’s diaries got her fired from the Royal Herbert Hospital as a VAD, though she was able to rejoin the war effort as a FANY (Smith 73). Despite the lack of critical engagement, both authors belong within the canon of women’s war literature like the others in this project, because they use their texts to ensure women’s place in World War I history and literature by showing women’s unique experience with the war. As Brassard writes, “Neither civilians nor combatants, these women unsettle traditional wartime boundaries between home and front, since they are expected to recreate a bit of homeland comfort and cheer abroad while also working hard in a dangerous environment” (46). Women were expected to uphold the ideals of home while abroad to remind the soldiers of what they were fighting for. As we have already seen, the war threw Victorian ideals of femininity into turmoil; it gave women freedoms they never had while simultaneously reinforcing the rigidity of those ideals. Women were given the freedom of leaving the home in order to serve their country, which also opened them up to more experiences in love and relationships. Conversely, they also were witnesses to the horrors of war and did not have the safety that the private sphere provided them all their lives. Using the private/public sphere dichotomy, whether

explicitly like Rathbone or implicitly like Bagnold, allows the reader to get the historical context that is necessary to understand what women were trying to negotiate as they discovered the freedoms of the public sphere. In “Bad Girls of the VAD,” Jennifer Shaddock writes:

By setting the Victorian separate spheres philosophy within the context of the patriotic, jingoist ideology of World War I, these writers are able simultaneously to critique both eras: the socio-political system at the heart of each relies upon the constructed innocence and altruism of the feminine domestic sphere to support and redeem the corruption at work within the broader masculine, public sphere.
(182)

If the private sphere demands that a woman stay demure and pure because of the corruption of the public sphere, then it is inevitable that the values of the private sphere will not transfer easily into the public, yet the values of the private sphere incongruously remain there. This brings up the conflicts women face as they figure out their place in the public sphere. In this chapter, I argue that Rathbone and Bagnold use their texts to depict the contradictions of being a woman in the public sphere as she joins the war effort, how the war was simultaneously an opportunity for learning about the world while also a horrific display of its cruelty, and how women dealt with the ideals of Victorian femininity at the war front, particularly in regards to sexual freedom.

Irene Rathbone’s *We That Were Young*

Based in part on her diaries as a Y.M.C.A. canteen worker and, later, as a VAD, Rathbone’s *We That Were Young* depicts the lives of four young women: Joan, Betty, Barbara, and Pamela. Though the narrative spends the most time on Joan’s story, using

four characters allows Rathbone to give a broad picture of middle-class women's lives. Elizabeth Delafield, herself a now-forgotten author, wrote in the Preface to *We That Were Young* that the war was the opportunity a young woman of her class needed to be free of the life her parents expected her to have. She writes, "To a very great number of middle- and upper middle-class young women—myself amongst them—the War bought release. We had been brought up in the tradition that a girl did not work: she was worked for, by a male relation" (viii). The war provided women the opportunity to work, not be worked for, which meant some amount of independence from their families and societal expectations. Working for the war effort meant going into the public sphere and, for many women, this was their first experience being outside their comfort zones without their family. As representatives of the private sphere, it was the Victorian woman's responsibility to maintain the integrity and spirituality of the home; she could do so because she would never be exposed to the corrupt public sphere of politics, which was the husband's role. The war obviously changed all this, complicating the ideas of where women belonged. In keeping with the ideals of Victorian womanhood, women's war efforts in 1914 were strictly domestic: knitting for the soldiers, rolling bandages, collecting money, and taking in Belgian refugees. The War Office shunned more efforts of help. When the war did not end in Christmas of 1914, the British War Office changed its policy (Sharon Ouditt 12). Women joined the effort in throngs; whether it was to be canteen workers for the Y.M.C.A., VAD nurses and ambulance drivers, Red Cross volunteers, or factory workers (if they were in the lower, working classes). Young women of Rathbone's generation were ready to throw off the rules and expectations of Victorian womanhood. The Pankhursts and the Suffrage movement was already

underway, so it is no surprise that women felt prepared to enter the public sphere and become part of the war effort. Many of them saw themselves as soldiers, as Joan says later (Rathbone 239) and as Bagnold opens up her novel. Rathbone writes about this call for women volunteers:

V.A.D.'s all over the country, whether they had had much, or little, or no training were being called up. From their homes, from their local hospitals, they were flung suddenly into gigantic wards where they had to rise as best they could to the varied and strenuous demands made on them. [...] the middle-class, home-sheltered girls of England felt, at last, that their existence was not wholly futile. How different from being merely "allowed to do things" was the fact of being definitely asked to come and do them. They were in the same position as their brothers now: needed by the country. (194)

The war gave many of these women purpose, a realization that there was more to their lives than the home and that they can make a difference in the world. The fact that they were being asked, rather than being patronizingly "allowed," made them feel that they were as important to the war effort as the soldiers. Young women, like Rathbone, were finally allowed to enter the public sphere without being shunned for doing so.

Rathbone was a suffragette before the war started and was pursuing a life outside the family home: "Prior to the war she had shared a flat with her cousin, pursued a theatrical career [...] and was a dedicated suffragist" (Knight, xi). Rathbone originally saw the war as an interruption of her career, forcing her to take a step back from the suffragette work to participate in the war effort, and she depicts Joan feeling the same way (xi). Once Joan realizes that the war is her generation's duty, she decides that she

must play a role in the war effort. The domestic work she does, including preparing a cottage on her family's property for Belgian refugees, is not enough to satisfy her.

Acknowledging that now is the chance for her to see life outside the home, she scorns the work she has been doing and decides to do more. Rathbone writes:

I feel that the time has passed for pottering at those various jobs—office-work, Belgians, bandage-rolling, etc—which can quite well be done by older women; just as the time has passed for cursing the war for interrupting our peace-time pursuits. Already it has boshed the careers of most of the women we know. Soon it will begin to take the lives of the men. Either we must stand aside and do nothing about it at all—which doesn't seem possible—or else we must be used right up by it. (19)

Joan believes that only by leaving England will she be taking a more active role and a more realistic approach. Since there is no escaping the war, then they (the women of her generation) must allow themselves to be consumed by it. Though it is framed within a larger issue of young women needing to play a more active role in the war effort, it is important to note that Rathbone includes the fact that the war has ruined the careers—or even the pursuit of careers—for young women. Her lamentation about the war “bosh[ing]” their careers, comes before the acknowledgement that the war is going to kill the men in their lives, indicating the earlier priorities of women. The desire to leave the home was there, and the war gave the opportunity to follow that desire for some, while forcing others to redirect that desire, all in the name of patriotism—ironically, an important Victorian value. During a dinner with her uncle Robert, the epitome of the men that those in Joan's generation (and Rathbone's) will hate as the war continues, boasts

that the war at least has shut women up about the vote. Rathbone writes, “‘Yes, the women are showing up well,’ boomed Robert. ‘And to think that only last summer they were causing us so much anxiety!’ His eyes twinkled as he looked across to his niece. ‘No more talk of the Vote now, eh, Joan?’ ‘No more *talk* of it, Uncle Robert,’ she threw back, ‘but our energies are only temporarily diverted. You wait!’” (14). Though Joan sees the war as an interruption to the women’s movement, she still believes that women should work for the war effort. She sees the war as many other women did: an obstruction to progress on the one hand, but on the other hand it was an opportunity to leave their sheltered lives and play a role in public sphere.

From our first introduction to Joan, we are shown her idealistic view of the war. When trying to brush off Colin’s romantic pursuits she says, “‘now isn’t the time to think of these things. There’s just the war. For good or ill we’ve got to give ourselves up to it.’ Her eyes were bright. She spoke to convince both herself and him. ‘It’s the justest war there has ever been, and the finest cause since the Crusades. You are a modern knight, Colin; think of it like that!’” (4). Not yet realizing the horrors to come, Joan tries to believe that the war is good thing. She later says, “‘We’ve just got to beat them, haven’t we? They can’t be allowed to swarm over Europe, like the old Goths, messing everything up’” (12). Rathbone’s language here shows how little women like Joan know about the war and the world. “Messing everything up” does not show a nuanced understanding of why there is a war and the reality of what the war is doing to the continent. Instead, Rathbone shows us the naïveté of those who are in the private sphere. Joan cannot know the larger issues at play with war and the horrors of it, because she has never been

exposed to it or sufficiently taught about it. But all that changes when Joan goes to France and she can see the realities of war for herself.

For Joan, taking an active role in the war was the opportunity to throw herself into work. While she volunteered/worked for the Suffragette movement, that was not enough for her. As a volunteer for a suffrage organization, Joan's biggest regret was not having been imprisoned for the movement. Having once been bruised in an incident involving the police was a proud moment for her. Rathbone writes:

Joan had begged to be allowed to get involved in a riot which would end in her arrest, but her adored leader had smilingly denied her that privilege, told her she was too young, and must be content with the jobs assigned to her. Once only did Joan feel she had actually suffered for the Cause. At a political meeting at Middlesbrough town-hall she had stood up and shouted "What about Votes for Women?" Immediately she had been seized, not by an official, but by an infuriated member of the audience, dragged to the door, and flung down a flight of eight stone steps. By a miracle she had escaped injury, and been only badly bruised. But she was prouder of those bruises than of anything in her life. (18-19)

In this passage, Rathbone depicts a young woman who is passionate about work and about being out in the public sphere. The desire to work for the war effort seems to be a natural progression for that suffragette. By depicting a hard-working woman, a young woman who has no desire to be idle, Rathbone breaks down the stereotypes of the Victorian and Edwardian lady who lives her life in the house entertaining callers or lounging on the chaise lounges outdoors. The war was the Edwardian woman's way out. Joan first spends time as Y.M.C.A. canteen worker in France, where she serves food and

tea for soldiers and officers who are on a break from the Front. She then becomes a VAD and works at a hospital back in England. After serving as a VAD for a while, Joan is hospitalized for septic fingers, but she decides that her illness will not prevent her from working for the war effort. Those who know Joan best, particularly her brother Jimmy, know that Joan cannot let her recurring illness force her to become an idle woman. In a letter to his sister, Jimmy writes:

“Of course you must go [rejoin the Y.M.C.A.],” he replied. “It will be lovely for you working with your friends again. And what’s the alternative? ‘Resting’ in England, getting more and more bored and melancholy, and then probably going back to hospital (if I know you) before you’re fit, and breaking down again. Don’t be an ass!” (368)

It is not in Joan’s nature to be sitting at home while others risk their lives and work. Besides that, Rathbone shows us how much a woman could enjoy being free from the confines of the home. Granted, there is a great difference between the work of a VAD and that of a canteen worker. The hours and the workload were kinder on the body. But it is important to note Rathbone’s language in describing Joan’s joy at being back in France and at work. She writes:

For years Joan hadn’t felt so buoyant and so free. It seemed a miracle that she should be out here. Pictures were printed on her mind—during that first week of sun and of great winds—which she knew would never be effaced. The changing lights on the Somme’s mouth. The stretches of shining sand. The inrushing tide with its horses of foam. The little cobbled streets of the town. The walk up to the Camp, through woods, and along high chalky paths edged with cornfields and

poppies. The glare of the great group of bell tents. The dilapidated, ivy-hung walls of their own house. And against all these settings the moving blue figures of the girls. (374)

The idyllic descriptions of being in France imply that these were the best days for Joan and, perhaps, for Rathbone. While she is at a site of war, the landscape still awes Joan. She's able to feel at ease because she is where she feels she belongs.

The presence of women at the Front, or even as nurses abroad, rattled the fragile egos of the men—be they soldiers, chaplains, or civilians. This is particularly interesting, because the two popular jobs for middle- and upper-middle class women can easily be categorized as domestic: cooking and serving food to the soldiers for the Y.M.C.A. and nursing. Because the war was seen a man's domain and an arena for the masculine/machismo performance, the presence of women disturbed many men. While Joan's Uncle Robert praised the way women stood up to offer their services, his praise is tied to his annoyance with the Suffragettes. To Robert, women who participated in the war effort were doing something patriotic, something good for the country, but demanding votes for women was a silly notion that caused trouble for the government. Women, then, were allowed only in the public sphere if it was for the good of the country and if they were part of the war machine. Besides having to fight with the War Office to participate actively in the war, women had to deal with proving themselves to be simultaneously physically and mentally strong enough to be at the Front and not being *too* strong, and scaring the men into thinking that women can do a great deal without their help. Rathbone shows this fear in Mr. Googde, the head of the Y.M.C. A. in

Boulougne, France, through a conversation with Joan, Barbara, and Mrs. Jessop. Mrs. Jessop tells the other women that Mr. Goodge doesn't feel welcome in their hut:

“Anyhow he thinks we're too independent here, and don't consult with him enough and run things altogether too much on our own.”

“You'd think he's be only too glad to have one hut, at least, where the workers gave him no trouble!”

“He'd like us better really if we gave him more. Anyhow, what we've got to do, my dears, is to be more respectful to him. We oughtn't to find it hard.” (53)

The young women are shocked that being *too* good at their job would be a problem. They do endeavor to be more charming and welcoming to Mr. Goodge, leaving the bulk of the work to Joan who supposedly has the talent for it. In a conversation with Mr. Goodge, Joan is not surprised to learn that many men are not happy having to deal with women. Mr. Goodge tells Joan:

“You, who have only recently joined us, would hardly believe— Why, some of our men-workers actually resent the intrusion of ladies in their midst.”

“So I've gathered; and I can understand it in a way,” said Joan, with wide-open eyes. “But as it's war-time and the Y.M.C.A. has spread to such huge dimensions, they could hardly have managed without us, could they?”

“That's just what I tell them. It's my most earnest wish that we should all work happily together.” (54)

Joan's ability to understand, even a bit, that men dislike women's presence shows us that she's aware of the gender politics at play in the war. Yet Rathbone makes it clear that despite these politics, the men eventually become grateful for women's presence. She

depicts the relationships fostered between the canteen volunteers and the officers and Tommies. Joan and her friends were the only women the soldiers saw for months and they provided the soldiers with a taste of home. Rathbone writes, “She [Joan] found them pathetically willing to talk” (37). On their days off, the young women would be taken for “joy-rides by two cheerful young officers” (55). This freedom of movement and the freedom to spend unchaperoned time with men whom they are not related to was a new experience for these young women. This new experience was complicated as the interactions with men provided some fun for the women, while it was also the only way for the volunteers to learn about the war. The price of the freedom to go on joy-rides with the men was to be exposed to the horrors of the war, but it was also the first time many of these young women were able to enjoy the company of men without worrying too much about their reputations.

The young women may have shunned the values of Victorian girlhood—something we do not see since the novel begins in 1914 and therefore does not give the reader a look into their past the way Brittain’s autobiography does—but there are moments in which a character will pause or reflect that show that some of those ideals have been indoctrinated in them. Joan and her friends are depicted as modern, turn-of-the-century women; Joan and Betty are both Suffragettes and Pamela wants to be an actress. The Victorian ideals of womanhood do not come through in Rathbone’s text as it does in Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* and Evadne Price’s *Not So Quiet...*, but Rathbone does give us glimpses into how a Victorian upbringing shines through occasionally, particularly through her descriptions of relationships between the sexes.

Rathbone is very clinical when writing on the details of the nursing routine so we hardly get the shock of male body that the other authors portray; instead, we see these moments particularly when the young women are in romantic situations with men. Having the freedom to go out with officers, to kiss men, or to spend the night with them is new, because there are no chaperones in France. Plus there is always the threat of being killed. We see this threat as a driving force of many women “abandoning” their values, because either you or the man you are with, or both of you, might die the next day. With such freedom, though, comes confusion and heartbreak. Like other aspects of the young women’s lives, Rathbone shows us how conflicting the war was when it comes to women’s freedoms. Joan, who is “loosely” based on Rathbone, is the one we see struggling most with the newfound sexual freedom. When she is on her way to France, she is forced to take a roundabout way due to troop movement and spends a night alone in a village. While walking on a pier, an officer approaches her, but she shuns him and leaves. Later she thinks to herself, “Either you didn’t answer at all when spoken to by a strange man on a pier, or else you carried the adventure through. After all what could have happened? It would have been amusing perhaps to see . . . but perhaps, on the other hand, not . . .” (96-97). Rathbone shows the hesitation and struggle through what is left unsaid. The ellipses leave the reader to imagine what is going through Joan’s mind. The possibilities could be a night of pleasure (“amusing”), no pleasure, or guilt ingrained from her Victorian education that would not make the adventure worthwhile. One is also left to wonder if the implication here is the possibility of sexual assault or pregnancy. Either way, Joan is relieved to have left the man on the pier. Her peers, however, are having the experiences she will not allow herself to have.

Rathbone explores sexual independence, and the thought processes that were behind the decisions women made when it came to sex, through Joan, Thrush, and Betty. Thrush, Joan's fellow VAD at 1st London General, is engaged to Ginger, a friend of Jack's, Joan's cousin. While they plan on getting married at his next leave, they consummate their relationship. Thrush comes to work and tells Joan her secret. Rathbone writes:

The little girl beside her had experienced—and just recently—that mysterious consummation of love of which she herself had only dimly dreamed—had on the whole kept resolutely from her thoughts.

“Was—was it lovely?” she stammered, her grey eye very wide. Then immediately blushed at the intimacy of the question.

Thrush gave her a curious look, and answered slowly through curved lips:

“Lovely . . . it's life itself. But last night wasn't the first time. Five nights I've had him with me. His mother thought we were always out at parties or dancing somewhere. But its being “lovely” isn't the question. When the boy you adore is going out to those awful trenches again you give him everything he wants—and you don't know whether its him or you who's wanting it most. [...] But you can imagine that it's harder than ever to let a man go when he's belonged to you in that particular way.” (140)

Within this dialogue Rathbone depicts several things at once: the culture in which discussing sex isn't the norm, the realization that sex is on young women's mind not just men's, and the ways in which the war made an impact on men and women's sexual decisions. First, we see Joan admitting that she's dreamed, and thought, about sex. While

she admits later that having pre-marital sex goes against her nature [“she had a stab of shame at her own niggardliness in love. Yet could one go against one’s nature? What Thrush had done was right—for her. It might not be right for another” (140)], she’s also a bit jealous of Thrush’s experience. Rathbone’s language in setting the scene shows how uncomfortable Joan and Thrush are discussing sex. Joan “stammer[ing],” her wide eyes, “blushing at the intimacy” of even asking the question aloud, and Thrush’s “curious look” all speak to the awkwardness and newness of the situation. These young women are not used to discussing sex, especially in a public space (at the hospital). Thrush and Ginger’s sense of immediacy in needing to consummate their relationship speaks to how many others felt. Perhaps some men, like Paul, who comes in later, were taking advantage of the situation and using the war as a way to convince women that their own night together would be their only chance, but Rathbone also shows us that romance existed. Thrush’s explanation, or defense, for her decision to have sex with Ginger shows the reader how much the war affected the way women viewed sex. Rathbone shows us that women craved the experience and intimacy of sex. Thrush keeps thinking about the man she loves being in the trenches and the way she can show Ginger how she feels is to sleep with him. By writing “you don't know whether its him or you who’s wanting it most” Rathbone equates men and women’s sexual desires, highlighting the sexual freedoms women gained during the war.

There were consequences to the newfound sexual freedom, however. Men take advantage of women’s sympathies, while women are left behind with the consequences: be they pregnancy or heartache. Betty, who joined the Y.M.C.A. because of Joan’s insistence, falls in love with Guy Lovatt, someone she had seen before at dances. The

circumstances of France heightened emotions, causing people to make moves they previously would not. Rathbone never describes the sex, just the thought process and emotions that go into making that decision. Through Betty and Guy, and in one interaction alone, Rathbone depicts how some men take advantage, how women are willing to give in, and what the consequences of these actions are. She writes:

Guy didn't let the opportunity slip, but drew her [Betty] to him, and kissed her face, her eyes, her neck. [...]

She laughed a little, and 'That's enough,' she said, but she was willing, at that moment, to let him have what he wanted.

Soon after midnight Guy was rumbling in a dark and draughty train towards the Front.

Thinking it over later, Betty reflected that it was hardly fair the way that the Guy Lovatts of this world just walked away from things. (179)

With a few key phrases, Rathbone highlights the fact that women could still be at a disadvantage even if the war liberated them sexually. When Guy doesn't "let the opportunity slip," Rathbone shows her readers that men were willing to take advantage of women reveling in their newfound freedom. It is as if he knew that Betty would not turn him away. Betty stops him, but still realized that she "was willing, at the moment," to give Guy what he wanted. And, based on the next sentence, we assume she does because Guy leaves "soon after midnight," implying that some time has passed since the kiss and his departure. While Betty has the freedom to sleep with Guy (she's not at home so there's less of a chance of anyone knowing), she acknowledges that she is still at a disadvantage. Guy is able to walk away, whereas Betty can be the only one to deal with

the possible consequences. Besides pregnancy, she could be dismissed from the Y.M.C.A. if the affair was discovered. Guy, or any other officer, would get a slap on the wrist, but the woman would be dishonorably sent home for being immoral.

Not every woman reveled in the sexual freedom the war presented. Victorian values maintained their hold on many women, like Joan. As mentioned before, Joan never had sex. What some may call prudishness, Joan called her “nature” (140). Joan’s Victorian upbringing influences her “nature” and the fact that she clings to an “antiquated” idea of sex while being progressive in terms of women’s rights, is something she is shamed for by Paul, a man she thinks is after marriage, not sex. Though we see Joan discussing some of what she sees as antiquated ideas of marriage, she is not opposed to the institution itself. This is not, however, what Paul sees, so he is annoyed when Joan turns him down for sex. Rathbone writes:

“I see. You wanted to be proposed to—like an ordinary girl? You realise how funny that it—after all your free talk, and your diatribes against marriage? A man listens to all that, takes you at your word, and you freeze up like any little suburban miss who’s out for a ring and a wedding cake.” [...] “Just a specimen to you,” she said dully, “something fresh. You don’t care for *me*.” “I do Joan—I do—in my way!” He moved towards her in an attempt to win her back, but he saw by her eyes that it was hopeless. “Perhaps you do—in your way. I don’t feel as though I knew anything. Good-bye, Paul.” (340-41)

Rathbone’s language here shows how the war changed expectations about sex and marriage. Before the war, it is not likely Paul would assume Joan would be willing to sleep with him if they were not engaged, but seeing how other women abandoned the

“values” they were raised with and embraced their sexual independence could have given men the expectation that all women would do the same. Calling Joan a “suburban miss who’s out for a ring” minimizes Joan to an old-fashioned husband-hunter and not someone who was looking for a meaningful relationship in a chaotic world. Lynn Knight, in her introduction, argues that having a measure of sexual freedom was complicated; women did not always know what to do with this freedom, because they were indoctrinated with the idea that “decent” women would never have pre-marital sex or multiple partners. She writes,

If Irene Rathbone was not new to independence, she was nevertheless as confused by potential sexual relationships as many of her contemporaries. [...] Motivated by an earnest desire to be a “decent” woman, she did not cultivate her sexuality—though, unlike Joan, she admitted the temptation: ‘Oh, if only one hadn’t to be respectable, what a time one could have!’ (xvi-xvii)

The idea of “respectability” being tied to one’s sexuality was still ingrained within the minds of Edwardian women. Rathbone’s tone when writing about the characters who were sexually active, like Thrush, remains nonjudgmental. She is not claiming that the women who enjoyed their newfound sexual freedom were “bad” women, but she does show that not all women were able to dismiss the values that had been ingrained in them. Much like discovering sexual freedom brought complications of loss and judgment, so too did going into the public sphere, where women had to deal with the horrors of war and the disillusionment of their worldview.

Just like the soldiers who so eagerly joined the war effort and then began to waver in that idealism, so too does Joan. Even though Joan’s investment in the war is her male

relatives and friends, her experience is depicted to be as meaningful as the experiences of men. She struggles with her ideals as the men she knows, the men of her generation, are killed. When Joan gets news that her friend's brother, Brab (her cousin's friend), and one of Barbara's brothers were killed within days of each other it is the first—and only—time Rathbone allows the reader to see anger in Joan. In response to her Uncle Robert's statement that she must be glad her generation gets to be a part of the war, Joan yells at him. Rathbone writes:

“No, I'm *not* glad!” she cried. “I think it's utterly damnable to be young at this particular time of history. The ‘splendid burden’ as you call it will break us before we're through. Everybody we care for is being killed every minute, and you can stand pompously there—your own son at the Front—and talk about the luck of our generation! It makes me sick. If I had my way I'd put every man over fifty into the trenches, and every woman over fifty into the hospitals, and let them get on with it. They've had their lives. We're only beginning ours. If the beastly war has got to be gone through with, then it's got to. We're not going to shirk it. But for the Lord's sake don't pretend to *envy* us!” (126)

As the war progresses, Joan is forced to the realization that the war is killing her generation. While she would have come to this truth even if she were not a volunteer, as a participant in the war, this realization comes to her sooner and, arguably, more painfully. As a canteen volunteer and, later, a VAD, Joan is in regular contact not only with the men she already knows, but also with the men she meets. She writes letters and sends cigarettes to some Tommies and officers whom she builds relationships with, so the pool of men who she knows and who end up dying is larger. This affects Joan greatly,

especially when she leaves France and begins her VAD work in London. At 1st London General, Joan sees first hand the damage of war on men and their bodies. It is a bit ironic that she sees more damage in London than in France, but that was the nature of the work. Seeing men lose their limbs, parts of their faces, and, oftentimes, their lives, traumatized Joan and makes her question the war in a way she had not before. In her rant against her uncle we see her still accept the war as her generation's responsibility, but that is now gone. Her willingness to deal with the loss and the pain as a part of war's reality is shattered because of just how much trauma she has seen and experienced herself. Thus, Joan begins to question the war and England, and nationality, itself. Rathbone writes:

What was the use of winning the war, Joan cried to herself in sudden despair, if none of the men who won it were to live? The papers were for ever quoting "Who dies if England lives?" But after all what *was* England? The old men who sat at home, and in clubs, and gloatingly discussed the war? The bustling business men who thought they ran it? The women with aching hearts? Or the young manhood of the nation—that part of the nation that should be working, mating, begetting, but which now was being cut down? There was no question—the last. And in a year or two there'd be no 'England.' (227)

Joan's slow realization about the true cost of the war wears her down. Rathbone shows how Joan sees how the world is divided between her generation and the older generation; the older generation's oppressive separation of the sexes is, at the very least, paused during the war because young men and women are the ones facing the horrors of the Front together. She further iterates the connection of men and women of her generation and the importance of women in the war when Joan admits to seeing her self as a soldier.

When they are hiding from a German air raid in London, Joan does not rush to shelter. She has become numb. Rathbone writes, “In a detached way she wondered whether she would mind dying, and found that she wouldn't very much. Half of the youth of the world was dead already; she would be in good company. She thought of the patient soldiers in the ward—of Sergeant King. In a way she too was a soldier” (239). When she considers the loss of her friends and peers, Joan's pessimism comes through.

This numbness and loss of idealism is similar to the depictions by Borden and Price, though those authors end their texts with the idea of a machine. Rathbone, instead, depicts a numbness that may be more relatable to her contemporary readers—tired of the war, but still going through the daily motions of life to survive. As discussed in the introduction, repressing and detaching one's self from the present was the way many who are living through traumatic situations feel they can face the realities. Joan's apathy about her death signifies this detachment, not only from her own self but also from the world.

Women, of course, were not going to the Front to fight and the women at the canteen, in particular, were relatively safe, but their generation became seemingly united and equal as both the young men and women saw first-hand the effects of the war. In the scene when Joan does not bother hiding from the air raid, we see that Joan's cynicism has reached the point of not valuing her own life, though it is in relation to the lives of her generation. What does a VAD's life matter when half of her generation is already dead? What does life mean after that? She likens herself to a soldier, because, like them, she is seeing the death of men (and women) and while she is not fighting in the trenches, she is fighting to save the lives of those who are. Rathbone is not necessarily equating the experiences of the soldiers to women like herself, but she is showing what is a common

theme in the women's literature discussed in this project: the divide is not between the sexes but those who are in France and those who are at home, the young men and women dying while the old men who started the war profit from their deaths.

Rathbone's focus on her characters' lives involves not only their time serving in the war, but also their ties to men. Just as Brittain focused on the men in her life who were fighting—her brother, fiancé, and two male friends—Rathbone's characters live through the lives of their men. Joan's cousin, Jack, and dear friend and Betty's brother, Colin, are officers; Barbara's two brothers, fiancé, and his brother are also at the Front. Just because Barbara, Joan, Betty, and Pamela are not at the Front, it does not mean they do not feel the pains of the war. Rathbone depicts this by having Joan question her own ideas of the war as she sees her friend's pain. When they see a new machine gun, Barbara says, "Splendid gun! I hope they kill millions [*sic*] of Germans!" (70). Joan is shocked by Barbara's strong reaction. Rathbone writes:

Joan looked at her gentle friend surprised. Did Barbara really feel like that about it? Or was it lack of imagination? If so, what a blessed gift! Better just blindly to hate your enemy, better just blindly to love your country, better just blindly to believe in the return of your loved ones. And if the loved ones did not return, then blindly, uncomplainingly acquiesce in their loss—as Barbara would do. Barbara had two brothers and a fiancé fighting, a brother-in-law wounded and missing; was it any wonder she felt as she did? Perhaps it was in herself—not in Barbara—that imagination was lacking. (70)

Joan's thought process here shows a very different feeling about the ideals of war from the glimpse we get later on when she finds Rupert Brooke's poetry. Brooke's poetry

inspires Joan, even when she is feeling disenchanted. This back and forth between inspiration and disillusionment is Rathbone's way of showing that women's relationship to the war is complicated. Joan's feelings of the war fluctuate between inspiration and horror, until ultimately settling somewhere in the middle when she realizes that you can both love and hate something simultaneously, though we do not see this until the very end of the novel.

The war was a harsh awakening for many women. On the one hand, they were free from the confines of the home; on the other hand, they were traumatized from the horrors of the war and did not have the safety of the home that those back in England felt they had. In her novel, Rathbone does not depict the trauma in the highly emotional ways Brittain and Price do, but through Joan, Betty, and Pamela she does show the pain as the understanding of the end of their happy lives dawns upon them. They experience this first-hand and as witnesses to the trauma of the soldiers. As Brassard argues, "Rathbone's text suggests that war workers, such as Rathbone and her comrades, experienced trauma because they were in a novel yet improbable position of offering support to the troops while listening to tales of horrors, yet masking their own tears and feelings" (47). While working in France, women would get to see, and if lucky, spend some time with the men from home. However, this also meant hearing of war while needing to be a place of solace for those men. Joan is able to see Colin and her cousin Jack. Even before the more devastating battles and losses, the canteen workers have learned the horrors of war. Joan saw off wounded soldiers in her first few days of being in France and that was enough to affect her outlook on the lives of her generation. Rathbone writes, "It was Joan's first glimpse of the havoc of war, and she walked back subdued and silent beside her friend.

Her only comment was: ‘Anyhow they're going *home*, they'll be safe for the time being’” (36). “Subdued and silent” are not words that had been used to describe Joan when we first meet her; Rathbone first presents us with a vivacious, free spirit, but within a few days of being in France, Joan has changed. The seeping cynicism affects Joan deeply, though she always tries to keep a cheerful face for the soldiers. When Jack is able to visit with a couple of his friends, Rathbone writes a scene in which we see how while some may still have faith in going back to their normal lives, others know that that time is over. She writes:

Joan looked at them—at Jack with his laughing eyes and pink girl’s cheeks; at Brab and Maurice with their admirable soundness of body and of character; at funny little Ginger. She couldn’t express to them what she felt, or she would probably have hugged the whole darling English group. Either that or prayed over them.

All she said was: “What good times those were! Will they ever come again? Shall we ever dance again?”

Light as she tried to keep her tone Jack’s reply reproved her.

“Good Lord, Joan, don’t be morbid! Of course we shall.”

But in Brab’s eye she caught a look—only for a second, and she couldn’t be sure of it—which seemed to say: “We shan’t.” (65)

Rathbone captures the innocence of Jack’s belief in the return of “normalcy” through her descriptions of him. His “laughing eyes” and “pink girl’s cheeks” make the reader see him as a carefree young man. His reprimand of Joan’s morbidity speaks to how optimistic he is about the future. It is ironic that it is the canteen worker, Joan, not the

officer, Jack, who sees the war as the horrible catalyst that it is. This also shows how quickly a sheltered young woman grew in the public sphere. Yet while the war brought on such cynicism, it seems to have also brought on a sense of equality between the sexes. Men and women shared the experience of the war and were talking about it as equals, even though their experiences were different.

The physical and mental experiences of the war differed greatly between the combatants (men) and the noncombatants (mostly women), so their writing on the body is also different. Owen and Sassoon describe the bloody carnage of the trenches and a few women authors write about not just the broken bodies of the men the nurses see, like Borden, but also emphasize the nurse's body. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Mary Borden and Evadne Price write about the body graphically, particularly about how exhausted the body of the female volunteer is and how, eventually, the woman becomes an automaton in order to survive the work and the war. While Rathbone's volunteer nurse character, Joan, is in England and not in France, her work is difficult and takes a toll on her body. There is a tone of detachment as Rathbone describes Joan's thought-processes during her nursing shifts. Nurses had to detach themselves from their bodies in order to discipline their body for the hard work and to shield themselves from witnessing the trauma of war. Rathbone writes:

during the day, sensibilities had to be hardened, quivering disgust controlled, and head and hand kept steady for the sake of the sufferers themselves. With unconscious wisdom she let down a sort of safety-curtain between her mind and the sights before her, keeping them at bay, preventing their full significance from penetrating. If she had not done so she would have been useless. The nights were

reactions from this discipline, and the safety-curtain no longer functioning the horror rushed in on her in the shape of dreams.

But after the first week she no longer even dreamed. She had adjusted herself inwardly and outwardly to the conditions in which her life must now be lived—conditions which, if they could not be accepted as normal, would mean her defeat. And in the face of the gay endurance, the positively worshipful spirit of the wounded, how was it possible not to give one's very best? (195)

Rathbone traces how the nurse's body protects itself: it starts by ignoring and repressing the traumatic sights to shutting it down completely because of exhaustion. Rathbone makes clear that this is a means of survival for women. Joan's ability to disassociate from the sights and smells around her, both while she's awake and sleeping, is what keeps her able to focus on her work. Descriptions of the nurse preparing for the day also show how almost every movement becomes automated; there is no thinking, just moving. Rathbone writes:

She [Joan] fell out of bed, splashed some cold water into the basin; washed, dried and dressed. All the little business of fixing studs into starched linen took time. Grey cotton dress, buttoned up to the throat and down to the wrists; clean apron with strings crossed behind and fastened with safety-pins at the waist; white Peter Pan collar; glazed linen belt fastened by two studs; glazed linen cuffs fastened by one stud each. Hat, coat, dispatch-case with clean cap in it, and she was ready. (207)

The donning of the nurse's uniform is systematic, done without thought. Rathbone's attention to detail gives the reader a look into the specifics of how nurses look, and,

simultaneously, her language and the listing each part implies the mechanical movements of Joan. The idea of being a part of—and actually *being*—a machine is clearly stated. Rathbone no longer implies, but states, that to be a nurse is to be a machine. She writes, “For moments together consciousness slipped away; then came jerking back again. Thank God your hands hadn’t stopped. You were part of the machines. You *were* a machine. Soulless, mindless, deaf, blind—with only far inside a tiny indomitable human will, keeping you at it—at it.” (275). This quote moves from acknowledging that Joan has the consciousness to admit a lack thereof. If any humanity is left inside, it is a “tiny indomitable human will” to stay alive as the machine does its work.

Rathbone’s use of the image of the machine, while similar to Borden and Price’s, does not suggest that the machine replaces humanity forever. Her novel, unlike Borden and Price’s, does not end with the end of the war, but continues until the ten-year anniversary of Armistice Day. By doing so, Rathbone shows us the progression of the female body. Joan may become a machine while she is nursing, but does not remain so. While she does not forget or continue to repress her experiences, Joan is able to hold on to the experiences that helped her grow as a human and a woman. The female body, according to Rathbone, is able to turn parts of itself on and off in order to survive.

The end of the war brought along as much change as the beginning. The freedoms women gained in 1915 all but disappeared in 1918. Women of Rathbone’s class were expected to go back home into the domestic sphere, back to the same type of life they were living in 1914. But many women were not willing to give up the freedoms they had enjoyed. Their desire and willingness to stay in the public sphere, not to revert to their old lives, is the rejection of their Victorian families’ ideals of femininity. Rathbone, like Vera

Brittain, makes it clear to her readers that the war was just as much women's war as it was men's. She shows this through Joan's perspective, who misses being a part of the military apparatus. Joan writes a letter to Pamela stating:

“It was wonderful, in a way, being in those surging crowds, but I wished—oh, how I wished—to be back with the British Army! If peace had only broken out while we were still in the Rest Camp what a time we should have had. But I mustn't think about it. It makes me too home-sick—I mean too army-sick. It's queer and dull being at home just among civilians; and this awful 'flu that's raging about makes things still more depressing. [...] Pam, I keep saying to myself: 'No more men are being killed! No more men are being killed!' And the fact that imagination almost fails to take in that state of affairs shows how hideously used one had become to the other.” (408)

Rathbone's use of language here—“army-sick” and “among civilians”—makes it clear that Joan felt that she was part of the army, even if the Army itself refused to admit women in their ranks. Joan's difficulty of adjusting to civilian life, though not as painful or difficult as it presumably was for the soldiers, is Rathbone's way of reminding her readers how important the war was to women. This is reiterated when she writes, again through Joan's perspective, “To be working once more with the B.E.F. [British Expeditionary Forces]—*still to be part of a machine*—what content!” (424, emphasis added). By writing “part of a machine” instead of “being a machine,” Rathbone indicates a shift back to humanity. Joan must adjust to being a civilian again and with that comes the adjustment of rediscovering her humanity. Part of that adjustment, however, also means rejecting the ideas that dominated her pre-war life. Women had had a taste of

public life and many were not ready to let that go. For many, like Rathbone and Joan, fulfillment was found in work. Rathbone emphasizes this when she writes, “And with a sort of terror she envisaged her own life at home—the life to which she had looked forward for so many war years, and which now seemed to stretch bleakly before her, holding only memories. She would need to find something to do” (425). Rathbone suggests that home and its luxuries were a dream to those at the war, but with the end of the war, it became a nightmare for many women. Through Joan, Rathbone raises the worry about doing nothing of worth, or of purpose, for the their lives.

Rathbone ends her novel with the reminder that the Great War was her generation’s war; it didn’t belong only to the male soldiers or to the war poets. Fast-forwarding ten years to 1928, we see Joan as the single, working woman who visits her married friends and their children. It does not surprise the reader to see Joan as the only non-married friend of the group. Though she was ready to marry Colin by the end of the war, we never saw her as enthusiastic about marriage. Her passions were to her work. Shaddock argues that as volunteers, women became “cynical, worldly and disillusioned,” thus questioning the values they were raised with (177). She writes, “for women, this political fall from innocence had the added impact of a fatal blow to their participation in the social contract of patriarchy. [...] the women in these narratives return to England after the war refusing the pre-war social position of the bourgeois unmarried woman’s dependence on her father and taking up a feminist position of political activism and economic self support” (177-78). Joan first works with an organization to help returning soldiers find work and help them receive their pensions, then, by 1928, we see her working for the League of Nations. As she tells her younger cousin, the war played such

a large role in the lives of her generation, so it seems almost inevitable that Joan ends up working in politics. Talking to her younger cousin about the war, Joan says:

At the time, you see, the war was so ordinary—it was just our life. Yes, we hated it, and loved it, both. Loved it only because we gave so much to it, and because it was bound with our youngness—rather like an unhappy school. It was *our* war, you see. And although it was so every-dayish at the time, and we were so sickened with it, it seems, now, to have a sort of ghastly glamour. [...] Our hearts are there—unwillingly—for always. It was our war. (465)

Rathbone uses “our” five times within this sentence to emphasize the role both men and women played in the war. It’s significant that this is said ten years after the end of the war. The distance from the war is what accounts for Rathbone’s—and Joan’s—tone of mourning rather than anger. Doris Eder, in a review of the novel, writes, “Its tone is elegiac and it mourns that lost generation to whom its author belongs [...]. This was a generation set apart, prematurely aged by war and, because its lives, loves, ideals and ambitions were ravaged by war, forever at odds with the generation that had gone before and those to come after” (132). Rathbone’s ending serves two purposes: to highlight the effect the war had on women and the effect it had on her generation.

Writing this in 1932, Rathbone saw how quickly women’s war work was written over. The writings of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Richard Aldington helped popularize the cult of trench warfare and the soldier’s war. However, by fictionalizing her own experiences, Rathbone reinserts women’s stories into the public’s memory:

Rathbone also claims history for herself and her colleagues when she transforms her personal wartime writings into a feminist narrative of public memory, thus

putting women back into World War I history at a time when their contributions, both in life and in literature, were threatening to disappear from cultural and social history. (Brassard 44)

Men's war texts had created the myth of the "trench soldier" and this myth dominated public memory and perception of the war. Women's experiences as noncombatants could not be considered "authentic" when compared to the trenches. Culturally, England was trying to go back to its pre-war values, including the Victorian ideals of femininity. Women were supposed to go back into their homes and raise families to repopulate the country. They needed to make room for the returning soldiers who would need work. Thus, between the popularity of men's war writing and the societal pressures of reverting back to an idealized femininity, women's war work was culturally erased, a gap Rathbone's writing worked to fill.

Though the other characters of the novel—Betty, Barbara, and Pam—are not discussed here, it is mainly through Joan that Rathbone highlights the conflicts women faced as they joined the war effort. Joan's ups and downs—from idealism to disillusionment, from love to loss—help the reader to see that women's war experiences were oftentimes painfully complicated. While Joan's, and Rathbone's, experiences were not the same as the women who were volunteering at the Front, we still see the war affected women's worldviews, their understandings of their place in the world, and their understandings of their femininity. In *The Happy Foreigner*, Enid Bagnold shows us the struggles of being a female driver in post-war France where women still dealt with the Victorian pre-conceptions of femininity and a woman's place.

Enid Bagnold's *The Happy Foreigner*

Very few who are categorized as war authors wrote strictly about the aftermath of the war. Most authors show the readers the horrors of the war as they happened. Though a few authors—like Brittain and Rathbone—give us a glimpse into post-war life in England, both authors end their texts in the 1920s. However, Enid Bagnold's *The Happy Foreigner*, published only two years after the end of the war, focuses solely on post-war France. Stella Deen, in "Enid Bagnold's *The Happy Foreigner*: Wider World Beyond Love," suggests that scholars tend to leave out this text when looking at women's literature from World War I because it has been "read as a romance using the war merely as its backdrop" (132). In her article, Deen argues that Bagnold writes a "self-discovery novel," a novel about Fanny's (Bagnold's character) "gradual intuition of a natural or cosmic context for human experience [...] leads her to recognize connection not dictated by wartime political and social order" (133). This is a difficult argument to make, however, when one sees how much the gender expectations of Army life and established rules dictate much of Fanny's actions and reactions. While the war is the backdrop of the novel, the reader is always conscientious of its existence as the war is the reason Fanny is in France and why she can be having a relationship with the French officer. Fanny is a volunteer driver for the French Army and is tasked to stay in France and drive around the higher-ranked officers as they assess the damage and discuss reconstruction. Through Fanny, Bagnold gives her readers a look at the impact the war had on France, and shows both the struggles of being a woman in an army auxiliary corps and the sexual freedom women discovered by participating in the war. Fanny is a complex character; she is at times vain and silly while being simultaneously introspective and brave. In this text, Bagnold conveys the struggles women faced fighting to be seen as serious war workers

by the men, who view them as either too feminine to do the work or not feminine enough *because* they do the work. She also shows us how women dealt with having the freedom to pursue relationships without the confines of society's rules. We do not get any information about Fanny before the end of the war; we do not know when she came to France though we see that she stays after the war has ended. By omitting such information, Bagnold keeps the focus on post-war femininity and freedom instead of the traumas caused directly by the war. Because Fanny is a driver, we do not see if the war has affected her in the same way as we see in the other authors in this project. It is what makes this book unique; however, we still see a female character, Fanny, as the narrator, struggle with her newfound freedom and navigate her femininity in this post-war world.

Bagnold's intentions of equating women volunteers to soldiers are made obvious in her opening sentence. She writes, "I am a soldier of five sous.²² I am here to drive for the French Army.' And her thoughts pleased her so well that, at the moment when her circumstances were in their state of least perfection, she exclaimed: 'How right I was to come!'" (4). Fanny is not described as a volunteer, but as a soldier, albeit a poor one. In this opening sentence, Bagnold sets up Fanny's experiences; they will never be perfect, but she'll enjoy them nonetheless, even though she will have to deal with some of the consequences of her choices. Though Fanny's job can be seen as a great deal easier than those of the nurses and ambulance drivers, it is still a very lonely job. However, it *is* a job and it allowed her the freedom to leave home and be a part of the war effort. Bagnold writes:

²² "Sous" is old French currency, meaning roughly 1/20th of a franc ("The Value of French Currency in the 17th and 18th Centuries").

The early start at dawn, the flying miles, the winter dusk, the long hours of travel by the faint light of the acetylene lamps filled day after day; the unsavoury meal eaten alone by the stove, the book read alone in the cubicle, the fitful sleep upon the stretcher, filled night after night. A loneliness beyond anything she had ever known settled upon Fanny. She found comfort in a look, a cry, a whistle. The smiles of strange men upon the road whom she would never see again became her social intercourse. The lost smiles of kind Americans, the lost, mocking whistles of Frenchmen, the scream of a nigger, the twittering surprise of a Chinese scavenger. Yet she was glad to have come, for half the world was here. There could have been nothing like it since the Tower of Babel. (8-9)

Bagnold's references to the darkness—getting up at dawn, “winter dusk,” and the “faint light”—along with the loneliness of the long drives and evenings provide a bleak picture. Yet she also makes clear that this experience is once-in-a-lifetime, because Fanny is exposed to groups and ethnicities of people she would never have been exposed to if she did not go there. Referencing “Tower of Babel” is also an interesting choice. While it is the site of people trying to reach God, it is also the site of humanity's failure to do so and the origin of different languages, ensuring that people will never work together to try to reach God again. Here, the reference is not only for the different languages and ethnicities surrounding Fanny, but also the failure of humanity and the constant discord between them. The war caused this fall, but it also was the cause of Fanny's freedom. Bagnold focuses on the positive aspects the war provided for women through Fanny's ability to focus on the freedoms she has gained in France.

In pre-war England, a woman driving was not a common sight. Women of a certain class were driven around, not the drivers. A lady would also never be seen unchaperoned with a man, but the war changed all that. While it took a while for England's War Office to accept women's willingness to participate in the war effort, women jumped to the opportunity. Many women, like Fanny and Nell in *Not So Quiet...*, learned not only to drive cars, but also learned how they work in order to be able to fix them. Much like Nell and the other ambulance drivers were responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of their ambulances, so too are Fanny and her peers. When being shown their cars for the first time, several women were attracted to the Rochet-Schneider. The men, however, did not think those were appropriate for the women drivers. Such sexism, though "natural" for the time, irked the women, who were determined to prove themselves. Bagnold writes:

"That car is too heavy for your strength, mademoiselle. It is not a car for a lady."

"I like the make," she said stiffly, conscious of the ears which listened in the shed.

[...] Stewart, seizing the handle, could not turn it. In the false night of the shed the lights shone on polished lamps, on glass and brass, on French eyes which said:

"That's what comes of it!"—which were ready to say—"March out again,

Englishwomen, ridiculous and eager and defeated!" Fanny, looking neither to

right nor left, prayed under her breath—"Stewart, Stewart we can never live in

this shed if you can't start her. And if you can't nobody else can..." [...] The

women were accepted. (19)

Through one woman's stubbornness and need to prove herself as capable as the male drivers, the women were accepted by a small group of men in the French Army, though

equality is still far off. Being a female driver meant having to deal with much skepticism: distrust in one's ability to drive, disgust in one's willingness to be alone with men for hours, and worry in what will be said if one is seen with such a woman.

Driving officers around was the job women had signed up for, indicating that many had no problem being alone with the officers for hours or days, but there was still discomfort and distrust from the men and many civilians who saw these women with the officers. Fanny is assigned to drive around a Russian officer who is shocked when he sees Fanny is his driver. Fanny is understanding of his suspicions, because it is something she has grown used to. Bagnold writes:

“Perhaps I appear flippant to him. But I am grave, too, grave as he, and I long to go, and the car and I, we are trustworthy. I do, indeed, know the way to Verdun.”
[...] She was sure he had said to the Frenchman: “But what sort of woman is she? One does not want to have difficulties.” And as sure, too, that the other had answered: “I know the English. They let their women do this sort of thing. I think it will be all right.”

She no longer felt defiant towards the spoken and unspoken criticism she met everywhere: “What kind of women can these be whose men allow them to drive alone with us for hours, and sometimes days?” but had begun to apologise for it even to herself, while it sometimes caused her bewilderment. (28)

It is interesting that Fanny has stopped defending herself against men like the Russian officer; she accepts that she will face criticism and skepticism while she is in France.

However, the world created by the war is filled with contradictions, and while a female driver is cause for speculation, perhaps because of her independence and skill, she

is still seen as a man's property. Fanny drives the Russian officer and French translator to Verdun, where they stay at the underground citadel overnight. Here, as the only woman, Fanny is treated not with skepticism, but with awe. At dinner, a French commandant says that Verdun "honours" her as a guest of the citadel. This both confuses yet pleases Fanny who feels, probably for the first time, appreciated for who she is, even if that appreciation is tied to her femininity. Bagnold writes:

“*Verdun ... honours ...*” His words lingered in her ear. She a guest, *she* honoured ... *here!* Up till now the novelty of her situation had engrossed her, the little soldiers watching in the tunnels, the commandant so eager to air his stumbling English, these amused her. And when she had perceived herself rare, unique, she had forgotten why she was thus rare, and what strange, romantic life she meddled in. Here in this womanless region, in this fortress, in this room, night after night, month after month, the commandant and his officers sat at table; in this room, which, unlike the tomb, had held only the living, while the dead and the threatened-with-death inhabited the earth above. (33-34)

In this passage, Bagnold highlights several aspects of a female volunteer's reality in army. Their situation is a novelty; no one really knew how to deal with the presence of women in a situation that had been dominated by men for most of history. War and the army was man's realm, and women had invaded that realm. In this case, that invasion is very specific because it is in cramped quarters of an underground citadel where French soldiers have lived for months. Fanny's presence creates a stir. Bagnold's language in describing this situation—"rare," "unique," and "romantic"—makes it clear that this was an experience unlike any other Fanny would have. Her femininity—the state of being a

female, in this case—brings about not just the gentlemanly manners of the soldiers and officers, but also the possessiveness that at times permeates relationships. Bagnold’s word choice does not make the reader think of an invasion, but that is because the viewpoint is clouded by Fanny’s adventurous spirit. Where the men see an invasion, Fanny sees an adventure.

Being the only woman in a sea of men comes with consequences, however. The idea of a woman belonging to a man is not something left behind at home; in fact, with so few women at the Front, Bagnold suggests that men’s possessive nature still controls their views of women. Fanny’s joy at being addressed and honored by the French commandant upsets her Russian client. After that dinner, the French officer who is the Russian’s translator, tells Fanny that:

“He [the Russian employer] dislikes it intensely when you talk to the commandant of the *citadelle*.”

“But....”

“He does not think you exclusive enough, considering you, as he does, as *his woman*.”

“But, why....”

“Yes, of course! But you ought to realise that you are the only woman for miles around, and you belong to us!” [...]

“[...] He thinks: ‘This woman is a great curiosity, therefore a great treasure; and this treasure belongs to me. I brought her here, I am responsible for her, she obeys my orders.’” (37)

A woman's place in the army is thus defined: she still belongs to the "superior" male, superior not just in terms of rank, but also in the way that the men see themselves. "His woman" and "you belong to us" leave no room for misinterpretation. Fanny is the Russian's driver and her conversations with the French commandant, who is trying to impress her and ensure she feels comfortable being surrounded by all men, are thus deemed inappropriate. The values of home have followed Fanny to France. While none of these men are English, the same values exist: a woman belongs to a man, no matter what the situation. It does not matter that the Russian officer is not her father; he has taken the place of a father figure in his ownership of Fanny. While the war has provided women with some independence, they are still seen as property. Bagnold does not criticize this patronizing idea outwardly—Fanny does not respond to the French officer or the Russian officer—showing that such ideology was part of the reality for the women abroad, but her reader does see the absurdity in such a comment.

Bagnold depicts several other instances of Fanny enjoying her role as a driver, but always makes clear it is a complicated issue. The main plot of Bagnold's text is Fanny's affair with Julien, a French officer. Through this affair, Bagnold focuses on women's sexual freedom and how this freedom complicates Fanny's life and work, but ultimately focuses on Fanny's love of her general independence. There was a dance to be held and Fanny worked hard on a fancy white dress with the joy of having Julien see her in it. Then, a few days before the dance, she is asked to drive a couple of officers around the countryside to assess the damage. Reluctantly, Fanny shows up to do her duty. While she is upset about the possibility of missing the dance, she later finds that she is enjoying herself. Bagnold writes:

It was not unpleasant sitting there with the three white-chested strangers, watching the sky through the prongs of the bare hedge, spreading *pate* on the fresh bread, and balancing her cup half full of red wine among the fibres and roots of the grass. ‘Now that I have started I am well on my way to getting back,’ she thought, and found that within her breast the black despair of the morning had melted. She watched her companions with amusement. (51)

Bagnold shows us a woman who went from being angry about missing a dance, like a teenager, to one who is able to sit in the countryside with three strangers and enjoy her present reality. It is a complicated situation for a young woman, but Fanny’s ability to enjoy it speaks loudly to women’s pleasure in the independence the war granted them. The French officers, however, are shocked by their driver. It is difficult for them to understand Fanny’s situation. Bagnold writes:

“What is your father?” said the little man suddenly to Fanny.

“He is in the army.”

“You have no brother—no one to take care of you?”

“You mean, because I come out here? But in England they don’t mind; they think it is interesting for us.”

“Tiens!”

They obviously did not believe her, and turned to other subjects. (51)

Fanny’s statement that “in England they don’t mind” is an exaggeration. The French find it hard to believe that a father would allow a daughter to be abroad and driving around strange men, being alone with them for hours and, sometimes, days. But while they are suspicious of Fanny, they still enjoy their time with her as they picnic along the way.

Bagnold repeatedly shows us the dichotomy of being a woman within the French army: men enjoy your company, likely because they haven't been around women for months, but simultaneously distrust your ability as an active actor in the public sphere. However, Fanny takes all this in stride. She is mildly amused by the assumptions the French and Russian men make about her abilities as a driver. Bagnold shows us that there are many complications of being a woman in such a macho environment as the war and the complicated way women can react to it. It is Fanny's newfound sexual freedom and its consequences that Bagnold shows as having more of an emotional impact.

Women leaving their homes to go abroad did not mean they were allowed to abandon the values of femininity they were raised with. Bagnold gives us no information on Fanny before the war, unlike Rathbone and Brittain who show us the pre-war expectations they and their characters were raised with. However, keeping in mind the historical context within which this text is written, it is not a stretch to assume that Fanny comes from a similar background. Through Fanny's choice of dress Bagnold shows us that Fanny is from a certain class (at least middle-class, if not higher), and thus we can make the assumptions that she was brought up by Victorian parents who raised her with the Victorian ideals of femininity that dictated women's behavior towards men and sex. Other authors in this project, namely Vera Brittain and Evadne Price, clearly criticize the British Army and those in charge in the VADs for their rules on women and their femininity. As made clear in the analysis of those texts, women could be dishonorably sent home if they were caught having "inappropriate" relations with men. Bagnold does not make such criticisms and does not give her readers a clear idea of what rules Fanny has to abide by, except a reference to not being out with a man overnight. Bagnold does

not give us much insight into the push for femininity and “proper” female behavior as the other authors do; the post-war world she presents is not as troubled with the rules of femininity as the other texts that are set during the war. Nonetheless, we are shown the complicated ways in which Fanny embraces a new form of femininity: one that simultaneously allows for a woman to be both a capable driver and member of the French Army, and a woman who embraces femininity and her sexuality.

The freedom of being around men and unchaperoned allowed many women to explore their romantic and sexual lives, though not without consequences. In the war literature discussed in this project, we see different ways in which this freedom is tested. We are shown women who lose their fiancés and stay true to their memory throughout the text, women feeling used and abandoned by lovers, and women who can only find a connection with men disabled from the war because they see themselves as broken. We tangentially see the *physical* cost of this freedom in Trix from *Not So Quiet...* who asks her sister for money for an abortion. In this text, Bagnold gives us a whirlwind romance that shows how the world of the war and the post-war world were separate places—there was the here and now, post-war France, and there was back home, where most women went after being demobilized. This alone created some problems for the war romances. There are times in which the reader is frustrated, or at the least puzzled, with Fanny. Early on when the ladies are told they are leaving their current post in the country and moving closer to a city, they are excited at the prospect of civilization. While packing, Fanny and another driver converse and Fanny admits she was “thinking of [her] one pair of silk stockings” because she is “equipped for anything” (12). Fanny imagining that an occasion in which silk stockings are needed speaks to her priorities and her own naïveté

about the war. While there are two dances the ladies will be invited to, one that she's afraid to miss by going on the job of driving three French officers, there is no need for such luxury. Bagnold addresses this by repeatedly describing Fanny as vain. At the first dance where the ladies are invited to, Bagnold writes, "Fanny, turning her *vain* ear to spoken flattery, her *vain* eye to mute, danced like a golden gnat in fine weather" (21, emphasis added). It is easy to see Fanny as a woman who is enjoying herself in this new world. Bagnold shows us that this feeling cannot last, that there is a real world in which Fanny may not be able to feel as free as she does here. She writes, "She [Fanny] was *dazzled*, she did not hurry to understand. One *could not choose*, one *floated free* of preference, all men were *strangers*. 'One day I shall know what they are, how they live, how they think.' But she did not want that day to come" (21, emphasis added). Bagnold's word choices emphasized here portray a young woman who understands the specialness of her circumstances. She does not have to be formally introduced to a man before she dances with him; she is free to dance with whomever she pleases, because she does not need to know them. Fanny is not dancing with the intent of finding a husband, but to have fun and enjoy the moment, an intention that seems contrary to what we understand of Victorian and Edwardian dances and the intentions of women of a marriageable age.

With the new feelings of independence and sexual freedom, women had to navigate the ideals and values they were raised with and expectations they, and men, had about sex and love in a world destroyed by war. Like Rathbone did with Joan, Bagnold shows Fanny initially shunning physical contact with men. This is her natural reaction. However, unlike Joan, Fanny finds someone who she does want to have sex with, without the expectation of marriage. At the underground citadel in Verdun, a soldier walking

Fanny to her room asks for a kiss. Fanny's instinct is to resist, what any other "respectable" woman would do. Yet after her resistance Fanny feels bad for not kissing him. This is a particularly interesting scenario for Bagnold to portray, because it speaks volumes about expectations of men and women and to the new morality in the post-war world. During the war, there was the constant fear of death, which drove many men and women to be more willing to have premarital sex. After the war, there was a push back to pre-war morals, especially in France and England. Fanny's rejection of the soldier's advances can speak both to the lingering pre-war morals and to the cultural attitude now that the war was over. The soldier says:

"One kiss would not hurt you, mademoiselle."

"Let me pass...." she stammered to this member of the great "monastery."

He wavered and stood aside, and she went on up the corridor vaguely ashamed of her refusal. (38)

The soldier's expectation is that a woman who is willing to be in a car alone with strange men for hours must be more than willing to kiss a strange soldier. The "would not hurt you" is in reference to her reputation; merely kissing this young man, who has not seen a woman in months, would be seen as a good deed. Fanny's immediate response is to be free of him. Her discomfort is made evident as Bagnold writes that Fanny "stammered" her response. This was Fanny's natural reaction, which is juxtaposed to her second feeling, that of remorse. Why would she feel remorse for refusing to kiss a stranger? In *Not So Quiet...*, Nell feels silly for refusing to kiss a man because in wartime you did not know who would die the next day. But this is post-war France. Fanny's shame is based on the new implied rules of sexual freedom. She *should* be the type of woman who

wouldn't blink at a soldier asking her to kiss him, but her first instincts, the ones she had honed growing up, still have a hold on her.

With most of the focus of the novel on Fanny's affair with Julien, Bagnold shows the reader how women's newfound sexual freedom can turn young women into young girls. Because their Victorian upbringing kept young women in ignorance about romance and sex, experiencing it for the first time was inevitably confusing and, sometimes, poor decisions were made. In Fanny's case, she is almost driven to jeopardize her job by begging off an assignment. Bagnold shows us a switch between the woman working to prove herself in the army to a vain and petulant girl. Up until this point, the reader enjoys Fanny's perspective, but here, we can compare her to a teenager being told she is grounded before the prom. To be fair, however, Bagnold shows us this side of Fanny because in terms of love and relationships, Fanny *is* young and inexperienced. It does not matter that she is in her 20s. She has not had such a relationship before. When she is told she must drive three French officers and they do not know how long the trip will take Fanny is frustrated that she could miss the dance and the first opportunity for Julien to see her in fancy dress. Bagnold writes:

White frills and yards of bleached calico lying at the dressmaker's cried out to her to stay, to make some protest, to say something, anything—that she was ill—and stay.

She splashed petrol wastefully into the tank, holding the small blue tin with firm hands high in the air above the leather strainer and the funnel.

“And if I said—(it is mad)—if I said, ‘I am in love. *I can't go*. Send some one who is not in love!’” (49)

These women are there to work, but through work they are able to explore parts of their lives otherwise closed off to them. Fanny does not beg off her assignment, but doing so would have likely have cost her job. The fact that she even for a moment considers doing so speaks to how a romance can turn a naïve woman into a juvenile. However, Fanny ends up enjoying herself as she picnics with the three French officers and is able to make it in time for the dance (asking other women to work overnight to finish her dress) and see Julien. Bagnold writes, “But I chose this particular dress because it is so *feminine*, and it will be the first time he has seen me in the clothes of a *woman*” (58, emphasis added). Without being given the details of the female drivers’ uniform, we can assume since they were part of the French army they were seen as “masculine.” Julien has only seen Fanny in her uniform, and the significance of being seen as a “feminine” and a “woman” is that then Fanny can be seen as a lover and not simply a driver. This is made clear when Fanny and Julien have sex soon after the dance.

Bagnold does not criticize women who took advantage of their newfound freedoms; the reader, while sometimes annoyed, does not hate Fanny. She is written as a good woman; however, post-war society imposed the pre-war social mores and expectations, which would sully Fanny’s reputation. Meanwhile, Bagnold creates a world in which sex becomes a temporary departure from reality; there are seemingly no consequences from an affair. Fanny is able to keep up a relationship with Julien; she sees him for dinner and she even drives him to a village on an assignment, thus being able to spend the night with him. Their first time having sex was after the dance, when they slip away. Bagnold merely writes, “He was by her side, the silence broken, the voyage begun” (63). While the love Fanny feels for Julien is real, we soon learn that the

relationship is not. So far, Bagnold has shown post-war France and the villages Fanny is in as a secluded world. When the real world does sneak up on Fanny, she avoids it. She is capable of avoiding reality because of the way the war created a space between home (England) and the Front, and this divide still exists in immediate post-war France. For Fanny, home is where reality and responsibility lie. Perhaps hinting to a larger catastrophe coming, Bagnold shows her reader that there is no such transience, even in the post-war world. Soon after they have sex, Fanny and Julien have a conversation about the past and the present. Bagnold writes:

“Look how detached we are in this town, which is like an island in the middle of the sea. We behave as though we had no past lives, and never expected any future. Especially you.”

“Especially I?”

“You behave as though I was born the day before you met me, and would die the day after you leave me. You never ask anything about me; you tell me nothing about yourself. We might be a couple of stars hanging in mid air shining at each other. And then I have the feeling that one might drop and the other wouldn't know where to look for it.”

But after a little silence the truth burst out, and he said with despair:

“Don't you want to know anything about me?”

(Yes, that was all very well. She did, she did. But not just this that was coming!)

And then he told her....

[...]

After this they pretended she [Violette] did not exist, and the little wraith floated back to Paris from which she had come, suddenly, on days when she had written him certain letters which had brought tears into his eyes. (70)

This should be a blow to Fanny, who just consummated her first relationship with a man and who was unwilling to kiss a strange man. Yet the values of not having a relationship with a married or otherwise taken man do not matter in Fanny's little world. This is particularly interesting, because the threat of death that drove the relationships in the other novels is not present. While Fanny can recognize the detachment of her world from the rest, she still chooses to ignore it once she learns that Julien has a lover back home. The reader is never told if Julien is engaged or married, but that does not matter to Fanny. She embraces living in the present and letting that run her life: "I have learnt again and again—that there is only one joy—the Present; only one Perfection—the Present" (82-83). But this world cannot exist. Bagnold soon shows the reader that while there may be freedoms gained for women it all has to come to an end.

With more and more men returning home from the war, women's place in the public sphere was threatened. With demobilization, women were expected to return to the private sphere and give their work back to the returning soldiers. This meant that women who were also still abroad had to go home. Thus begins Fanny's realization that reality is closing in on her. Bagnold writes:

Among them there ran a rumour of England—of approaching demobilisation, of military driving that must come to an end, to give place to civilian drivers who, in Paris, were thronging the steps of the Ministry of Liberated Regions. [...] And

how the town is filling with men in new black coats, and women in shawls! Every day more and more arrive. And the civilians come first now! (120)

As the civilians come back, the army loses its significance. Bagnold writes that priority for food goes to the civilians instead of the army, a big change from the last four years (121). This becomes a symbol for Fanny that the war has truly ended. On her last meeting with Julien, they speak of the future, of him returning in a week. Fanny does not have the heart to tell him that by then she will be gone. She wants to keep the dream alive, at least for the last night she has with him. Bagnold writes:

Should she tell him, he who sat so close, so unsuspecting? An arrowy temptation shot through her mind.

“Is it possible— Why not write a letter when he is gone!”

She saw its beauty, its advantages, and she played with it like someone who knew where to find strength to withstand it.

“He is so happy, so gay,” urged the voice, “so full of his plans! And you have left it so late. How painful now, just as he is going, to bid him think: “I will never see her face again!” (129)

Through Fanny’s reluctance to tell Julien that they will not see each other again, Bagnold shows that us that Fanny herself has accepted that the dreams she and Julien had are over. The life she was able to live in France is over. Bagnold abruptly ends the novel, with Fanny writing Julien the letter, just as abruptly as she started it. This makes her intentions clear: the focus of her text is on the time between the end of the war and the demobilization of the army. This in-between time when Fanny and her peers can still be a

part of the army is a transient time, but just as reality came to end Fanny's romance, so did the need for women's war work.

Rathbone and Bagnold's texts provide an interesting contrast to Vera Brittain, Mary Borden, and Evadne Price. The two authors examined here do not spend a great deal of time criticizing the war; in fact, Bagnold does not at all. While the other texts can be read as anti-war novels, these cannot, and that is still an important perspective. By not showing the same anger and pain of the other novels, Rathbone and Bagnold convey a more objective look of what the war meant for women. Though they were participants as well, and Rathbone lost her fiancé and brother in the war, their writing provides distance from the trauma of the war to focus instead on women's everyday lives. Both Bagnold and Rathbone provide emotionally distant narratives to highlight the struggles of women working to discover their place in the public sphere. For Bagnold, the war has already caused its damage and that damage is the backdrop of an alternative reality in which Fanny is able to work and love with a sense of freedom she likely would not have been able to feel at home, but that alternative reality cannot last for long. For Rathbone, the war is also in the background. It served its purpose in giving women the opportunity to leave their homes and experience the world first-hand while also showing them the chaos that dominates that world. The female characters of these texts must learn how to live in the new world created by the war and they try to find a balance between enjoying the freedoms of living abroad and away from family, and the freedoms of loving and being loved, yet simultaneously being exposed to the pain and chaos those freedoms bring.

CHAPTER III

Like the soldier poets who sought innovative ways to share their war experiences, some female writers deviated from the conventional novel format to do the same. While Vera Brittain, Irene Rathbone, and Enid Bagnold use traditional forms of narrative (autobiography and romance novel), Mary Borden and Evadne Price use modern narrative techniques, such as stream of consciousness, non-linear narratives, and grotesque imagery, to show the clash between the expectations of femininity for their socioeconomic class and the ways in which they perform and question their femininity at the war front. Using modern narrative techniques presents the war in a more vivid way as the techniques can mimic the chaos, the noises, and the blurred memories in a way that the realist texts cannot. While Borden and Price may not be categorized as Modernist writers, they are still viewed by scholars, such as Hazel Hutchinson, Sharon Ouditt, Angela Smith, and Laurie Kaplan, as writers who incorporate Modernist narrative techniques and motifs. These modern rhetorical choices can speak directly to Borden and Price's examination of the decline of femininity. Sharon Ouditt, in *Fighting Forces*, writes "Exit 'femininity' with its tenderly nurtured 'sensitivity.' But what is its replacement? These texts, having begun with an enthusiastic response to the call of their country, typically become dominated by images of alienation, dislocation, and even madness—motifs of literary modernism" (37). By refusing to write in the realist tradition, Borden and Price can be seen, as Ouditt suggests, rejecting the feminine and replacing it with something else. Ouditt argues that the replacement is alienation and dislocation, while I argue that the alienation is manifested through the imagery of the machine. The authors end their texts with the imagery of a machine or automaton, portraying women

who feel like they become machines, who have to ignore or kill their humanity in order to survive the war.²³ This imagery, along with their choices of narrative technique, speak to Borden and Prices' modernist influences.

The technological innovations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries helped influence such Modernist movements as Futurism and influenced many artists, perhaps most notably Charlie Chaplin in his film *Modern Times* (1936). We can see the influence of the rise of machines in Borden and Price as well, but in a different light. Borden and Price suggest that the only way to survive not just the war, but also the aftermath, is to turn off the feminine characteristics of nurturing and caring, and to instead focus on the basic instinct of survival that dictated the lives of those at the Front. While survival is still a human instinct, the decline of femininity leaves them questioning what is next in terms of gender. Both use the metaphor of a machine at the end of their texts, suggesting the mechanical as the future. Ulrika Maude writes that scholars, such as Sigmund Freud and Jean-Marie Guyau, compared technology to the human body. She writes:

²³ When thinking about machines and femininity, one may think of Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" published in 1984. In the essay, she argues for a future in which the ideal is a cyborg—part machine, part human; this cyborg will not have the biological sex that separated men and women, thus ridding the world of the patriarchy. She imagines a world without the dichotomies that separate humanity; there would be no man versus woman or black versus white. Haraway also discusses how wars are products of patriarchy that ultimately damage humanity. She writes, "The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential" (154). Reading Haraway's text, one can see the similarities between her ideas and what Borden and Price present; however, Borden and Price's imagery of the machine is so entrenched in the experiences of war. It is through the trauma that the machine overcomes the humanity, but only as a means of survival, not as an ideal of humanity that rejects gender binaries. This is an important distinction between the cyborg ideal and the presentation of the machine or automaton that Brittain, Borden, and Price depict.

Technological innovations, as Sigmund Freud argued, are modeled on the human body and its functions. Early telephone technology, for instance, used the “vibrations of a tympanum to induce a variable current which [was] then converted back to sound,” while sound-recording devices were compared by the French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau to memory traces in “brain cells” and “nerve streams.” Such technologies operate as extensions of the central nervous system, and they both mimic and extend its abilities. They enhance the sensory and muscular powers of the human body, or alternatively, supplement its deficiencies [...]. (34)

If, as Freud and Guyau argue, technology mimics the human body, then we can see why the idea of a machine replacing the feminine can be so appealing to Borden and Price. Their characters can keep working at the Front, but only if they turn off some aspects of their humanity. These writers suggest that it is better to stop processing the carnage they are witnessing and focus only on working. With survival and work as their main focus, the women stop caring about their gender and the expectations of femininity that is placed on them.

Some scholarship has been done on the writings of these two women, but there is room to elaborate on how Borden and Price address and explore the implications of the decline of femininity. Angela Smith in *The Second Battlefield* (2000) discusses what she has termed women’s “accidental modernism” (6). The authors she examines, including Borden and Price, wrote in “new literary techniques in order to articulate their experience and equality” (18). Smith focuses on “women who push the boundaries of convention a little further, creating a different kind of female language for the literary representation of

war,” because, she argues, the study of Modernism and war literature has largely focused on men and the canon needs to be reexamined in order to create room for female writers. Sharon Ouditt examines femininity as it is presented both in literature and public discourse (magazines, journals, and pamphlets). In doing so, she briefly discusses Price’s depictions of budding sexuality, but does not further discuss the decline of femininity Price shows. Other scholars, such as Hazel Hutchinson, Ariela Freedman, Laurie Kaplan, and Jennifer Shaddock, have published on Borden and/or Price, covering such topics as the anti-war messages, feminism, and form. In this chapter, I build on this scholarship to more deeply examine the ties between the forms in which Borden and Price wrote and how those forms work to highlight the challenges of femininity faced by women at the Front. Ouditt, Kaplan, and Freedman, who do discuss gender and/or femininity, show that Borden and Price work through the problems of maintaining one’s gender performance while at war, but do not discuss the implications of what those challenges can lead to. Here, I trace Borden and Price’s depictions of the decline of femininity and the rejection of the Victorian feminine ideal, which, according to them, leads women to ultimately become machines in order to survive the war.

Mary Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone*

The year 1929 was an important one for war literature: Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero*, Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, and Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* were published. Among the fanfare and popularity of soldier memoirs and novels, Mary Borden published her memoirs, *The Forbidden Zone*. Unlike the soldiers’ writing, Borden’s text is not a novel—it is a collection of memories, or, to use Borden’s word, impressions. According to Borden’s introduction, these short

stories were the only way to accurately depict her experiences, in the same vein Tim O'Brien uses 60 years later in his collection of memories, *The Things They Carried* (1990). Like O'Brien's text, this is a piece of creative non-fiction, a blending of the real with the imagined or exaggerated. Also like *The Things They Carried*, this text presents fragments of memories to represent the chaos of the war. Borden writes in her preface, "To those who find these impressions confused, I would say that they are fragments of great confusion. Any attempt to reduce them to order would require artifice on my part and falsify them" (Borden n.p.). The war was chaotic, and Borden argues that to place that chaos in an orderly narrative would "falsify" the experiences of many. Hazel Hutchinson in "The Theater of Pain: Observing Mary Borden in *The Forbidden Zone*" has perhaps the best description of Borden's text. She writes:

Ironic in its intensity, immediate in its detachment, and apocalyptic in its absurdity, the narrative voice of this text both relates and embodies the confusion of war. Disconnected impressions of sight, sound, and touch all evoked and then swiftly abandoned—splinters of perception that litter the text without context or coherence, like the wreckage of the battlefield. (139)

The writers who did add order to the chaos by writing more traditional novels, such as Aldington, Remarque, and Sassoon, gained more fame from their novels than Borden did for her work. Yet, to scholars today, it is Borden's format that makes her stand out from the male writers, not just her gender. As Ariela Freedman writes, "her [Borden's] method is more imagistic than documentary. Indeed, she wrote a surreal memoir about the war during a period when most war memoirs were written as conventional autobiographies" (110). Angela Smith argues that these fragments and impressions were the new way of

recording what Borden witnessed. She writes, “The fragments and impressions that make up these hospital stories represent an intensive search for a way in which to convey experiences which appears to be unspeakable. [...] When conventional means of expression are no longer adequate, alternatives must be found” (96-97). While Borden’s narrative form stands out from the conventional autobiographies written by the soldiers, the myth of the soldier’s experience as the only true one persisted, leaving Borden’s text to be largely ignored in literary scholarship up until about twenty to thirty years ago when feminist scholars worked on recovering women’s war writing. What Borden’s work adds to the discipline is not only a narrative form to present the war, but also a glimpse into women’s *particular* experiences in the liminal space they occupied as nurses—neither soldier nor civilian. Her readers see: how women were simultaneously valued yet disregarded at the Front; how they were expected to maintain the standards of femininity in a world in which it was almost impossible to maintain those ideals and standards; and, how many nurses reacted to the horrors of war as they dealt with the carnage of battle. Through the use of her short stories, Borden traces the trajectory of a nurse fresh from England to the battle of the Somme (1916) and the nurse’s understanding of her femininity as it deteriorates, to ultimately suggest a futuristic look at gender.

Through her language and emphasis on the male gaze, Borden establishes that soldiers and civilians view the nurses the same way as society sees girls on the marriage hunt—meat to be claimed. This sets the reader up to understand the nurse’s position at the war and how, in one crucial respect, it is the same at the Front as it is back in England. The omniscient narrator in “The Regiment” exposes the thoughts of the soldiers and civilians, as well as the nurse, presumably Borden herself. Soldiers are lined up and

the townspeople are gathered to wait for the arrival of the general. A bugle sounds to let the people know the general is on his way; however, instead of the general, a nurse steps out of the car. Borden describes the arrival of the nurse through the male gaze as the narration focuses on the body. She writes, “She opened the door of the motor and put out her white foot and stepped down, and her *delicate body* dressed in the white uniform of a hospital was *exposed* to the view of the officers and the regiment. Her head was bound close with a white kerchief. A red cross *burned* on her forehead” (Borden 28, emphasis added). Borden’s word choices—“delicate body,” “exposed,” and “burned”—highlight the way the soldiers see the nurse. This description is reminiscent of how we imagine debutantes were viewed at a ball. The focus is on her body, and “exposed” implies that she is on display, as if naked, for the soldiers to see. The “red cross burned” on her head brings up the image of a branded animal, indicating that she is owned by someone. Yet Smith sees this dehumanization/animalization as reminiscent of the soldiers becoming non-entities in the war. She writes, “The woman in wartime is non-human, an animal, removed from traditional stereotypes in a similar way to the anonymous ‘no-men,’ created by the arbitrary nature of war” (92). One cannot ignore, however, the gendered language Borden uses to describe the nurse. She is animalized, yes, but the narrator describes the nurse’s “delicate body,” which rings more closely to a sexualized body than an animal. The image of the sexualized female body is further explored when Borden writes what the townspeople think of the nurse. She writes, “To the town, she was a *strange fantastic thing*, like a *white peacock*” (29, emphasis added). Once again, Borden shows the objectification of a nurse through her language. The phrase “strange fantastic” implies the exotic, and “thing” is used specifically to disassociate the nurse from

humanity—she is not a person, but an object, or an animal, like the white peacock. But this “thing” is not in the wild; someone must *own* it. Borden writes, “The town said to itself: ‘This curious creature has gone astray. It has the appearance of being expensive. It must have escaped from its owner, who, no doubt, prizes it highly’” (29). Borden’s language in describing the nurse presents her as an object that must be owned. This brings about similarities with what was expected of young upper- and upper-middle-class women of the late 19th century; women belonged to the men—either their fathers, husbands, or male guardians. Borden creates the connection then, to this nurse and the women at home, showing that the perceptions of women and their place, follows them to the Front.

Borden chooses to only give two lines to the nurse, showing that how the nurse views herself is lost within the larger context of how others see her, further highlighting the argument that the nurses are viewed not as professionals, but as women who are meant to be observed just as they would be in the private sphere. While the soldiers, officers, and townspeople view the nurse as an animal, the nurse sees herself as a person there to help the soldiers, no longer confined to the home, but out in public doing her bit. Between the soldiers seeing her “delicate body” and the townspeople seeing an exotic, white peacock, the nurse speaks through her “shadowy eyes:” “‘I came to the war to nurse and comfort you’” (28). The regiment does not respond to this, so the nurse speaks aloud, saying, “I am here for you” (28). The officers respond with “We know why you are here” (28), but still seem stunned by her presence. Borden writes, “The presence of the woman was a teasing current of delight touching the officers” (28). While the nurse has risked her personal safety to look after the soldiers risking their lives, the soldiers see

her as an object there for their pleasure. The nurse is there for a purpose, and while others may view her in such demeaning ways, her only goal is to help. Borden writes about her experience in third-person narration, because who that woman was then, likely at the beginning of the war, is not who, or what, she becomes at the end. The way the soldiers and townspeople view the nurse in “The Regiment” is likely how Borden herself was viewed for breaking away from her prescribed gender role, for leaving her family behind, and therefore breaking the rules of proper society. Freedman agrees when she writes that this “early portrait” of Borden is a “confusing and libidinal mix of purity and animality, haunted by her own demons but secure in her mission to help the soldiers. Yet this nurse, described in third person, does not resemble the nurse who narrates the events in the book’s later sections. [...] Yet the nurse whose voice Borden later narrates is too tired for sex and almost without gender” (119). The nurse in this story is the object of desire, a feminine being there for the men. But this is the first story that deals with a nurse’s femininity and from here Borden sets to deconstruct the image of this nurse.

To be able to do her job, which includes seeing men broken into pieces, mending them, and sending them out again to a certain death, a nurse, Borden argues, must detach herself from the motherly and nurturing role she has been assigned. A nurse cannot be the ministering angel; in fact, she may not even be able to sustain being human after seeing the damages of war. In “Moonlight,” Borden contemplates her life at the Front and the nurse’s position within the chaos. This contemplation in particular focuses on bodies and sexual identity, suggesting that male or female cannot exist when there are only mangled bodies, foreshadowing Borden’s later argument that with the end of femininity comes the machine or automaton. In this story, Borden suggests that there are no men and no

women, just bodies, either dying or trying to stop the death. Borden writes, “There are no men here, so why should I be a woman? There are heads and knees and mangled testicles. There are chests with holes as big as your fist, and pulpy thighs, shapeless; and stumps where legs once fastened. [...] There are these things, but no men; so how could I be a woman here and not die of it? [...] It is impossible to be a woman here. One must be dead” (44). What it means to be a woman is not made clear, but by comparing the lack of women to the lack of men by using the images of mangled body parts, Borden suggests that only a whole person can be identified as a man or woman. The men are physically damaged and torn apart, whereas the women, Borden implies, are emotionally damaged from what they see. The divide between men and women of the upper-classes placed women in the private sphere so that they would not see the ugliness of the world, but now that women are in the public sphere and participating in the war, they are on more equal ground. But that equality comes in the form of not existing in the ways that society has prescribed, showing the readers that the idea of gender as a social construct was becoming clear to women like Borden. Borden’s vivid descriptions about the men with their “mangled testicles,” “pulpy thighs,” and “stumps” for legs ensures that the reader understands what the nurses see daily. Borden uses these descriptions to explain to the reader why there is no sex in the warzone, only pieces of bodies. Speaking about another nurse, she writes:

She is no longer a woman. She is dead already, just as I am—really dead, past resurrection. Her heart is dead. She killed it. She couldn’t bear to feel it jumping in her side when Life, the sick animal, choked and rattled in her arms. Her ears are deaf; she deafened them. She could not bear to hear life crying and mewing.

She is blind so that she cannot see the torn body parts of men she must handle.

Blind, deaf, dead—she is strong, efficient, fit to consort with gods and demons—a machine inhabited by the ghost of a woman—soulless, past redeeming, just as I am—just as I will be. (43)

In this passage, Borden highlights the active rejection of femininity a nurse participates in and foreshadows the machine metaphor as the end of the femininity. A nurse, Borden argues in this passage, must reject her feminine empathy for the suffering of the men she is helping. She must be blind and death to her surroundings, not because she should not see what is happening, but because the realities of war are too horrible for anyone to see. For nurses, being deaf or blind, or both, is not a disability; instead, it is a way to reject the softness associated with femininity in order for the nurse to be strong and efficient, like a machine.

Borden further shows the rejection of traditional femininity in two different ways in “*Enfant de Malheur*” (“Child of Woe”): first, by sexualizing the male soldier—an act that goes against the proper actions of a feminine woman—and second, by highlighting the effects the war has on a woman who is the paragon of traditional femininity. Told through Borden’s perspective, this short story focuses on the nurse Pim and her interactions with a North African soldier fighting for France. The story begins with a description of this soldier and Borden’s language emphasizes the female gaze looking upon the naked body of the man. This is a bold choice by Borden, because the descriptions of the *Enfant* imply that a woman can enjoy and sexualize the body of a man she does not know. Borden writes:

He himself might have been fashioned by the Praxiteles, [...] blue ink into the marble flesh of his arm, and written there the incredible words—*Enfant de Malheur*. He waved that slender member of his incredibly perfect Greek body in the nurse's face. [...] He had race, distinction, an exquisite elegance, and even in his battered state, the savage grace of a panther. Not even his wounds could disfigure him. The long deep gash in his side made his smooth torso seem the more incredibly fair and frail. The loss of one leg rendered the other more exquisite with its round polished knee and skim ankle. (47)

The *Enfant's* wounded body is sexualized as Borden describes his body from his torso to his legs. The words she uses—"savage grace," "smooth torso," "exquisite"—have erotic undertones. This language is a major shift from her earlier descriptions of men's bodies ("stumps," "lumpy thighs," "mangled testicles"). This change of language and gaze tells the reader that while the reality of the nurses' life was seeing these mangled bodies, it was still a new experience for many young women to see a naked man, especially one not related to them. The Victorian era was known for its prudish mentality on sex and the repression of female sexual desires, but of course one cannot eliminate desire. The appreciation of the male form was not going to be lost on all women. While Borden, someone who rejects the ideals of Victorian femininity, can sexualize and appreciate the male form, Pim, a paragon of femininity and the volunteer nurse, succumbs to the *Enfant* not because of his looks, but because of his pain. By juxtaposing the narrator's appreciation of the male body to Pim's pity for the *Enfant's* pain, Borden foreshadows Pim's eventual rejection of the ideals she clings to.

Borden uses Pim's attitude changes to break down the myth of the angelic nurse, showing that the expectations held of nurses—submissive and obedient to authority figures—can and will break down at the Front. Borden sets the reader up by showing what the “proper” feminine nurse looks like and how she acts, then breaks down the myth throughout the story. She writes, “She [Pim] was the daughter of an Archdeacon [...]. She was an excellent nurse, very fastidious about the care of the patients. Her blue uniform was always stiffly starched, her cap and apron were immaculate; so was her smooth severe Madonna face, with its childlike candid eyes and thin quiet mouth” (49). In this description, Borden uses key words to paint the image of Pim—an image that can be substituted on the recruitment advertisements. Pim's uniform is clean and stiffly starched, implying that she does not look disheveled from her work. There is no mention of dirt or blood on her uniform, giving the reader an image of a pristine nurse. Borden describes Pim's face as a “Madonna face.” The reference to Madonna is especially important, because nurses were expected to be Madonnas: clean and pure of heart.²⁴ Pim is not affected by the *Enfant's* good looks and pays no notice to his sexuality. Borden writes, “She didn't, I believe, notice that he was beautiful. She was interested in his wounds and in saving his life. [...] She was not interested in Frenchmen, not in any man. She knew no men. She knew only her patients. [...] She simply went on handling his dangerous body with the perfectly assured impersonal gentleness of an excellent surgical nurse” (49). But Pim cannot stay detached and impersonal forever. Despite the *Enfant's* crude and insulting remarks to her, Pim pities him and worries about the amount of pain

²⁴ See Alonzo Ear Foringer's “The Greatest Mother in the World” (circa 1918) of a nurse depicted as St. Mary holding a wounded soldier in her arms, similar to the ways St. Mary has been painted holding the wounded Jesus. This image was used to recruit upper- and middle-class women by appealing to their maternal instincts.

he is in. Pim says to the narrator, “We must do something. Can’t we do something? [...] I tell you I am ready to give him any amount of stuff. I’ll do anything to put an end to it” (54). The Archdeacon’s daughter is ready to kill a dying man, a twist the reader would not expect after reading Borden’s descriptions of Pim. She is willing to disregard authority, blatantly disobey her superiors, and go against her religious upbringing, so she can stop the *Enfant*’s suffering. While she does not follow through, Pim’s willingness to kill the *Enfant* shows that the war challenges and breaks down the demure and obedient feminine.

Borden, like Price, shows the deconstruction of upper- and middle-class femininity through the metaphor of the machine, highlighting the Modernist idea that machines play an important role in the post-war world. To survive the war, Borden argues that a nurse must relinquish the traits associated with her femininity, perhaps even her humanity. Trying to live up to the ideal of the ministering angel can be exhausting and not always possible when the wounded men come in by the hundreds. While Evadne Price writes about Helen Smith’s lack of emotional response to anything, or the death of Smith’s emotional capabilities, Borden focuses on the physical. Price’s machine is literal as Smith refers to herself as a slot machine (Price 215); Borden addresses the shift into a machine by disassociating her tired body from her work, her body working autonomously from her mind. In “Blind,” Borden’s narrative shifts back and forth from first-person to third-person, as Borden begins to see herself from the outside and talks about her physical exhaustion, brought on not just by the physical strain of the work, but also by the emotional strain of having the power to decide who lives and dies. “Blind” is in part two of *The Forbidden Zone*, which is entitled “The Somme.” The Somme offensive took

place between July and November 1916 and is one of the bloodiest battles in history (Hallett 163). Because of a lack of space, nurses, and doctors, nurses had to perform triage, giving them more power than they had been entrusted with before.²⁵ Borden explains this when she writes:

It was my business to sort out the wounded as they were brought in from the ambulances and to keep them from dying before they got to the operating rooms: it was my business to sort out the nearly dying from the dying. [...] It was my business to know which of the wounded could wait and which could not. I had to decide for myself. There was no one to tell me. If I made any mistakes, some would die on their stretchers on the floor under my eyes who need not have died.

(95)

The lives of the soldiers are always in the nurses' hands, but not to the extent as triaging. Borden expresses the weight of this responsibility, and yet by calling it her "business," she manages to disassociate herself from the emotional turmoil that can result from her work. Borden writes, "I didn't worry. I didn't think. I was too busy, too absorbed in what I was doing. [...] My hands could instantly tell the difference between the cold of the harsh bitter night and the stealthy cold of death. [...] I was in a dream, led this way and that by my cute eyes and hands that did many things, and seemed to know what to do" (95-96). Borden's descriptions of her actions suggest a separation between her actions and emotions. Her hands and eyes know what to do without thinking about it. By

²⁵ Margaret Higonnet writes, "Triage imposed upon doctors and nurses the sacrilegious responsibility of determining who should live and who should be allowed to die. While it in fact raised survival rates, triage came at a cost to those who performed it" ("Authenticity and Art" 98). The work of deciding who was worth saving and who was bound to die fell on many nurses and, as Borden shows, the work could be traumatizing.

detaching her emotions and working without thought, Borden does not need to think about the soldiers as people who are dying; they are sacks of bodies that either have beating pulses or none at all. She does not have to think about how many men are dying as she feels their cold, clammy skin. By not worrying and not thinking, the nurse then becomes less of the ministering angel, the beautiful and caring Madonna, and closer to a machine. On the one hand, this allows the nurse to perform her work without being conscious of damages of the human body, but on the other hand, she loses her ability to provide sympathy and warmth to dying men. This creates the machine, which can keep working despite the exhaustion and trauma. This imagery becomes more prominent as Borden focuses more on her physicality than on her surroundings. Her narrative shifts back and forth between the first and third person narration. Through the use of the third person narrator, Borden steps outside of herself to see what she has become. She writes:

I think that woman, myself, must have been in a trance, or under some horrid spell. Her feet are lumps of fire, her face is clammy, her apron is splashed with blood; but she moves ceaselessly about with bright burning eyes and handles the dreadful wreckage of men as if in a dream. She does not seem to notice the wounds or the blood. Her eyes seem to be watching something that comes and goes and darts in and out among the prone bodies. (99)

When shifting to the third person narrator, Borden presents a very different image from the description of Pim in "*Enfant de Malheur*." Borden's apron is bloody, her face is sweaty, and her feet are swollen. This is what a nurse looks like at the Front, not the pristine, perfectly starched Pim. While Borden does not directly mention a machine, her language implies the idea of a machine, the entity that can continue to function beyond

the capabilities of people. Borden works “ceaselessly” and “handles” the situation, but does not actually process what she is seeing and dealing with. As she writes in “Moonlight,” the only way for a nurse to be able to do her job is to let go of the burden of her femininity—the need to be nurturing, to be looking a certain way, and to care how you look. When those aspects of femininity are abandoned, the pain and exhaustion can be dismissed. Like a machine, the nurse works with no interruption. Borden writes, “I do not want any supper. I am not hungry. I am not tired. I am busy. My eyes are busy and my fingers. I am conscious of nothing about myself but my eyes, hands and feet. My feet are a nuisance, they are swollen, hurting lumps, but my fingers perfectly satisfactory. They are expert in the handling of frail glass ampoules and syringes and needles” (101). Borden is aware of the “nuisance” of her body, but that does not stop her from doing her work. She does not need food or rest—like a machine, she continues on. The nurse, then, becomes part machine with her ability to continue working and is part human only because of her body. Her gender or sex do not matter, neither does the sex or gender of those she is trying to save. War essentially killed the Victorian female and created a machine to replace it.

Because Borden’s text ends before the end of the war and one of the last images she presents is that of the machine, she implies that the machine is the future of gender, perhaps its replacement. Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone* traces the decline of the feminine, particularly the Victorian feminine ideal—from the beautiful, sexualized animal in “The Regiment” to the machine figure in “Blind.” She goes beyond the simple truism that “war changes you” to look deeper into how it changed her and many other women, and their understanding of and relationship to their femininity. Through her use of first- and third-

person narrations and interior monologues, Borden argues that femininity cannot survive the war and suggests that a machine is what will replace the traditional feminine. By morphing into a machine, the women are able to give up working on being the ideal Victorian women while living in a war zone. The expectations of femininity that followed them from England cannot survive, so it is the machine that replaces them, allowing the women to work as hard as they need to and, possibly, survive the war. Borden shows the toll the war took on a woman's body and psyche, forcing women to change not just their behaviors but also their understanding of the world around them. Evadne Price in *Not So Quiet...* also shows the decline of femininity at the Front and uses the machine metaphor at the end, implying the same suggestion as Borden: femininity will be replaced by machine.

Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...*

Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...* goes further in exploring the ties between war, femininity, and modern narrative techniques. While fragments of memories were the only way Borden could imitate her war experience, the novel was Price's way of representing a young woman's story. The novel reflects the chaos of war and the mental breakdown of a young woman trying to live through the chaos. Writing a women's version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) allows Price to insert women into history and popular literature. Albert E. Marriot, a "publisher," approached Price and asked her to write a satirical skit of *All Quiet*, but Price found that distasteful and decided, instead, to write a woman's version of the text.²⁶ Using the now lost diaries of Winifred Constance Young,

²⁶ The story behind the publishing of *Not So Quiet* is very interesting. A man named Albert E. Marriot who claimed to be a publisher approached Evadne Price and asked her

Price recreates Young's experiences in France. Like Remarque's text, which focuses on young men, this novel focuses on women whose ideals of the war are very quickly shattered by the reality. Unlike Remarque, Price writes the story in the first-person through the "writer," Helen Zenna Smith. Remarque's *All Quiet* became an instant bestseller very quickly after its publication in 1929, and Price, by rewriting it and alluding to the famous text in her title, uses *All Quiet*'s fame to bring attention to the woman's perspective. Angela Smith argues that by taking on a rewrite of Remarque's text, Price shows that women's service is as "unheroic" as men's: "Her [Price's] women are no more heroic than Remarque's schoolboy soldiers, nor do they comply with the feminine codes which disguise First World War nurses as nuns and angels" (109). According to Smith, Price does this successfully by adapting Remarque's "illusory dispassionate language" to present a woman's perspective in the "male world" (118) and by combining Modernism with war fiction by focusing on the individual's reality as opposed to the collective (119).

Price's text, like Borden's, stands out from the other writers discussed in this project, because of her incorporation of Modernist techniques. Vera Brittain, Irene Rathbone, and Enid Bagnold published autobiographies or novels using the traditional

to write a skit of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. According to Price, he showed her a book jacket of the book he wanted her to write, entitled *All Quaint on the Western Front* by Erica Remark. Having never read *All Quiet* before, Price read it that night and decided that anyone who wanted a skit of that book "wants their brains busted" (George Simmers). Instead, she suggested a book written from a woman's point of view. Having not served in France herself, Price met Winifred Constance Young through an acquaintance and received Young's permission to use her diaries for Price's book. After the book was published, Marriot was arrested. He was a con man whose real name was Nelley Lucas. He had failed to pay Price for her writing, which was lucky for Price. The copyright of her book was left to her instead of Lucas' creditors. The novel was republished under the genre of fiction instead of a memoir and Price went on to write four more novels as "Helen Zenna Smith" (Simmers).

first-person and third-person, omniscient narrator, respectively. Price writes the novel with the Modernist technique of stream-of-consciousness narration, made most famous by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Just as those authors show us the interiority of Leopold Bloom and Mrs. Dalloway, Price uses stream-of-consciousness narration to give the reader insight into Helen Smith's thoughts. Other Modernist narrative techniques Price uses include fragmented narration, grotesque imagery, juxtaposition, and broken sentence structures. These techniques combined offer the reader not just the interior thoughts of Smith, but also highlight the effects of war on a person's mind. In the analysis below, I examine how Price uses the combination of these narrative techniques to show the deterioration of Smith's femininity as it is tied to her understanding of the world created by war.

Price specifically focuses her narrative technique of the interiority of Smith's thoughts to show how, as the war progresses, Smith's doubts about the established ideals of Victorian femininity, particularly as those ideals are tied to patriotism, grow. Shaddock writes, "their [volunteers'] sacrifices of time and energy for their country (a womanly gesture defined by Victorian gender codes) represented their families' commitment to England and the war effort—hence the wartime accolade 'England's Splendid Women'" (166). Women were praised for volunteering for the war effort, for answering the call of their country. As Shaddock argues, patriotism was tied closely to the ideals of Victorian femininity. While middle- and upper-class women were not given the lectures on "King and Country" that their male counterparts were hearing at their schools, the young women were nonetheless expected to have the same unquestioning patriotism as their brothers. With the connection between the late-Victorian gender codes and patriotism,

Price is able to criticize old-world femininity and the war simultaneously. Price uses Smith's mother in England and The B.F. in the ambulance corps to represent traditional upper-middle class femininity. It is no coincidence that both these women are depicted as silly, one-dimensional, and shallow. The reader's introduction to The B.F. is as the voice of society's expectations on the ways in which the ambulance drivers in France must act, making sure that, above all, their femininity is maintained. Tosh, an earl's niece, prepares to cut her hair off as a way to save herself from the continual onslaught of lice. The B.F. is horrified that a lady, especially an earl's niece, could do such a thing, as long hair is an important factor to looking feminine. Price writes, "The B.F. cries out in alarm. 'You're not going to cut off your hair, Tosh? Your *lovely* hair.' [...] 'Oh, Tosh, how *can* you? Short hair's terribly unfeminine. I wouldn't cut off my hair for anything'" (13-14). While Smith looks enviously at Tosh, she admits she does not have the courage to cut her own hair. Price here ties The B.F. to Smith's mother as Smith thinks, "Poor Mother, she would die of horror if I came home on leave with my hair cut short like a man's. [...] Only dreadful blue-stockings cut their hair" (15). Price establishes what she sees as the traditional feminine norms—including having long hair—within the first few pages as she prepares to challenge these norms. She also shows how these young women held on to their ideas of femininity as taught to them by their mothers. As Ouditt argues, "[Smith] observes the scenario envious of Tosh's emancipatory gesture, but oscillating between admiration for this image of 'masculine' freedom and the shelter of feminine conservatism policed by her fear of her mother's disapproval" (37). This back and forth between admiration and fear follows Smith throughout most of the text, showing how the

attempt to maintain their femininity affected the actions of many of the young female volunteers at the Front.

By showing how the expectations of femininity follow the women from England to France, Price is able to highlight the absurdity of these expectations in the new, war-ridden world. The uniforms of nurses and ambulance drivers reflect the expectations held of women on their behavior. Collars are expected to be stiff, cuffs are expected to be starched, and hats and women's hair need to be in perfect order—much like the way Pim is described by Borden in "*Enfant de Malheur*." Laurie Kaplan writes, "the quasi-Medieval veils and tippets, the little capes, the starched cuffs, and white aprons—seem[ed] an absurd costume in which to begin a modern enterprise, especially when the landscape is muddy, the weather abysmal, the laundry (and bathing) facilities often non-existent" (6). While Kaplan describes the nurse's uniform in particular, ambulance drivers were also expected to dress neatly and be clean when the reality ensured that cleanliness was not a viable option. The uniform, like a military uniform, symbolized order and decorum, and was a representation of the woman's country. And yet, it is ironic that donning the "quasi-Medieval" uniform simultaneously gave many of these young women the freedom to reject the old world rules. As Kaplan continues to argue, "the new clothes liberated the young women to assert their right to cross lines—to cross the Channel, in fact, to cut off their hair, and to wear trousers, boots and breeches" (6). Tosh cutting her hair off symbolizes a rejection of that order, because she understands that order cannot exist in war. While Tosh cuts her hair, Smith contemplates her mother's reaction if she did the same and how her mother expects Smith to act, which all ties to Smith's name. She writes:

Helen Z. Smith. How jealously I preserve the secret of that Z., the ludicrous Z. bestowed on me by my mother. Z. was the heroine of a book mother read the month before I arrived on earth. She wanted me to grow up like Z. Z. was the paragon of beauty, virtue, and womanliness. Mother has been sadly disappointed over the first; I am still the second, but the third—well, Z. was never an ambulance driver somewhere in France. I am very dubious about the third. Snip, snip, snip. ... No, I had better not emulate Tosh. It would definitely put the tin helmet on the womanliness.

(15-16)

Smith's womanliness, her femininity, is already in question because of her participation in the ambulance corps in France. But despite the abundance of filth that surrounds her, Smith cannot let go of the aspect of "womanliness" she has, her long hair. While Mrs. Smith's wish for her daughter to be a paragon of womanliness may have been somewhat plausible in England, the war has made that wish absurd. By using stream-of-consciousness narrative, Price highlights how significant femininity is to the young women. Smith is very conscious of how she does not meet the expectations her mother had of her and, for now, clings to the one aspect of femininity she has—her long hair.

Price shows how the policing of upkeeping femininity is present on Smith's mind not only through the use of stream-of-consciousness, but also through the presence of a few women who cling to their home front feminine expectations. Besides the expectations carried by the "Z.," The B.F. is in the room to remind other women what they should and should not do. As mentioned before, she is the voice of home, bringing

along with her the expectations of femininity, particularly as it is tied to patriotism, and what Price criticizes throughout the text. Price describes The B.F.:

[S]he is a harmless ass. Her definition of a true lady is one who is ignorant of the simplest domestic details to the point of imbecility. [...] The B.F. is like a Harrison Fisher girl on a magazine cover, and is frankly disappointed with the War. The War office has not quite played the game sending her here. She had an idea being put out in France was a kind of perpetual picnic minus the restrictions of home life. [...] (The B.F. is very fond of talking about ‘doing her bit.’ She would go down terribly well with my parents.) (24-25)

The B.F.’s image of her role in the war included being able to flirt with the soldiers and, hopefully, to marry one. In order to do so, she must still look good in her uniform, still look feminine, and still act the part of a lady whom an officer would marry. Price writes, “she [The B.F.] saw herself in a depot, the cynosure of innumerable admiring male eyes. It seems such a waste of a well-cut uniform to be in a place where the men are too wounded or too harassed to regard women other than cogs in the great machinery, and the women too worn out to care” (25). For The B.F., and women like her, “doing her bit” means going to France for a little while, marrying an officer (hopefully a wounded one), and returning home while being praised for having gone to France. But even The B.F. cannot escape from the realities of war.

Throughout the novel, Price uses juxtaposition between the thoughts or images of home with the harsh realities of war to show the severe disconnect between the two and to highlight the unrealistic expectations held of the volunteers. Smith’s musings on home are interrupted by the sounds of war. Using onomatopoeic war sounds like “Bomma-

boom-booma-boom-boommm” (28), Price brings the reader out of Smith’s internal thoughts and back to the present. As Tosh throws the ashes of the newspaper and lice out the window, the sounds of bombing come through and stop the joking and revelry. Price informs her reader what those sounds mean. She writes:

We hate and dread the days following on the guns when they boom without interval. Trainloads of broken human beings: half-mad men pleading to be put out of their misery; torn and bleeding and crazed men pitifully obeying orders like a herd of senseless cattle, dumbly, pitifully straggling in the wrong direction, as senseless as a flock of senseless sheep obeying a senseless leader, herded back into line by the orderly [...] men with faces bleeding through their hasty bandages; men with vacant eyes and mouths hanging foolishly apart dropping saliva and slime; men with minds mercifully gone; men only too sane, eyes horror-filled with blood and pain. ... (29)

Talking and joking about hair lengths can no longer continue. Being brought back to reality by the sounds of the bombs, the girls fall silent. Smith can think only about what the bombs mean for their immediate future, as she and the other women will be the ones driving the wounded soldiers to the hospitals. Worrying about the terribly unfeminine short hair becomes a frivolous issue as Smith thinks about what the effects of the bombing are, showing us just how absurd the expectations of maintaining the ideals of Victorian femininity are when at war.

Following through with juxtaposition, Price sets Smith’s thoughts back to England to show how different the expectations of those at home were from the reality of

those living at the Front. Reminding the readers of the divide between France and home, Price writes:

Tell them that you hate it, tell them that you fear it, that you are as terror-stricken as you were when they left you alone in the dark [...] tell them that all the ideals and beliefs you ever had have crashed about your gun-deafened ear—that you don't believe in God or them or the infallibility of England or anything but bloody war and wounds and foul smells and smutty stories and smoke and bombs and lice and filth and noise, noise, noise—that you live in a world of cold sick fear, a dirty world of darkness and despair—that you want to crawl ignominiously home away from these painful writhing things that once were men, these shattered tortured faces that dumbly demand what it's all about in Christ's name—that you want to find somewhere where life is quiet and beautiful and lovely as it was before the world turned khaki and blood coloured—that you want to creep into a refuge where there is love instead of hate. ... (30-31)

With the repetition of some words (“noise”) and the brutal imagery of the war, Price sets a tone of bitterness to Smith's thoughts. It serves to remind the reader of the idea that there are “two distinct Britains,” one at home in England and another abroad at the Front (Graves 4). Smith's parents cannot understand what her life is like and she cannot tell them. The reason Price gives for Smith's self-censorship is that her parents would not believe Smith's reality: “Tell them these things; and they will reply on pale mauve deckle-edged paper calling you a silly hysterical little girl—‘You always were inclined to exaggerate, darling’” (31). Smith can only write a letter about how “splendid” it is to be

“really in it,” because it is also the only kind of letter the parents want so, as Price points out, they can brag. The misunderstandings between those at the Front and those at home is a recurring theme in many works about the war, especially Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Ouditt sees this vital connection between Remarque and Price and argues that the divide between sexes, as dictated by Victorian and Edwardian society, narrows as the divide between generations expands. She writes, “Price emphasized the complete severance of one generation of women from the next. As the novel’s relationship to Remarque’s *All Quiet* suggests, these women felt better to communicate with their male contemporaries [...]. Allegiance shifts from one of gender to one of generation” (41). As Smith begins to question the righteousness of the war and the “infallibility of England,” the divide between her and her parents becomes greater. And as communication fails, losing faith in the ideals they were brought up with becomes easier. Thus, Price shows the breakdown of the feminine ideal of the patriotic volunteer, who carries the expectations and ideals held at home to the war front.

Price tracks the changes of women’s understanding of femininity not only as a conflict in relation to society, but also as a conflict within one’s self. The tone of Smith’s musings becomes more and more bitter, as do her thoughts on the war and her situation. Price shows a shift from a pliant young woman to an angry woman who scoffs at authority, an optimist to a cynic, and, later, a human to a machine. As Deborah Gorman argues, the ideal female must be submissive and be free of “any trace of anger or hostility” (4). But this ideal cannot exist at the Front, where these young women are witnesses to one of the modern era’s deadliest wars. Through her text, Price suggests that having ideals of femininity pushed on these young women as they see the carnage of war

and live in horrifying conditions is bound to cause a great deal of anger *and* hostility. It is the sound of her Commandant's police whistle that sparks the first instance of rage in Smith and the resulting interior monologue gives Price the space to explore the changes in her main character. Price writes:

Commandant's police whistle is ruining my pre-War disposition entirely. It rouses everything vile within me. Not long ago I was a gentle pliable creature of no particular virtues or vices, my tempter was even, my nature amiable, and my emotions practically non-existent. Now I am a sullen, smouldering thing, liable to burst Vesuvius fashion into a flaming fire of rage without the slightest warning.

Commandant's police whistle. ... (47)

This passage highlights the extreme shift in Smith's personality brought on by the sound of a whistle: from not having emotions to the verge of a Vesuvius-sized rage attack. Price suggests here that war has the ability to change even the most amiable people into angry beings. More importantly, Price shows how war simultaneously does not *allow* one to be feminine while showing the contradictions and problems within the ideals of femininity. Price mocks the feminine ideal when writing about Smith's "non-existent" emotions, suggesting that this ideal dehumanizes women while highlighting women's depth of emotion that the war forced onto them. Yet, it is not the horrible sights of the war Smith witnesses that changes her personality so much; it is the strict regimen the Commandant enforces, a regimen that enforces the behavioral norms of femininity despite the chaotic and messy world surrounding the women. Price writes:

If I [Smith] am bathing or attending to my body with carbolic ointment or soothing lotion ... it ordered me to stop. [...] Whatever I am doing it gives me no

peace. But worst of all, whenever I am asleep ... it wakens me, and gloats and glories in the action. [...] Commandant insists that we are carefully and neatly dressed for 7.30 roll-call, ... white shirts, ties, smoothly dressed-hair, brushed uncrumpled uniforms ... even though we may have been driving till 5 a.m. (47-48)

Price shows the absurdity of imposing ideals of femininity during the war through the Commandant's unrealistic expectation of a clean, perfectly dressed driver as the Commandant is the one who also interrupts those few moments of peace that would allow for that perfectly uniformed woman to exist.

The ideal of a perfectly dressed driver comes from the socio-economic class to which most of these women belong. Just like officers, these volunteer ambulance drivers and nurses come from upper- and middle-class families and a certain amount of decorum in dress and behavior is expected. It is this class issue that drives a great deal of the expectations Price criticizes. She writes:

It astounds me why the powers-that-be at the London headquarters stipulate that *refined women of decent education* are essential for this ambulance work. Why should they want this class to do the work of strong navvies on the cars, in addition to the work of scullery-maid under conditions no professional scullery-maid would tolerate for a day? Possibly this is because this is the only class that suffers in silence, that scorns to carry tales. We are such cowards. We dare not face being called "cowards" and "slackers," which we certainly shall be if we complain. [...] Poor fools, we deserve all we get. (50-51, emphasis added)

In this passage, Price shows—again—the disconnect between what is expected of these women by the “powers-that-be” and the Commandant, and the reality of the situation. The expectations of perfection and the Commandant’s regimen ensure the women get barely any sleep, fall ill and are hospitalized regularly, and most—like Smith, Tosh, and Edwards—end up resenting those people in power. This questioning and resenting of those in power is contrary to the ways in which educated women must act and think. Ouditt examines the ways in which class plays a large role in recruiting upper- and middle-class women. The perks, she argues, are what Price shows here. Ouditt writes that these women would not demand their rights or complain, are used to obeying authority figures, and they will do what is needed (22). Shaddock also argues that the education of the upper- and middle-class women “as the angel-woman” made these young women perfect recruits for the military. She writes that these women were taught to be “the angel-women who would graciously make any sacrifice [that] effectively prepares her for the job, and her learned passivity, her inability to assert herself to subvert cultural expectations, keeps her conveniently submissive to the more degrading demands of the military” (171). As Smith says, her class “suffers in silence,” but Price writes several anti-war paragraphs throughout the text to show that the class of silent sufferers is finding their voice. Their behavior is changing as the war goes on.

For many women, the war was simultaneously a path to freedom and a rude awakening about the horrors of the world they finally got the chance to explore. After volunteering to “do one’s bit,” women were forced to live in circumstances they had never experienced. Price begins the novel by exposing the realities of living in France—suffering from lack of sleep, being dirty, and always being hungry. She writes, “We have

just wakened from our first decent sleep for weeks—eight glorious dreamless hours of utter exhaustion. [...] We have not had our garments off for nine days, but there has been an unexpected lull this afternoon; no evacuation, only one funeral, and very few punishments [...] We are hungry, but we are used to hunger. We are always hungry in varying degrees—hungry, starving, or ravenous” (9-10). Patriotism or the need to do one’s bit no longer takes priority for many of the women, except for The B.F. The women Price depicts are angry and tired. As mentioned before, there no longer is the woman who is willing to suffer silently. To emphasize this, Price writes an anti-war rant from a character we only hear from this one time. Edwards, a woman who just got engaged to an injured Australian soldier, exclaims that she would never let any man of hers ever go to war again. She says, “I know too much. Let the people who make the wars fight them. I would rather see a child of mine dead than see him a soldier” (55). The B.F., still the voice of home, calls Edwards’ comment unpatriotic. Edwards, unaffected by the B.F.’s comments, says:

Our enemies aren’t the Germans. Our enemies are the politicians we pay to keep us out of war and who are too damned inefficient to do their jobs properly. After two thousand years of civilization, this folly happens. It is time women took a hand. The men are failures ... this war shows that. Women will be the ones to stop war, you’ll see. If they can’t do anything else, they can refuse to bring children into the world to be maimed and murdered when they grow big enough. Once women buckled on their men’s swords. Once they believed in that ‘death-or-glory-boys’ jingo. But this time they’re in it themselves. They’re seeing for themselves. ... And

the pretty romance has gone. War is dirty. There's no glory in it. Vomit and blood. Look at us. We came out here puffed with patriotism. There isn't one of us who wouldn't go back to-morrow. (55-56)

Finally seeing what war really can be, a bloody and chaotic catastrophe, women can now speak from experience when they speak out against wars. Having seen what she has seen, Edwards is angry and she is speaking up. While she does not quit her position, therefore still being compliant to the war effort, this tirade ends the image of the submissive, calm feminine ideal. Smith's interiority goes through the same process, though Price uses Smith's interior monologue to push further against the problematic ideals of femininity and patriotism.

Through Smith's interior monologue and the imagined conversations with Smith's mother, Price conveys the psychological shift in Smith's personality, particularly as she internally reacts to the pressures of being a proud, patriotic volunteer. As the war continues, Smith becomes more jaded and angry at the women who brag about their children who are abroad, who cling to the ideals of patriotism, and who choose to be ignorant to the realities of war. Like Edwards, Smith blames the politicians as well as the women who are pro-war for their current situation. In fact, Smith spends more time blaming her mother and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington, her mother's committee rival, for the war than the politicians. Price's decision to focus more on the women is an indication that she believes women played an influential role in the war. From passing out white feathers to "cowards" to rallying for the war to serving on recruitment committees, women at home still felt it their duty to "do their bit" for the war. Even though women were not allowed to wear the soldier's uniform or had the political power to ensure Britain joined

the war, Price believes that women were just as responsible for the war as the men. She writes, “A war to end war, my mother writes. Never. In twenty years it will repeat itself. And twenty years after that. Again and again, as long as we breed women like my mother and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington. And we are breeding them. Etta Potato and The B.F.—two out of a roomful of six. Mother and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington all over again” (90).

Twenty-one years after the end of the Great War and nine years after the publication of this text, Hitler invaded Poland and started another world war. Price’s prediction came true. And women were just as ready to send their men and themselves to the battlefield in the Second World War.

If upper- and middle-class femininity is tied to the patriotism, as Price argues through *The B.F.* and *Mrs. Smith*, then *Smith*’s questioning of the war and her anger towards the generation that caused the war is seen as unfeminine. *Smith* is no longer the quiet, unemotional woman that was seen as the ideal Victorian and Edwardian woman; instead, she is livid and questions the patriotism that has been ingrained in her generation, thus breaking away from the femininity she was raised to embody. To show *Smith*’s anger at her mother, Price writes a six-page imagined conversation between *Smith*, her mother, and *Mrs. Evans-Mawnington*. In this section, *Smith* “shows” them what they, the older generation, are supporting by walking around the train station as wounded soldiers come in and what the effects of that “support” do to *Smith*’s generation. Price criticizes how the older generation is so quick to send their children to war without wanting to accept the harsh and horrible reality of the effects of war. Through detailed and gory imagery, Price uses this imagined conversation *Smith* has with her mother and *Mrs. Evans-Mawnington* to give the reader an understanding of the war. She writes:

Look closely, Mother and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington, and you shall see what you shall see. Those trays each contain something that was once a whole man ... the heroes who have done their bit for King and country ... the heroes who marched blithely through the street of London Town singing 'Tipperary,' while you cheered and waved your flags hysterically. They are not singing now, you will observe. Shut your ears [...] lest their groans and heart-rendering cries linger as long in your memory as in the memory of the daughter you sent out to help win the War. (90-91)

Once again, we are reminded of the disconnect between the home front and the war front. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington cheer for the "heroes" in the parades, but do nothing to stop those same boys from being torn to bits. Price addresses this again when she writes, "It isn't pretty to see a hero spewing up his life's blood in public, is it? Much more romantic to see him in the picture papers being awarded the V.C. [Victoria Cross], even if he is minus a limb or two. A most unfortunate occurrence!" (91). Price mimics the language Mrs. Smith would use if she encountered a wounded veteran. But the only kind of veteran Mrs. Smith and women like her would want to see is a cleaned up version of whatever Smith and her cohort are witnessing.

To highlight the idiocy of bloated patriotism expected of upper- and middle-class women, Price suggests that even the thoughts of their sons being killed will not stop Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington from supporting the war. As women raised with Victorian ideals of femininity, they see it as their duty to be working for the war effort, even if it seems contrary that those who see motherhood as the epitome of womanhood have no qualms of sending sons and daughters to their deaths. Smith tries to make things

personal for her mother and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington by asking them to imagine Bertie (Smith's brother) and Roy (Mrs. Evans-Mawnington's son) suffering from a gas attack.

Price writes:

This is gas. You've heard of gas, haven't you? It burns and shrivels the lungs to ... to the mess you see on the ambulance floor over there. He's about the age of Bertie, Mother. [...] Bertie would look up pleadingly like that in between coughing up his lungs. ... The son you have so generously given to the War. The son you are so eager to send out to the trenches before Roy Evans-Mawnington, in case Mrs. Evans-Mawnington scored over you at the next recruiting meeting. ... 'I have given my only son.'

(93)

Here, Price criticizes the absurd competition between the two women (Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington) and their eagerness to send their boys out to war. Coughing to death is better, Price argues, than "fac[ing] the shame" of a patriotic mother (93). Price attacks the blind patriotism women like Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington subscribe to, because they are responsible for the deaths of so many young men as the invention of new weaponry, like machine guns, and the use of gas and liquid fire flamethrowers caused damage previously unknown.

As Smith continues imagining showing her mother and her mother's friend the damage of war, the women turn away from a "shapeless lump of raw liver," a victim of liquid fire. Smith asks why the women look away and says to her mother:

I remember your letter. ... "*I hear we're started using liquid fire, too. That will teach the Germans. I hope we use lots and lots of it.*" [...] You were

glad some new fiendish torture had been invented by the chemists running this war. You were delighted to think some German mother's son was going to have the skin stripped from his poor face by liquid fire. ... Just as some equally patriotic German mother rejoiced when she first heard the sons of Englishwomen were to be burnt and tortured by the very newest war gadget out of the laboratory. (95-96)

While Price's criticism of the warmongers dominates these passages, it is important to note that she is also showing her readers how the war has changed Smith. Pre-war Smith would not speak to her mother this way, would not criticize her, and would not imply she (her mother) is a murderer. Not only does Price use these changes to show that the ideals of a submissive and quiet young woman are dying, but she also criticizes the image of motherhood as she equates her mother to a warmongering murderer.

The longer women stayed at the Front, the more the late-Victorian feminine ideals were at risk, as evidenced by Smith's language and temper. Witnessing such horrors and being around soldiers changes Smith's language. Smith loses her temper and as her language changes, she "apologizes" to her mother for not being a proper lady. Price continues with the imagined conversation between Smith, her mother, and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington as Smith suggests Mrs. Evans-Mawnington drop her bag to see how the sound would affect the men. Price writes, "What? You won't try the experiment? You can't watch him? Why not? *Why not?* I have to, every night. Why the hell can't you do it for once? Damn your eyes. Forgive me, mother and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington. That was not the kind of language a nicely-brought-up young lady from Wimbledon Common uses. I forget myself" (92). Smith is aware of the changes within herself and how the war has

changed the way she interacts with others. Even though this conversation is imaginary and Smith is not *really* speaking to her mother, the fact that Smith wants to speak out against the war and against her mother shows change from the Price's original description of Smith ("emotions practically non-existent" [47]).

Even though female ambulance drivers and volunteer nurses were in a different country and away from their homes, the expectations of the "nicely-brought-up young lady" followed them to France and Belgium. We saw this through The B.F.'s reaction to Tosh cutting her hair and the Commandant's expectations about the way the volunteers looked. These young, upper- and middle-class women are, as Price writes, "haloed" as "the Splendid Young Women who are winning the War" (96). If a female noncombatant behaved in a way that was considered unladylike or immoral, then she was sent home. Tosh, the character who has been at the Front the longest, becomes Price's voice for disgust at the unreasonable expectations on noncombatants. Price writes:

Immorality, what a chance! Doesn't it make you sick? Slack as much as you can, drive your bus cruelly as you like, crash your gears to hell, muck your engine till it's in the mechanic's hands half its time [...]. But one hint of immorality and back you go to England in disgrace as fast as the packet can take you. As if morality mattered two hoots when it comes to convoying wounded men. Personally, if I were choosing women to drive heavy ambulances their moral characters wouldn't worry me. It would be "Are you a first-class driver?" not "Are you a first-class virgin?" The biggest harlot or the biggest saint ... what the hell does it matter as long as they put up a decent performance behind the steering wheel and can

keep their engines clean? You can't get up to much immorality with dying men, can you? (126)

Because these women are of a certain class, their behavior (and virginity) matters more to the powers-that-be than their ability to drive an ambulance in extraordinary circumstances. Even though they are abroad, these women are representing England and English values. This passage also speaks to the women's sexual lives while abroad. While there was the freedom for women (and men) to be sexually active without the supervision of their Victorian parents and chaperones, the reality is that these women were mostly in contact with injured and dying men. Price does not focus on the few characters who are "man-mad women, semi-nymphomaniacs" (Thrumms) or "man-hunters" (The B.F.), because the realities of life at the Front did not lend themselves to regular sessions of "immortality." As seen in the previous chapters, the Front provided a space for many women to explore their sexuality. Brittain, Rathbone, and Bagnold mention or depict women who feel free to have sex, especially as there is the lack of supervision at the Front that does not exist at home. However, as Price argues through Tosh's tirade, whether or not a woman has sex should not matter anymore; in the world created by the war, the important thing is survival, not morality.

Halfway through the text, Price depicts a more dramatic change in Smith's relationship to her own ideas of her femininity as Smith comes to scoff at the expectations of morality that come along with the rules of femininity. After sneaking out with Tosh and two officers to see a concert performed by German prisoners of war, Smith realizes her change in outlook. Baynton, her "date," kisses Smith after the concert. When she pushes him away, he says, "Have a heart, old dear, I'm going up the line to-morrow.

I'll probably be dead mutton before I get a chance to kiss another girl" (145). After this plea, Smith allows one more kiss but does not follow up on Baynton's request to spend the night together. On her way back, she questions her decision to follow the rules of feminine morality, or chastity. Price writes, "Silly to accuse a man of being ungentlemanly when he is practically sentenced to death. [...] To my astonishment I wasn't in the least shocked by his proposal. How one's outlook changes!" (145). Later, Price writes:

Oh, damn, why not? Why not? Why not get something out of life before ... you, Nellie Smith, a virgin, thinking these things, after the sheltered way you've been brought up, after ... if there had been a chance, would you? ... I don't know, I don't know—I might be dead and buried tomorrow, killed in an air-raid, smashed up in an ambulance, anything. ...
[...] Oh, damn, what does virtue matter—a little thing like chastity? (146-47)

Price reminds her readers that it is not just the soldiers whose lives are at risk daily, but also the female noncombatants. By repeating "why not" and "I don't know," Price highlights the shift of Smith's thoughts. Being in the war and seeing so much death forces Smith (and many women like her) to question the morals she was raised with. What does a "little thing like chastity" matter if she is going to die the next day? Does virginity matter if the person is dead? Ideals they were so sure of before the war are being questioned by these women as they are surrounded with the chaos and horrors of war.

Price depicts the end of the Smith's belief in the old world morality regarding sex and female chastity or innocence as Smith experiences a mental and nervous breakdown

from witnessing Tosh's death. Smith gets leave to go home and meets Robin, a soldier just about to go to France for the first time, in London. Smith is captivated by the light in his eyes, a stark difference from the procession of mangled bodies she sees when she closes her eyes. Price describes Robin as "clean and young and straight [...] so gay, so full of life" (171). After dining and dancing, he walks Smith up to her hotel room and asks to come in. Smith does not say "no." Price writes, "Must he say good night? ... Can't he come in and talk to me after I am in bed? ... I don't think him an awful rotter for suggesting it, do I? [...] He'll be good, honestly—well, just as good as I want him to be" (173). The next scene shows Smith waking Robin up so that he will leave. A large decision for an Edwardian woman—losing one's virginity to a stranger—is depicted within a few short lines and Price does not give the reader any insight into Smith's mind as she makes this decision. Price has already shown Smith's changing thoughts on chastity after kissing Baynton, yet the lack of insight into Smith's mind—the lack of a debate or justification for her actions—signals Smith's abandonment of her class' feminine ideals. Having premarital sex has become a non-issue; Smith does not need to worry about her reputation anymore, and through the lack of forethought, Price demonstrates the newfound empowerment of women. Seeing men's mangled bodies and Tosh's death from German bombs changed Smith's perspectives on life and the rules she is expected to live by. Price shows the futility of Victorian ideals in a world ruled by chaos. Having sex with this stranger is Smith's way of shedding her upper-middle class femininity.

While losing one's virginity to a stranger was a drastic change in Smith's behavior, Price spends more time on another physical symbol of Smith's changing

perceptions of femininity. About 130 pages after Tosh chops off her hair, Smith comes to the decision that her time has also come. Price examines Smith's thought process as she goes through altering her appearance. She writes:

I return slowly to my bedroom to carry out the decision it has taken me weeks to make—cut my hair off. I cannot bear the filth and worry any longer. What Mother will say I do not dare contemplate, but as I will probably never get leave it seems futile to worry. I get The Bug's scissors and begin to snip. As I snip I think of Baynton. I feel sorry we are unlikely to meet again. Into the newspaper goes my hair. Would Baynton like me with short hair? What a fool I am! What will happen to Mother's story of me and Trix [Smith's sister] now? (147)

This passage shows how difficult it is for Smith to commit to chopping off her hair. Price shows the extent of the influence Mrs. Smith has on her daughter as Smith admits to still thinking about what her mother would say. Towards the end of the passage, she seems to regret her decision as she thinks of what Baynton (her date to the POW show) would think of her short hair. It is an interesting decision by Price to show that more thought went into Smith changing her physical appearance than losing her virginity to a stranger. Losing her hair is more visible and public than losing her virginity, and it seems that while Smith can easily abandon the morals she was raised with, keeping appearances of femininity seems to matter. Through Smith, Price shows us the contradictions of femininity at the Front. Smith questions her willingness to be open with her rebellion against the standards of femininity. Yet the desire of cleanliness (based on the realities she faces at the Front) trumps the fear of openly showing her lack of interest in presenting

a feminine face. Price writes, “I burn my hair in the chamber and examine myself in the mirror. Not bad. Makes me look about sixteen. Something quite pleasant about the feel of short hair. Boyish. Tosh thinks it will become a universal fashion, but I don’t agree. It isn’t feminine enough. Women will never adopt a mode that isn’t *essentially* feminine” (147-48, emphasis added). Whether or not Price intended to start a conversation on what is essentially feminine, through Smith, Price questions the concept of what is feminine, and particularly asks why that matters while a woman is at the Front. It is interesting to note that while Smith has been rejecting many of the ideals of femininity, she does not criticize the concept of femininity itself; she merely questions the purpose of keeping up the expectations of femininity while at the Front. Price suggests that femininity, or even the concept of gender as a whole, does not matter in the chaos of war.

Price argues that once Smith changes the ways in which she exhibits femininity, or, rather, disregards it, Smith cannot go back to her pre-war self. The changes in Smith’s performance of femininity—cutting her hair short, having premarital sex, speaking out against authority—follow her home. Given leave after having a nervous breakdown from Tosh’s death, Smith has to readjust to civilian life. So many of the changes Smith went through were forced on her by the war environment, but Price shows that a change in environment cannot undo what has been done. When Smith comes home, she spends her days in bed and enjoys the luxuries of being out of the warzone. Her mother, who we have seen is blindly patriotic and competitive with other women about being in as many committees as possible, is not happy seeing one of her children at home and ignoring the war effort. Mrs. Smith asks Smith to wear her uniform and speak at a recruitment meeting, but Smith vehemently refuses. Her mother tries to figure out why and criticizes

Smith for her behavior. Price writes, “people are thinking it’s funny ... perfectly absurd the way I [Smith] refused to go anywhere; it isn’t as though I was a *wounded soldier*. [...] why, I won’t even wear my badge of honour—my uniform” (181). Smith laughs at her mother’s absurd comments. Her mother wants to parade Smith around as a badge of pride; she can show off her daughter who has been in France. Mrs. Smith does not understand her daughter’s resistance and points out the changes of her [Smith’s] behavior. Price writes, “Once I was a sweet girl, happy and interested in local things, now I’m bitter and snappy and sarcastic and with a tongue like an adder, yes, and not above swearing, either, actually *swearing*” (181). Price exposes just how obvious the change in Smith’s personality is; she performs and thinks so differently from the ways she did before the war. Smith’s bitterness has allowed her to speak up against her mother, and even criticize Mrs. Smith’s patriotism. She tells her mother that she is not on leave, but has quit the service entirely and has burned her uniform. She says, “I don’t believe in war. I think it’s vile and wrong, mother. It’s a chemists’ war. There’s nothing decent in it. Men are being killed by men, miles away, they’ve never seen. [...] I am a coward, mother. [...] Mother, you don’t know what it’s like out there driving those ambulances full of torn men—torn to bits with shrapnel—sometimes they die on the way. ...” (184-85). Her mother’s response of “Well, at least they died doing their duty” does not faze Smith (185). Smith has abandoned the feminine ideal of the passive, dutiful daughter parents of the upper- and middle-classes expect, to an angry, anti-war, and—in her parents’ eyes—unpatriotic woman.

Towards the end of the novel, Price changes gears and examines what happens to a woman who has been in war for too long. The damages of war go beyond the resistance

of the ideal feminine and Smith goes from being a passive and quiet, to bitter and angry woman, and, finally, to a machine. Just like Borden, Price shows how “war de-sexes men and women,” but goes further with her metaphor than Borden by depicting the death of humanity inside Smith, the result of experiencing and witnessing trauma (Kaplan 36). While Price does not focus on any men in her text, it is not a far reach to assume that her anti-war novel states that war kills humanity both literally and figuratively. Smith was disinherited from her aunt’s fortune when she declared herself a pacifist, but to pay for the abortion of her sister, Trix, Smith decides to rejoin the service in order to get money from her aunt.²⁷ Instead of using the £100 to reenlist, Smith gives the money to Trix; however, Smith must actually reenlist since she cannot go back home and admit to what the money was used for. The dread of going back is only temporarily relieved when Smith decides to act out against her mother one last time by signing up as a domestic worker rather than a driver: “Put that on your needles and knit it, my patriotic aunt. Tell that to the titled ladies on your committee, my snobbish mother” (212). But that is the last bit of spark we see in Smith. After she sees her sister leave for France after the abortion she says, “Nothing will ever stir me again. I am dry. Worn out. Finished” (213). Price shows us the death of humanity within Smith, inviting the imagery of the machine.

Price’s language by the end of the novel changes from sex specific words to describe Smith to mechanical terms. Throughout the last two chapters, after Smith says that nothing will stir her emotions again, she says she has become accustomed to “being a machine, to living by the clock, [...] to sleep certain hours, to work certain hours” (214).

²⁷ Upper- and middle-class women had to pay to volunteer. The money paid for their uniform and training, indicating a class issue with who can volunteer as a nurse. See Ouditt *Fighting Forces*, 11-12.

She describes herself as a “slot machine that never goes out of order. [...] Everything is regulated. Even my emotions” (214-15). Price has shown that being a part of the war machine for a long time inevitably turns you into a part of that machine. As the anger in Smith subsides into apathy, she becomes less of a woman and less of a human. Price writes:

Outwardly I am Smithy, assistant cook; inwardly I am nothing, I have no feelings that are not physical. I dislike being too hot or too cold. My body is healthy, my mind negative. I have no love or hate for anyone. Long ago I ceased to love Roy [her fiancé]; long ago I ceased to hate my mother. Both processes were gradual. I am content to drift along in the present. The past has gone; I have no future ... I want no future. [...] I have no nerves. (216-17)

Femininity, which played a pivotal role throughout the text, has now become obsolete. Price ceases to present Smith as a woman, but as a body not capable of emotions. With so much time spent on Smith’s struggle with the ideals of femininity, the shift to the machine suggests Price, like Borden, questions the future of femininity, perhaps even humanity, especially after a war that was unlike any European country had experienced before.

At the end of the novel, Price switches from first-person to third-person narration. The omniscient narrator describes the bomb that falls on the hut in which Smith works. Smith is one of the few survivors, but Price’s description of the aftermath shows what, if anything, is left. She writes:

Her soul died under a radiant silver moon in the spring of 1918 on the side of a blood-spattered trench. [...] Her body was untouched, her heart beat calmly, the blood coursed as ever through her veins. But looking deep into those emotionless eyes one wondered if they had suffered much before the soul had left them. Her face held an expression of resignation, as though she had ceased to hope that the end might come. (239)

Smith's humanity, or her soul, does not survive, but the body, the machine, continues to live and function as normal. With this ending, Price reiterates the idea that the war dehumanizes women and men, leaving soulless machines in its wake, and suggests that femininity and feminine ideals cannot exist when people become machines. Like Borden, Price traces the death of the feminine ideals but ends on a firmer note about the future of not just femininity, but also humanity.

As Borden writes in her introduction to *The Forbidden Zone*, a non-traditional narrative was the best way for her to capture her experience in the war. By writing a text that uses the first-person narration through stream-of-consciousness, Price gives us deeper insight into the mind of a woman at the Front struggling with maintaining the femininity she is told she must keep up while facing the realities that leave no space for that femininity. Both these texts differ from many of the other women's war narratives by incorporating modern narrative techniques that allow the authors to mimic the chaos of the war and the effects the war had on women's identities. As Ouditt argues, "The trauma of the daily experience of nursing—especially on the Western Front—destabilised for some women what had come to be their way of identifying themselves" (36). Borden and Price show their characters questioning their femininity, the ideals they were raised with,

and, eventually, their humanity. Both authors end their texts with the machine image, suggesting that the end of the old-world ideals of femininity, brought on by the war, eventually lead to the machine. We do not see what becomes of these characters after the war, again differing from the other texts discussed in this project, so we can only take the machine imagery as a suggestion of how Borden and Price viewed the state of femininity, and the world, in 1929 and 1930.

CONCLUSION

This project has focused on literature by women who were participants in the Great War. Through their texts, we have seen the struggles of women as they enter the public sphere and volunteer for the war effort. These young women were sheltered in the private sphere and kept there by the Victorian parents who believed a woman's roles are strictly daughter and wife. Their education was limited, both in terms of academic and worldly education. By leaving that place of safety or oppression, young women were exposed to horrors and the traumas of war. Vera Brittain, Mary Borden, Evadne Price, and Irene Rathbone show how seeing the destruction of war traumatized the young women. This was the price of their freedom. Many also discovered sexual freedom, but that came at a price as well, whether it was pregnancy, rejection, or the death of those they loved. And while being in the public sphere gave women the freedom to discover the world in all its complexity, the ideals of femininity and the societal rules of gender performance followed them from the private sphere, dictating the limits of their freedom. Though entering the public sphere meant having mixed experiences, the entrance made women a part of the war machine. Their active participation, even as noncombatants, helped England. After the war, there was the push to get women back into the private sphere, but women had proved to themselves and to the world that they can be active participants in the public sphere. As Brittain and Rathbone showed us, being active in the war led many women to never want to go back into the private sphere and into the lives that their parents wanted for them. But what were the political ramifications of their efforts to stay in the public sphere? In *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf reflects and considers women's roles in the public sphere as the possibility of another great war looms over England.

Virginia Woolf is not known as a political writer; for most scholars and critics—including Leonard Woolf, her husband, and Quentin Bell, her nephew and biographer—she is known for being apolitical. The First World War is a tangential thought in Part Two, “Time Passes,” of *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The focus of that part is still on the decay and death of the house where the Ramsey family summers. In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), the damages of the war are depicted through Septimus Smith, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, but the war is not the focus of the novel. For scholars contemporary to Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938) was considered her worst text *because* she took a political stance. Perhaps reacting to the damages created by the war, Woolf felt that it was time she spoke up about women’s roles and rights, abandoning her ideals of artistic aestheticism and spending two years writing a feminist and political treatise. While women proved their worth in the public sphere during the war, there was a pushback against women’s presence in the workforce. Though women were given the right to vote, it was only women over thirty who owned property who had that right. As another war seemed likely, Woolf let her private anger out into the public, making her politics clear for the first time. Because she is writing *Three Guineas* between 1936 and 1938, she provides a retrospective view of the issues the authors in this project explore. Woolf condemns the patriarchy while highlighting the complications women face as they work towards freedom from the private sphere. She also argues for women to be educated in universities and have the opportunities to work in the professional fields while simultaneously disengaging from those institutions—universities, the Church, the Exchange—to help prevent war. As she looks to the future, the past directs what she thinks are the best actions for women.

Published in 1938, Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* criticizes the patriarchal institutions that have kept women out for centuries, particularly schools, the Church, and the professional workforce. *Three Guineas* is written as a response to a "letter" asking, "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" as Europe is once again on the verge of war (3). In this response, the speaker also acknowledges letters from two other societies: one for a women's college and another for a boarding house for women who have professional jobs. By adding the requests of these societies for funds, Woolf shows the reader how the patriarchy and tyranny, fascism in particular, are intrinsically tied to each other. Woolf's ultimate answer to the man's question is that women must dissociate themselves from the patriarchal institutions that have failed to prevent war for centuries. However, the speaker gives a guinea to the man's society that is working to fight fascism; she also gives a guinea each to a society to help rebuild a women's college and a boarding house for women. Though she encourages rejecting the Victorian feminine ideal by calling for women's rights to education and work, she also argues that women should act differently within those institutions so as not to perpetuate the warmongering of the patriarchy. While many women found freedom in joining the war effort, as Brittain, Rathbone, Bagnold, and Price showed us, Woolf's argument and proposed solution would allow women to find freedom from the patriarchy and the private sphere without the trauma of participating in war.

Harshly criticized when it was published, current scholars see great value in Woolf's *Three Guineas*, many arguing that the text anticipates the feminist ideas of the personal being political. The text is simultaneously a diatribe against war, fascism, and the patriarchy. The essay shows the reader how all three are undoubtedly connected.

Woolf acknowledges that the personal is political, that the separation between the public and the private spheres is false as the two spheres are connected, anticipating the arguments of the third-wave and intersectional feminists. Berenice Carroll argues that Woolf ties the political to the personal, because Woolf sees the patriarchy as the center of the political problems that have plagued humanity. She writes:

Virginia Woolf recognized in the society around her a political and social system geared to the destruction and perversion of human life and creativity. The pillars of this system were: patriarchy, property, possessiveness, dominance, and invidious distinction. Like many radical feminists today, she saw patriarchy as the central pillar, where domestic politics, institutional politics, and state politics converge, where the “personal is political.” (Carroll 116).

In analyzing *Three Guineas*, we see that Woolf repeatedly compares the tyranny of the patriarchy to the tyranny of fascism, particularly in how both ideologies treat women. As Carroll argues, Woolf sees the patriarchy as the “central pillar” of the system that runs society. It is the system that fosters the ideologies of possessiveness and dominance, ideologies that promote war. In order to prevent war, changes within that system—within patriarchy—need to happen. Contemporary critics, such as E. M. Forster, Maynard Keynes, and Quentin Bell, criticized Woolf’s angry tone along with her comparison of the patriarchy to fascism. Forster called *Three Guineas* “the worst of her books” (Carroll 119); Keynes “was both angry and contemptuous; it was, he declared, a silly argument and not very well written” (Bell 205, qtd. Carroll 119). Quentin Bell, in his biography, writes, “What really seemed wrong ... was the attempt to involve discussion of women’s rights with the far more agonising and immediate question of what we were to do in order

to meet the ever-growing menace of Fascism and war. The connection between the two questions seemed tenuous and the positive suggestions wholly inadequate.” (Bell 205, qtd. in Carroll 119). It is perhaps unsurprising that prominent male writers and critics were not keen on what many saw as Woolf’s propaganda pamphlet. It was no doubt insulting to these men to be compared to Mussolini and Hitler. Alex Zwerdling reiterates the connection between Fascism and patriarchy when he writes, “It is the stress, in *Three Guineas*, on the connection between fascist brutality and ordinary, garden-variety impulses of authority in the men of her own country that offended so many of Woolf’s first readers” (82). Woolf’s contemporaries may have hated what was her most overtly political text, but some feminist scholars in the 21st century argue that Woolf does not go far enough in her critique. Elaine Showalter criticizes Woolf’s classist views and argues that Woolf was out-of-touch in terms of what women at the time needed (Showalter 292-93). Jane Marcus argues that Woolf’s anger present in her diaries is preferable to the toned-down anger present in *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*. These scholars suggest that Woolf’s work as a feminist text is compromised, because she does not acknowledge and publicly express her anger.

Woolf’s anger in *Three Guineas* can be seen as a response to the patriarchy that not only has defined her access to education and work, but also has perpetuated the circumstances that caused the Great War and continues to do so with the threat of a second war. Woolf highlights the connections and seems frustrated that there has been no change or advancement. She writes, “It seems as if there were no progress in the human race, but only repetition” (*Three Guineas* 66). Woolf’s tone, criticized by her male colleagues, is seen by many critics today as righteous anger against the patriarchy. In

“The Authority of Anger: ‘Three Guineas’ as Case Study,” Brenda Silver argues that Woolf’s anger is a way to disrupt the narratives of the patriarchal system, which is what feminist criticism aims to do. Silver sees Woolf’s angry tone as a way to change the ways in which the patriarchy has been criticized. She writes:

To the extent that the reigning discourses in our century, whether political, critical, or psychological, have constructed truths that condemn anger, at least women’s anger, and with it feminist critique as destructive of truth, feminist criticism has struggled to find a voice with which to speak in the public realm. Paradoxically, by claiming the authority of anger as the site of a discursive stance, feminist criticism becomes not only a different (and embattled) voice, but also a continuing means of altering the truths by which we live. (341-42)

Woolf’s angry tone, according to Silver, is how she inserts herself into the public discourse and works to dismantle it. However, Alex Zwerdling, in “Anger and Conciliation in Woolf’s Feminism,” argues that in *Three Guineas* Woolf works to simultaneously vent about the subjection of women while pacifying her male audience enough so that they would be willing to read her work seriously. Zwerdling argues that the tension between the two is obvious throughout Woolf’s text with her use of irony. Because anger—along with many other expressive emotions—was seen as childish in women, Woolf had to tone down her anger in order to reach her intended audience, men like Forster and Keynes. In “A Rhetoric of Textual Feminism: (Re)Reading the Emotional in Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*,” Krista Ratcliffe argues that framing Woolf’s text within a “rhetoric of textual feminism,” the reader can see Woolf use the emotional in order to discuss the “unspeakable” (Ratcliffe 401). Ratcliffe’s argument is similar to

Silver's in that both see Woolf's text as highly emotional, a method to break through the traditional narratives and highlight a feminist critique. Woolf, then, harnesses her anger to speak out against the institutions that have allowed war to once again become a possibility.

We also see Woolf critique the women who volunteered as noncombatants in the First World War when she argues that women must dissociate themselves from the patriarchal institutions that cause war. This is an interesting critique to read in context with Brittain, Borden, Rathbone, Bagnold, and Price who all depict the experiences of female noncombatants and show the complexities of femininity in the public sphere. Comparing Woolf's argument to those of the other authors in this project, it is difficult not to see Woolf's argument as an oversimplification of a problem and a depiction of an ideal (the separation of the sexes in terms of ideology) that cannot exist. In her text, Woolf captures the frustration that the other authors depict through their characters about the ways in which women are treated and their access to the public sphere. Woolf's critique of women's participation in the war implicates those women as complicit in the patriarchal institutions that oppress them. Most of the authors, particularly Brittain and Price, were vehemently critical of the older generation for being safe at home while encouraging the youth to kill and be killed. It is easy for Woolf, who played no active role in the war, to say that the only way women can help in preventing war is by dissociating from patriarchal institutions, but as we saw—and as Woolf later concedes—the war was the way out of the private sphere for many women.

Woolf argues that there are some essential differences between the sexes; these differences are not the basic biological differences, but the differences in experience. The

ways in which women and men have been raised led to a different understanding of and participation in the world. She writes, “For though many instincts are held more or less common by both sexes, to fight has always been the man’s habit, not the woman’s. [...] Scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman’s rifle; the vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you, not by us” (6). Women had not been the ones to grab weapons and head to war for the love of their king and country and women had not been the ones to call for war, because, as Woolf later argues, they did not have the same privileges as men. As Marian Eide, writes, “Not that it is necessarily a human impulse or even a man’s impulse to perpetuate violence, rather the impulse to protect privilege takes many guises and war is one of them” (54). With this important difference—the access to privilege—between the sexes, Woolf wonders why a man is asking a woman her opinion. Women have not been the ones to cause the wars or fight in them, so how can she know with certainty how to prevent war? She writes, “we cannot understand the impulses, the motives, or the morality which lead you to go to war, to make any suggestion that will help you to prevent war” (10). Besides pointing out the different impulses and values between the sexes, Woolf also argues that women have never had the opportunity to be in positions of power that might actively help to prevent war. She writes:

both the Army and the Navy are closed to our sex. We are not allowed to fight. Not again are we allowed to be members of the Stock Exchange. Thus we can use neither the pressure of force nor the pressure of money. The less direct but still effective weapons which our brothers, as educated men, possess in the diplomatic

service, in the Church, are also denied to us. We cannot preach sermons or negotiate treaties. (12)

The fact that women have been denied the positions in which they could possibly have made a difference makes them powerless to help prevent war, at least in the traditional way of joining societies and raising money for those societies. Instead, the only option they have, according to Woolf, is to not help men in the war effort, to actively dissociate themselves from the values and ideals of public institutions that promote war.

Woolf bases her argument for women's dissociation from patriarchal institutions on the fact that women have been kept out of those institutions for so long that their love for country, their patriotism, is not and cannot be the same as their male counterparts', thus the only active way for women to help prevent war is to not participate as they did in the First World War. To show that "her sex and class has very little to thank England for in the past; not much to thank England for the present," Woolf gives a history of how women have been made to be second-class citizens (108). Her argument focuses on the "daughters of educated men," those of the middle- and upper-classes. Women of the working classes could, or rather were forced to, work, and thus had the power to actively help prevent war; daughters of educated men could do nothing but marry. She writes:

Not only are we incomparably weaker than the men of our own class; we are weaker than the women of the working class. If the working women of the country were to say: "If you go to war, we will refuse to make munitions or to help in the production of goods," the difficulty of war-making would be seriously increased. But if all the daughters of educated men were to down tools tomorrow, nothing essential either to the life or to the war-making of the community would

be embarrassed. Our class is the weakest of all the classes in the state. We have no weapon with which to enforce our will. (12-13)

On the surface, Woolf's argument makes sense. The women of the middle- and upper-classes were confined to the private sphere, where any rebellion against the public institutions would not affect any policy. However, she ignores the work her own class did for the First World War. As we have seen in this project, many "daughters of educated men" participated in the war effort as volunteer nurses, ambulance drivers, and even munitions workers in factories. They left the confines of the private sphere to join their brothers in the war effort. If women like Vera Brittain, Irene Rathbone, Mary Borden, and Enid Bagnold refused to join up as volunteers, England would sorely miss the available nurses. These women also procured new territory for women to intervene and not simply be complicit in the war. By participating in the war as nurses, drivers, land workers, and factory workers, they proved that women could add value to the public sphere. Though their valuable work was ignored as soldiers returned home, their actions created the precedence that encouraged women to pursue higher education and enter the professional workforce.

In fact, Woolf contradicts her initial assessment of women of her class being the weakest of the classes when she later acknowledges the "amazing outburst" of willing volunteers (39). Her acknowledgement, however, comes with the criticism of calling those women pro-war. She writes:

How else can we explain that amazing outburst in August 1914, when the daughters of educated men who had been educated rushed into hospitals, some still attended by their maids, drove lorries, worked in fields and munitions

factories, and used all their immense stores of charm, of sympathy, to persuade young men that to fight was heroic, and that the wounded in battle deserved all her care and all her praise? The reason lies in education. So profound was her unconscious loathing for the education of the private house with its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immortality, its insanity that she would undertake any task however menial, exercise any fascination however fatal that enabled her to escape. Thus consciously she desired “our splendid Empire”; unconsciously she desired our splendid war. (39)

Woolf gave working-class women credit for their war work, likely because many of these women have no other jobs open to them, but for daughters of educated men—especially those who themselves are educated—Woolf is critical of the women in her class who joined the war efforts. Her tone is mocking when she discusses the volunteers’ “charm” and desire to praise the brave soldiers. While on the one hand she seems to be mocking and criticizing the women who volunteered, on the other hand she argues that it is the fault of the patriarchy that locked these women up in the private sphere, with the result that the women were so willing to risk their lives to escape their home. The patriarchal institutions that have dictated that a woman of a certain class must stay in the private sphere, that her education must be limited, are what drove the young women so willingly into the arms of the war machine. In only a few words, Woolf harshly criticizes the private sphere and the education that it provides young women—cruel, poor, hypocritical, and insane. Because of this, it is no wonder that women were so keen to leave; we saw this with Joan in Rathbone’s *We That Were Young* and in Brittain’s autobiography. Women, especially those who identified as suffragettes or feminists, were already

pushing to enter the private sphere and the war was the catalyst that allowed them in, not without consequences. Ultimately, Woolf's argument is that if women were given a proper education then they would be able to understand the horrors of war, without participating in it, and not need it as a means to escape. Of course, her argument comes too late as many women joined the war effort in 1914, but she does see dissociation as a possible way to avoid a second great war.

In discussing access to education, Woolf not only highlights how women have been kept out of the gates of Oxford and Cambridge, but also how the current education breeds young men who are taught to hate, thus facilitating war. With this argument, Woolf corroborates the experience of the other authors in this project. In her autobiography, Vera Brittain points to how the young men at public schools and universities are taught to put country first when she discusses her brother's graduation from public school. She remembers the headmaster of her brother's school saying, "If a man cannot be useful to his country, he is better dead" (*Testament of Youth* 89). Such a speech highlights the rhetoric of patriotism, nationalism, and duty that dominated British schools. It is this patriotism and nationalism that Woolf condemns. But more than that, she also criticizes how the educated men who refuse to share knowledge control access to education. She addresses this when she writes:

[A]ll attempt to influence the young against the war through the education they receive at the universities must be abandoned [...]. For do they not prove that education, the finest education in the world, does not teach people to hate force, but to use it? Do they not prove that education, far from teaching the educated generosity and magnanimity, makes them on the contrary so anxious to keep their

possessions, that “grandeur and power” of which the poet speaks, in their own hands, that they will use not force but much more subtler methods than force when they are asked to share them? (29-30)

The problems with the education system, Woolf argues, is that they perpetuate the ideals of war and hate because of their insistence of keeping that education to themselves.

Education is the privilege of the middle- and upper-class men, so any resistance or challenge to that comes as a threat that must be squashed.

This idea, of course, is perpetuated by the myth that women’s brains could not handle education. The men who became officers in the Army and Navy because of their class standing were educated in this type of society, one that taught them to love their country and to hate those who would try and take their privilege away from them, even if those are their sisters. Woolf references the teachers and students at a medical school who literally locked the doors to the school when a group of women came to study there (30). By hoarding education, men are able to keep women as second-class citizens, who then have no power to actively help prevent war. On the one hand, the education system is flawed because it encourages men to hate outsiders and work to prevent anyone from sharing their knowledge; on the other hand, an education outside the home is what women need in order to be active members within the society. This complexity and simultaneity of the problem of education is reminiscent of the problems the authors in this project depict: the simultaneity of freedom and restrictions they experienced as they entered the public sphere. Woolf writes:

[I]f those daughters are not going to be educated they are not going to earn their livings; in they are not going to earn their livings, they are going once more to be

restricted to the education of the private house; and if they are going to be restricted to the education of the private house they are going, once more, to exert all their influence both consciously and unconsciously in favour of war. Of that there can be little doubt. (37)

Staying in the home and getting the very limited education gives women a restricted view of the world, a view that perpetuates the ideals of patriotism and nationality that glorifies war. Only by leaving the home, getting an education and a job can women play an active role in trying to prevent war. Thus, the speaker promises one guinea to a society to rebuild a woman's college, since the college gets minimum funds from the university. In promising money to this society, Woolf not only highlights the need for promoting women's education, but also clearly ties education to work to show that admittance to the public sphere is necessary to ignite change in society.

Dismissing the imposition of the separation of the sexes, Woolf calls for the need of accepting educated women into positions of power. Society had kept women as second-class citizens, though even "citizens" implies more agency than what women actually had. A woman had no right to a scholarly education, property, or money; the latter two moved from her father to her husband or to her brother. Coverture ensured that women were dependent on men. Woolf reminds her correspondent of this when she writes:

Your class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically all the capital, all the land, all the valuables, and all the patronage in England. Our class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically none of the capital,

not of the land, none of the valuables, and none of the patronage in England. [...]

Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes. (18)

With no access to funds, land, or any other valuables, women were denied agency. With no ability to enter the public sphere, they also arguably lacked citizenship. Woolf first argued for the need for education outside of the home, even though it is a flawed system; now, she argues for women's right to work in the public sphere. The work women did in the private sphere—raising children and keeping up the home—was unpaid labor, which still leaves them powerless. She writes, “The world as it is at present is divided into two services; one the public and the other private. In one world the sons of educated men work as civil servants, judges, soldiers and are paid for that work; in the other world, the daughters of educated men work as wives, mothers, daughters—but are they not paid for that work?” (54). Women of certain classes only had those three roles to play and while those positions came with many privileges, Woolf is speaking for the women who wanted more agency, who wanted what their brothers had: independence. It is only through paid work that women would be able to gain some power within society.

According to Woolf, having an independent opinion formed by education and work experience is women's way to stand up against war. Just as with her problems with educational institutions, Woolf acknowledges the problems with the public institutions where the brothers of educated women work. Public institutions present the same patriotic and nationalistic ideas that educational institutions do, thus promoting war and hatred. While Woolf calls for more jobs for women in the public sphere, she also paradoxically rejoices at the shunning of women by some of England's major institutions. She writes, “And so long as the Church of England refuses our services—long may they

exclude us!—and the ancient schools and colleges refuse to admit us to share of their endowments and privileges we shall be immune without any trouble on our part from the particular loyalties and fealties which such endowments and privileges engender” (82). Because the public institutions have been run by men for so long—the same men that bring about war—they are tainted and if women were to work there then they too would be tied to the institution’s loyalties and values. Eide, when examining Woolf’s pacifism, summarizes Woolf’s position when she writes, “Woolf’s is a surprising position for readers who associate feminism with arguments for equal access; in her view, women’s particular deprivations become political views. Thus the nationality men enjoy, rather than an advantage, is a stigma, a wound, and an embarrassment” (50). As Eide argues, this seems like a contradiction to how many define feminism—equality between the sexes. However, though Woolf sees women’s lack of nationality and political value as a positive because that exclusion leaves women free from the loyalties that can cause war, she also argues that women can be valuable in helping prevent war by having the political power to argue against it. To do so, women need to be educated and must work in order to have the independence that is needed to form their own opinions. For Woolf, the ideal would be women balancing having access to and being a part of the patriarchal institutions that have long denied them access, while simultaneously actively rejecting the political ideologies that those institutions promote—the righteousness of war, in this case. Woolf believes that in order for women to help to prevent war, as the gentleman solicitor asks our speaker, they must have the same opportunities as men. Because women carry the burden of being the outsiders, they can avoid falling for the pro-war, pro-nationalist rhetoric that Woolf believes dominates the patriarchal institutions. We can see the

balance Woolf believes is the ideal as a reality in Vera Brittain, who worked as a speaker for the League of Nations. She did not flee back into the safety of the private sphere; Brittain roomed with Winifred Holtby and provided for herself by tutoring as well as working for the League of Nations. She used her education and war experience to speak for peace. Yet Woolf does not acknowledge women like Brittain who felt that their participation in the war gave them the authority to speak against war. Woolf's argument insists on women working in positions that have nothing to do with war; like men, women should focus on work that will give them financial independence, but only on that aspect.

Woolf's call for women to join the professional workforce meant women could financially benefit from those positions and ensure that others who have also been left out of those positions are given the chance to enter. In answering the second letter asking for funds, the speaker gives her second guinea to a boarding house that houses young women who work in the public sphere. The speaker's donation comes with a caveat—one that is surprising considering this book was published in 1938. Woolf writes, "You shall swear that you will do all in your power to insist that any woman who enters any profession shall in no way hinder any other human being, whether man or woman, white or black, provided that he or she is qualified to enter that profession, from entering it; but shall do all in her power to help them" (66). Woolf asks the society to not repeat the same mistakes of the established institutions that have excluded so many others. Her inclusion of race is particularly interesting, though in reality there likely weren't many black men and women who would have been considered qualified for professional jobs. The sentiment, however, speaks to the need of inclusion in the professional world. It is

through the inclusion of diverse ideas, opinions, and experiences can encourage public discourse against war.

Woolf's call for inclusion was complicated; she calls for inclusion while simultaneously calling for women's dissociation from the ideologies of those institutions she encourages women to work for. This argument ignores the diversity of women's experiences. She bases her argument that all women who enter the professional workforce will want to dissociate from the ideologies driven by those institutions. When answering the letter to the women asking for funds to help pay rent for their boarding house, the speaker opines that by having an independent opinion—gained from education—young women can save themselves from being blindly loyal to others' opinions. She writes, “the guinea with which to pay the rent of your house is yours—would that it were a thousand! [...] you can join the professions and yet remain uncontaminated by them; you can rid them of their possessiveness, their jealousy, their pugnacity, their greed. You can use them to have a mind of your own and a will of your own. And you can use that mind and will to abolish the inhumanity, the beastliness, the horror, the folly of war” (83). It is here where we clearly see Woolf's call for women to dissociate themselves from the patriarchal institutions that have caused or encouraged wars. It is unrealistic to ask women not to work in the professional workforce or to not attend the colleges and universities, because they already exist. What women can do, however, is work within those places to create change and to ensure that they can work from within to prevent war. However, that does not mean all women will or want to dissociate. Woolf simultaneously calls for the rejection of one ideal of women—the ideal of femininity that has kept women in the private sphere—while promoting another

ideal—the ideal that women can exist in the public sphere and reject the ideologies of the institutions that now would grant women access to education and funds.

As Woolf moves on to answer the original letter, the one from a man asking who women can help prevent war, she argues that women have been fighting their own war: a war against the patriarchy. Woolf compares the patriarchy to fascism by calling them both out on their forms of tyranny. By doing so, she works to have her reader comprehend how differently men and women see the world, and how women can understand men's urge to fight fascism because they have been fighting the tyranny of the patriarchy. She writes, "The daughters of educated men who were called, to their resentment, 'feminists' were in fact the advance guard of your own movement. They were fighting the same enemy that you are fighting and for the same reasons. They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state" (102). Here, Woolf not only compares the tyranny of fascism to the patriarchy, but she also criticizes the men who do not see the similarities. It is clear that at the time, and as it is now to some, "feminist" is a bad word. By including the fact that many women saw the word "feminist" as a slur, she is criticizing men who insult the women who are fighting against what they see as tyranny, just as the same men wish to do with fascism. Carroll argues that Woolf's rejection of the label of "feminist" is because "Woolf felt that labels simply could not express the real meaning of the feminist struggle" (121). Woolf writes, "Ignorant as we are of human motives and ill supplied with words, let us then admit that no one word expresses the force which in the nineteenth century opposed itself to the force of the fathers" (137-38). "Feminism," then, is a bad word not because of its

ideas, but because one word cannot encapsulate the complexities of a necessary movement for women's emancipation.

Additionally, Woolf uses the comparison between the two forms of tyranny to show that, though the Victorian woman has been raised to be blindly patriotic like her brothers, England has not treated women in a way that would encourage the patriotic feelings men felt. Patriotism and nationalism, especially racial nationalism, were the ideals of fascism that were promoted in Germany and Italy. Even England saw the rise of fascism with the British Union of Fascists, with Sir Oswald Mosley as its leader.²⁸ Fascist leaders were classifying people and promoting patriotism and nationalism, which, according to Woolf, is not very different from the ideals that have been promoted by the universities, the Church, and the professions. However, because women had been excluded from these institutions, they could be immune to those ideals. Woolf once again brings up the fact that women have had no right to any capital or land, literally not having any part of the country belong to her. She writes:

When he says, as history proves that he has said, and may say again, "I am fighting to protect our country" and thus seeks to rouse her patriotic emotion, she will ask herself, "What does 'our country' mean to me, an outsider?" To decide this she will inform herself of the position of her sex and her class in the past. She will inform herself of the amount of land, wealth and property in the possession of her own sex and class in the present—how much of 'England' in fact belongs to her. (107)

²⁸ Even with its antiquated ideas of a woman's place, women constituted 25% of the British Union of Fascists. In fact, the two most feared people in the British Union of Fascists were women, Unity Mitford and Diana Mosley, sisters to author Nancy Mitford (Gottlieb 109).

By calling women “outsider,” Woolf dissociates women from the patriarchal structure that promotes the patriotic ideals that lead to war. She puts England in quotes to reiterate how distant women feel from the idea of England their brothers and fathers idealize. She continues to illustrate how the country has wronged women. She writes that England has “treated me as a slave,” “denied me education or any share in its possessions,” and “ceases to be mine if I marry a foreigner” (108-109). Woolf calls attention the realities of women’s rights, or lack thereof, for her male audience who may not have understood the extent to which the patriarchy has affected the ways in which women in England experience their country.

Woolf’s conclusion to the man’s questions of “how are we to prevent war” states that first he needs to understand that there is no “we.” She uses her text to show how differently men and women have experienced England, that women have been denied the rights and privileges men have had for centuries, and that because of these differences women may not feel the patriotic pull men do. Because of these differences, the speaker writes to the male writer that the best way women can help prevent war is to not partake in the institutions that have led to war. The male writer suggests that the speaker join his society, presumably one that aims to fight the spread of fascism. Instead, the speaker says that women will join the “Outsider’s Society.” As members of this society, women will “refuse in the event of war to make munitions or nurse the wounded” (106-107). This is a specific reference to the work women did in First World War; even though women did not fight in the war, by helping in the hospitals and factories they were part of the war machine. If a second war is to start, Woolf argues that women should not take part in any of it, even the displays of patriotism. She writes, “She will bind herself to take no share in

patriotic demonstration; to assent to no form of national self-praise; to make no part of any clique or audience that encourages war; to absent herself from military displays, tournaments, tattoos, prize-givings and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose 'our' civilization or 'our' dominion upon other people" (109). Here Woolf alludes to the women who went around giving white flowers to men who looked like they should be in uniform but weren't, to women's participation in parades, and to the overall celebrations of war and patriotism. Once again, Woolf also reminds the male writer that women are not part of England when she puts quotations around "our." The civilization and dominion that the military aims to impose on other countries belongs to England's men, not women. This does not mean that women do not want to fight to end fascism; in fact, as Woolf has shown, women have been fighting tyranny longer than men. Woolf suggests instead that women fight in their own way, because clearly the ways of men have not prevented war. In closing her letter, she writes:

We are both determined to do what we can to destroy the evil which that picture [a photograph of German violence] represents, you by your methods, we by ours. And since we are different, our help must be different. [...] But as a result the answer to your question must be that we can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods. We can best help you to prevent war not by joining your society but by remaining outside your society but in co-operation with its aim.

(143)

Woolf ends her text by reiterating the differences between the sexes. These differences are not a matter of essentialism in terms of the biological differences, but by the societal

forces that have created these differences. While she argues that the lack of education, property, and the right to work have hurt women, ultimately it seems as though there is a silver lining to women being kept from these institutions. Because they are on the outside, they can see how flawed these institutions are and now that they have access, they can work to change it. By being part of the Outsider's Society, women may—according to Woolf—be in a good position to help prevent war.

Three Guineas is a feminist text that criticizes the patriarchal institutions that have kept women from being educated, earning a living, and owning property. Woolf's argument that women should be allowed into the colleges and universities to earn degrees and to be allowed to work in the professional fields to earn money goes against the Victorian ideals of femininity that dictate women stay in the private sphere. In this way, she has similar ideas to those as Brittain, Price, Rathbone, Borden, and Bagnold. But Woolf is writing her text as the threat of another major war looms over England, and so while the authors in this project depict the struggles women faced when dealing with the Victorian ideals of femininity in the public sphere, Woolf feels the pressure to call for an outright rejection of those ideals. Woolf argues that women, particularly women of her class, have no power because they have been forced into the private sphere; in order to prevent the horrors of another war, women must have complete access to the public sphere. Her assumption is that because women made small strides to be active in the public sphere by participating in the war—and some important steps like admittance into non-degree colleges before the war—that the next logical step would be the complete immersion of women into the public sphere, solidifying the rejection of Victorian ideals of femininity. However, as those authors show, rejection is not so easy. Brittain fought

with her father to go to Oxford and when she returned from the war she could not simply stay at home with her parents; instead, she worked as a speaker for the League of Nations and lived with Winifred Holtby in London. Price depicted Smith's struggle of stifling her hatred for the powers-that-be that dictated the actions of the ambulance drivers while they witnessed brutality around them. Borden critiqued the ways in which women were simultaneously valued for their femininity while being disregarded as nurses who were there to help. Rathbone highlights the many different experiences of women and concludes by showing the different paths women could take at the end of the war, showing that while there was some progress for women, the pre-war conceptions of womanhood were still very much alive. Finally, Bagnold shows the reader that the freedoms women gained during the war could not be maintained so easily in the post-war world, making the reader question just what freedoms were actually gained for women.

Woolf's text works to promote progress and change in the light of the most horrific war of history at the time. However, Woolf's call for dissociation from political institutions is not necessarily what many other women wanted since their experiences as noncombatants in the war had given them a more complex picture of the world's realities than their secluded experiences in the private sphere could have ever given. The authors discussed in this project show us the need for many women to enter the public sphere, to experience a life that they had been denied, and to explore the newfound freedoms the public sphere provided for them. Woolf's *Three Guineas* is a reaction to women's work in the First World War that is explored in the texts discussed in this project. Though she saw that women's work helped the war effort, she argues that helping is only perpetuating the problems that cause war. She says, "It seems as if there were no progress

in the human race, but only repetition” (66). Woolf wants to look forward, to learn from the mistakes of the past, which seems idealistic when considering Woolf’s *oeuvre*. Even Brittain, Bagnold, Rathbone, Price, and Borden seek progress in terms of society’s expectations of femininity in their critiques of it. Looking at these texts—along with *Three Guineas*—in 2018, we need to ask ourselves how much progress actually has been made.

This project works to fill a gap within literary criticism on women’s writing from World War I. The literary canon has bought into the myth that the soldier poets helped create: that the only true experience of war is the combatant’s experience. Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Jacob’s Room* and Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* may be taught and studied as war literature, but these texts focus on the male combatant and women’s experiences at home, not at the Front. Since 1985, feminist scholars have rediscovered and reclaimed women’s war writing with CUNY Feminist Press publishing many of those works—including Evadne Price’s *Not So Quiet...* and Irene Rathbone’s *We That Were Young*. History scholars have been ahead of the curve by examining the many roles women played in First World War; literary scholars have been working to bring attention to the texts written by women to not only highlight the literary worth of these texts, but also to challenge the canon of war literature. By writing on three different forms of writing--the autobiography, the traditional novel, and the modernist text—I hope to have shown that these texts have value not only because they present women’s point of view in the war, but also because they are complex literary texts worth of scholarship.

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