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Battling the Separate Spheres: New Woman Writers and British Women Writers of World War I

Christine Haskill
Western Michigan University

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BATTLING THE SEPARATE SPHERES: NEW WOMAN WRITERS AND
BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS OF WORLD WAR I

by

Christine Haskill

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
English
Western Michigan University
June 2014

Doctoral Committee:

Todd Kuchta, Ph.D., Chair
Jil C. Larson, Ph.D.
Jon R. Adams, Ph.D.
Kathleen Williams Renk, Ph.D.
Christopher C. Nagle, Ph.D.

BATTLING THE SEPARATE SPHERES: NEW WOMAN WRITERS AND BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS OF WORLD WAR I

Christine Haskill, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2014

In “Battling the Separate Spheres,” I argue that New Woman writers’ interventions into gender discourse at the end of the nineteenth century shaped the feminist pacifist protests of World War I. This analysis illustrates that the discourses of gender and war are intertwined: the rise of the women’s movement in the nineteenth century was positioned as a sex war, and the gender ideology of the separate spheres helped to justify World War I. I examine two New Woman interventions into the separate spheres debates—the “sex war” of the fin de siècle. Olive Schreiner propels women into the public sphere, encouraging them to extend a maternal altruism to meet the needs of the world, while George Egerton reconfigures the private sphere as a space of resistance to the corruption of patriarchy, demonstrating how the public invades the private sphere. Schreiner and Egerton’s feminist interventions into the separate spheres can be used to interpret women writers protesting the gender discourse of World War I. I examine two neglected war writers—poet Margaret Sackville and public intellectual Vernon Lee—and two prominent postwar writers—Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf. Sackville extends Schreiner’s maternal altruism by making maternal grief a platform of pacifist protest, while Lee adopts Egerton’s radical outsider position in order to critique the gender

politics of war experience. In the postwar period, Brittain utilizes Schreiner's politics of reform to redefine patriotism through feminism and pacifism in the public sphere, whereas Woolf synthesizes Schreiner's call for public reform with Egerton's radical turn toward privacy to create a feminist pacifist community of outsiders. Sackville, Lee, Brittain, and Woolf thus extend the New Woman critiques of the separate spheres to protest war and to situate feminism as necessarily pacifist. This analysis demonstrates that the language and imagery of the sex war and the Great War are inextricably linked. While modernism and World War I are positioned in opposition to the preceding period of the Victorians, this project examines a late Victorian inheritance present in the war writers of World War I.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In writing this dissertation, I have often felt like Olive Schreiner's hunter from *The Story of an African Farm*, on a quest and slowly building a stairway by chipping away at stone. While the path to enlightenment or research is often a solitary one, this dissertation was upheld by many people. First, I am grateful to my dissertation advisor Todd Kuchta for his patient and thoughtful feedback, and to my committee—Jil C. Larson, Jon R. Adams, Kathleen Williams Renk, and Christopher C. Nagle—for their dialogue and support. The committee's faith and commitment to my work has made me a more conscientious thinker and writer. In addition to my committee, I'd like to thank Gwen A. Tarbox for her generous mentorship, particularly, her feedback on chapter one, and Nicolas S. Witschi, whose questions about the relationship between feminism and war energized this project for the last year. Furthermore, I am indebted to the intellectual support and funding by the English Department, Gender and Women's Studies, and the Graduate College at Western Michigan University.

This dissertation was also sustained by my friends and family. My parents—Mike and Cheryl Anklam—offered their steadfast prayers and material support, and I'd like to thank my mother, especially, for always having faith in me, even when my own faith wavered. My husband's parents—Steve and Judy Haskill—and my extended family, near and far, lifted me up and helped make Michigan home. My ever-increasing herd of nieces and nephews were a constant inspiration while writing, and it is to them that this

Acknowledgments—Continued

dissertation is, in part, dedicated. My Grand Rapids friends kept me grounded in my academic life, and in particular, Rachel Anderson, Sunshine Somerville, and Miranda Gardner have listened long and offered support and cheer. My academic friends have nurtured me with their encouragement and feedback; they have, in a sense, run alongside me the last few years—Laura Donnelly, Mick Teti-Beaudin, Renee Lee Gardner, Adrienne Redding, and Jason Vanfossen. Renee first helped me see that failure could be something other than failing. Their support has been the lavender field and the sea in my life. Additionally, I want to acknowledge that daily companionship that sustained this project: Lily, whose ghost haunts chapter five, and then Bethy, who is beside me now. They were curled next to me while writing and forcing me to walk while thinking. And last but not least, this dissertation would not be what it is without the unyielding faith and patience of my husband Buddy Haskill, my intellectual companion, whose steady support made all this possible. In particular, his thoughtful reading and conversation of this dissertation brought it into being and forged a more precious intimacy. We've built a good life together, and I dedicate this dissertation to him.

Christine Haskill

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Introduction: Battling the Separate Spheres

A great South African author, Olive Schreiner, once wrote that because women bore children in anguish, they would never allow them to be sacrificed to the passions and hatreds of war if once they had political power. To-day women have that power, for the vote is the greatest of political weapons. Yet we still bear children not only in anguish but in avoidable peril; and the world is still an armed camp.

—Vera Brittain *Honourable Estate* (553)

What were they working for in the nineteenth century—those queer dead women in their poke bonnets and shawls? ... 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. Thus we are merely carrying on the same fight that our mothers and grandmothers fought; their words prove it; your words prove it.

—Virginia Woolf *Three Guineas* (121)

She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation.

—John Ruskin “Of Queens’ Gardens” (159)

In this dissertation, I argue that New Woman writers’ interventions into the gender discourse at the end of the nineteenth century shaped the feminist pacifist protests of World War I. A central argument of this project is that while World War I heightened issues of gender, we must go back to the waning years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth in order to understand these complex constructions. I examine two New Woman interventions into the separate spheres debates—the sex war of the fin de siècle—represented by Olive Schreiner and George Egerton. Both writers reconfigure the terms of the separate spheres in order to deconstruct the division between the public and private. But whereas Schreiner propels women into the public sphere, encouraging them to extend a maternal altruism to meet the needs of the world, Egerton reconfigures

the private sphere, in fact the most private of spheres, a woman's self or soul, as a space of resistance to the corruption of patriarchy, demonstrating how the public invades the private sphere. This analysis demonstrates that the discourses of gender and war are intertwined. The rise of the women's movement in the nineteenth century was positioned as a sex war, drawing on the language of warfare to discuss the relationship between the sexes.

The discourses of gender and war were further deployed during the Great War as a way to justify war and engage civic support. Feminist writers intervened in the discourses of gender and war by challenging and reconfiguring the Victorian separate spheres ideology, and this analysis demonstrates that the language and imagery of the sex war and the Great War are inextricably linked. Schreiner's and Egerton's feminist interventions can be used to interpret two neglected war writers: poet Margaret Sackville and public intellectual Vernon Lee. Sackville extends Schreiner's maternal altruism by making maternal grief a platform of protest, and Lee adopts a radical outsider position in order to critique the gender politics of war experience. In the postwar period, Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf contextualize their feminist arguments against war by drawing on the language and imagery of the New Woman writers. Both Brittain and Woolf question the legacies of feminism and its relationship to the Great War, but they diverge in their political emphases. Brittain utilizes Schreiner's politics of reform to redefine patriotism through feminism and pacifism in the public world of politics, and Woolf synthesizes Schreiner's call for public reform with Egerton's radical turn toward private life to create her feminist pacifist community of outsiders in *Three Guineas*. The war writers examined in this study extend the New Woman critiques of the separate

spheres in order to protest war and to situate feminism as necessarily pacifist. In doing so, they not only challenge how traditional gender was appropriated into the discourse of war, but the ways feminism was deployed as well. While modernism and World War I are positioned in opposition to the preceding period of the Victorians, this project examines a late Victorian inheritance present in the war writers of World War I.

The Victorian gender ideology of the separate spheres was a middle-class discourse that delineated distinct gender roles, as women were associated with the private sphere as moral guardians and men were associated with the public sphere of work and politics. The most prominent image of the separate spheres was found in Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House," an image which Woolf would later insist women writers needed to kill. Excerpted for anthologies and textbooks, John Ruskin's lecture "Of Queens' Gardens" (1865) is often marshalled as a reinforcement of sexual difference envisioned in separate gendered spaces, but what is less commented on is how Ruskin utilizes the imagery and language of warfare to discuss gender. Echoing Sarah Stickney Ellis's ideas of women's moral role in society, Ruskin writes that while men's and women's functions within society are different, both contribute valuably to the progress of a nation. Man is "the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender," and "his energy is for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, where conquest necessary" (158). Woman's power is different; hers is "for rule, not for battle," and "her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision" (158). As Britain became an industrial nation, writers depicted an oppositional divide between the chaotic and violent marketplace and the sacred domesticity of the middle-class home. In doing so, they utilize the language of warfare to describe gender.

But lest we interpret the public and private as solely physical spaces, Ruskin attributes essential qualities to each space. The public sphere is a place of violence and risk; it is the “hostile society of the outer world” (159). The private sphere is depicted as its opposite, as a “place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division” (158). This, he argues, is “the true nature of home” (158). In creating the home as a place of peace, Ruskin encourages women not just to maintain the home, but to embody it by becoming moral sanctuaries themselves. He insists that “wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her. The stars only may be over her head; the glowworm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot; but home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her ... shedding its quiet light far, for those who else were homeless” (159). Her identity becomes synonymous with an embodiment of the home, as she is directed toward service and sacrifice for others.

In *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*, Ellis writes that a woman’s moral power derives from the fulfillment that comes from “promoting the happiness of others” (55). In order to do this, she must “lay aside all her natural caprice, her love of self-indulgence, her vanity, her indolence—in short, her very *self*” (55). Ellis extends this outward to the nation, as women determine the “moral character” of their country through their sacrificial virtues (53). Like Ellis, Ruskin argues a woman must embrace self-sacrifice as a kind of domestic kenosis: “She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation” (159). By depicting woman as a moral sanctuary, he imbues her with the power “to heal, to redeem, to guide, and to guard” (169). The separate spheres

ideology for women becomes not only spatial, but psychological and discursive as women become an embodied-home for others. Ruskin extends this moral guardianship outward, arguing that women—as well as men—have a responsibility to the nation-state. The man is to extend his role “in the defence of the state,” and likewise, the woman’s role is “to assist in the ordering, in the comforting, and in the beautiful adornment of the state;” hers is a moral rather than political influence (169). The language of gender and war are intertwined as Ruskin depicts the separate spheres through the language and imagery of warfare.

What I have discussed thus far reflects what is typically excerpted of Ruskin, but what is less often included is Ruskin’s comment on women’s relationship to the event of war. Women, he argues, are not separated from the moral state of their country; in fact, they are responsible for it:

There is not a war in the world, no, nor an injustice, but you women are answerable for it; not in that you have provoked, but in that you have not hindered. Men, by their nature, are prone to fight; they will fight for any cause, or for none. It is for you to choose their cause for them, and to forbid them when there is no cause. There is no suffering, no injustice, no misery, in the earth, but the guilt of it lies with you. (171)

In this remarkable statement, Ruskin blames women for not extending their moral influence over men in order to disrupt warfare. Men are fighters; women are peacekeepers. This virtue comes from their capacity to feel and their sentimentality: “Men can bear the sight of [war], but you should not be able to bear it. Men may tread it down without sympathy in their own struggle; but men are feeble in sympathy, and

contracted in hope; it is you only who can feel the depths of pain, and conceive the way of its healing” (171). Continuing to invest women with redemptive virtues, Ruskin argues that women’s peacemaking qualities come from their inability to endure the sight of violence and their ability to establish pathos, creating pathways to healing not only for the home, but for the homeland. Ruskin chides women who sever themselves from the state of the nation, who “shut [themselves] within [their] park walls and garden gates” (171). In order to be queens of their own domain, women must extend their moral rule, making the gardens of the home the gardens of England, as “The whole country is but a little garden” (167). The separate spheres was more than a spatial division between the private and the public; it was a discourse of gender that centered women—the embodiment of the home and the homeland—as moral healers of the nation-state.

Ruskin’s oft cited description of the separate spheres sets out important implications for understanding feminist interventions into gender ideology and war. First, the language of gender and war are inextricable. In describing gender roles, Ruskin utilizes the imagery of warfare and peace, constructing the public sphere as an embattled terrain and the domestic as a peaceful sanctuary in which healing and redemption take place. This occurs by women emptying themselves in order to make a space for the moral replenishment of others. Second, Ruskin not only discusses gender through the language of warfare, but delineates gender roles in war, drawing on traditional imagery of men as fighters and women as peacekeepers. But in chastising women for remaining within their garden gates and not intervening in war, Ruskin opens up a site of contestation—if women embody home wherever they go, then why shouldn’t they go into the public sphere? As Mary Poovey demonstrates, gender ideology is often uneven in its

developments, “because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations” (3). While Ruskin was not making a feminist argument, he sets out discursive pieces that New Woman writers and feminists reconfigure in order to challenge the separate spheres ideology.¹

The New Woman was a popular figure that challenged Victorian gender roles; however, as Sally Ledger argues, the representation of the New Woman was diverse: “She was variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women’s movement” (*The New Woman* 1). Feminists’ engagement with the boundaries between the private and public spheres became a central feature of the New Woman writers and the suffrage movement, and as I argue, an important feature for feminist pacifists responding to World War I. As Susan Kingsley Kent states, “nineteenth century feminists argued ... that the public and the private were not distinct spheres but were inseparable from one another; the public was private, the personal was political” (*Sex and Suffrage* 5). While they did not coin the phrase “the personal is political,” New Woman writers interrogated the political implications of private sphere tyrannies. Many in Victorian society argued that feminists were instigating a sex war. As the writer of “The War of the Sexes” proclaims in a 1901 article in *The Idler*: “A Great war cry is ringing out all over England. It echoes in books, in universities, on the platform, and in the family. The fight is beginning; everywhere preliminary skirmishes are taking place; we are on the eve of a great war—the war between the sexes!” (24). The backward glance of history makes the use of “great war”

¹ Whether Ruskin is in fact in line with feminist ideas is up for debate. See Weltman, and also Peterson.

language particularly striking. But while many blamed feminists for the sex war, feminists argued they were already in a state of war as defined by the separate spheres (Kent, *Sex and Suffrage* 57-58); consequently, feminists argued that changing women's social and political status would result in a peace between the sexes: "The feminist movement, and more singularly the suffrage campaign, aimed to supply women with the weapons necessary to repulse male attacks and to establish a condition of 'sex peace'" (164). This change included access to education, legal protections, sexual equality, the professions, and the vote as central issues. While critics and historians agree that the New Woman essentially declined as a cultural figure after the Oscar Wilde trials, her influence over literature and involvement in politics certainly did not.

One way feminists reconfigured the gender roles Ruskin describes is by extending women's guardianship as mothers into the public sphere, making their moral influence a political one. One such New Woman writer is Olive Schreiner. While Sarah Grand was the first to coin the term New Woman in order to challenge the supposed True Woman—the Angel in the House—Schreiner's heroine Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is seen as the first New Woman character.² In chapter one, I examine Schreiner, who reforms women's moral roles as mothers in order to argue for their equality in politics and the professions and to advocate a maternal pacifism. This move makes a logical extension of Ruskin's argument that women must expand their virtues beyond their garden gates and intervene in war. But whereas Ruskin envisions women's self-sacrifice in the moral service of the home/land, Schreiner puts maternal self-sacrifice in

² "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" *North American Review* 158 (March 1894): 270-76. See Nelson.

the service of women's equality in politics and the public sphere. Furthermore, Schreiner argues that motherhood opens up a site of pacifist knowledge about the worth of human bodies, a knowledge she argues they should use to intervene in government and war.

Schreiner's trajectory broadens women's roles to the public sphere, and she argues that women's equality with men will lead to peace, both between men and women as well as among nations. But this is not the only reconfiguration made possible within the separate spheres ideology. In chapter two, I argue that George Egerton offers a different form of contestation in her short fiction collections *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1895). While Schreiner reforms women's self-sacrifice in the service of politics, Egerton rejects the patriarchal association of women with altruistic domesticity and redefines women's identities through self-development rather than self-renunciation. Egerton highlights the language of warfare present in the separate spheres ideology and contends that women must battle with male definitions of womanhood. But rather than argue for institutional reform—as Schreiner does—Egerton argues that women must take back their identities and construct a home that remains separate from the corruption of patriarchal culture. Egerton evinces a radical suspicion of patriarchal institutions and often rejects masculine culture in favor of separate women's communities. Egerton reconfigures the domestic space as a site of feminine self-development rather than feminine self-sacrifice.

Ruskin's gender-war imagery and the New Woman writers' critiques anticipate the cultural discourse of World War I. Society initially followed Ruskin's lead, compelling men to fight and women to heal and redeem their men's sacrifices through surrender and mourning. As many scholars contend, politicians, writers, and

propagandists drew on gender to mobilize the nation to war: “[the] ideal British man and woman were most often embodied in the images of soldier and nurse—he representing the masculine virtues of bravery, strength, and courage, she the feminine ideals of compassion, nurturing, and virtue” (Robb 36). This reinforcement of dominant gender ideology emerged from the crisis in gender at the turn of the century. Not only had the women’s movement instigated a sex war, but as Sarah Cole explains, masculinity was in crisis as well: “when military recruitment officials in 1902 announced that only two in five men were physically fit to serve in the Boer War, many English people not only felt that the nation had reached the brink of disaster, but they also understood the crisis specifically as a problem of dilapidated masculinity” (*The Organization of Intimacy* 5-6). The Great War itself was framed as an antidote to decay, and as George Robb explains, many British people believed the Great War would be “an opportunity to redeem the nation’s manhood,” and that “it was hoped, [the war] would regenerate manliness in men and femininity in women” (33). In essence, the war offered an opportunity to reinforce the sexual division represented by the separate spheres ideology. But the realities of a nation at war and the involvement of the women’s movement challenged the ideals of gender.

Between the late nineteenth century and World War I, the women’s movement pushed aggressively for the vote. But when war broke out in 1914, the campaign for suffrage was suspended in order to support the war: “For all intents and purposes, ‘votes for women’ was dead for the duration of the war” (Kent, *Sex and Suffrage* 220). Much of the suffrage movement supported the war effort as an opportunity to demonstrate women’s strength and capability in the public sphere. The vigorous fight to deconstruct

the separate spheres ideology, symbolized by the vote, became all the more complex during wartime. Many women were involved in the war effort and were eventually brought into various industries traditionally held by men. Kent explains that “As men went off to war, women joined the work force in unprecedented numbers, taking jobs as munitions workers, agricultural laborers, tram conductors, ambulance drivers, frontline nurses, and, finally, after the disasters of 1916, auxiliary soldiers” (*Making Peace* 35). This shift in home front work disrupted the ideological divisions between the private sphere of domesticity and the public sphere of work and politics. While the realities of warfare challenged the stability of dominant gender, the cultural imagery associated with the separate spheres ideology continued to wield powerful influence over wartime discourse, as the home front became feminized and the battlefield was masculinized. Dominant gender roles associated with the separate spheres were both contested and redeployed.

The war both disrupted and reinforced the separate spheres, and feminism as well as traditional femininity were part of the discursive deployment of war. One writer who represents this dual deployment is Jessie Pope, whose infamous poem “Who’s for the Game?” imagined the war as an athletic competition. When Pope writes, “Who’s for the game, the biggest that’s played, / The red crashing game of a fight?” (1-2), she draws on and subverts traditional gender roles in order to take a more active role as a war supporter. She deploys an athletic language of masculinity alongside a rhetoric of courage to propel men to the front: “Who’ll grip and tackle the job unafraid? / And who thinks he’d rather sit tight?” (3-4), and “Who wants to turn to himself in the show? / And who wants a seat in the stand?” (7-8). The speaker asserts that men can either join the

game or become cowardly spectators. As Cole explains, “The rhetoric surrounding masculinity—in relation to athleticism, house and school loyalty, patriotic and imperial sentiment—inevitably relied upon intense group identification, and this matrix of manliness and loyalty to impersonal institutions found its logical culmination in the theater of war” (*Modernism, Male Friendship* 146). Pope utilizes traditional gender roles when she calls to men: “Your country is up to her neck in a fight, / And she’s looking and calling for you” (16-17). But by taking on a more vocal and political role, Pope simultaneously subverts the division between the public and the private, as her other poems celebrate women’s war work. In “War Girls,” she illustrates how women assumed traditionally masculine jobs as evidence of their participation in war: “There’s the motor girl who drives a heavy van, / There’s the butcher girl who brings your joint of meat, / There’s the girl who cries ‘All fares, please!’ like a man” (11-13). These war girls are “Strong, sensible, and fit,” and “They’re out to show their grit, / And tackle jobs with energy and knack” (5, 6-7). The speaker asserts this as a direct challenge to the separate spheres ideology; women are capable and, moreover, they are doing men’s jobs. She states that they are “No longer caged and penned up” in the private sphere, and “They’re going to keep their end up” in the public sphere “Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back” (8-10). The war effort, according to Pope’s speaker, is made up of soldier boys and war girls, each doing their part. Culturally, the discourse of war relied upon traditional gender, but it also deployed feminist arguments in support of war.

But not all feminists supported the war or were comfortable with it providing a means to women’s liberation. The Pankhurst family reflects this split, as Sylvia parted ways with Emmeline and Christabel in order to protest the war. While the trench lyric is

most often associated with World War I, women poets also wrote of their experiences of war. While Pope famously trumpeted the ideals of war, Margaret Sackville's poetry, which I discuss in chapter three, intervenes in the discourse of war by making maternal grief a political site of protest. Analyzing how the maternal was appropriated by the discourse of war, Sackville sets out to reclaim the maternal as a site of pacifism. In doing so, I argue, she extends Schreiner's maternal feminist pacifism. While many feminist pacifists claimed the maternal in order to construct their authority to speak out against war, Vernon Lee offers a contrast by adopting an oppositional stance to society as an outsider to war, which is the subject of chapter four. Reflecting a similar radical feminist strategy as Egerton, Lee rejects traditionally cherished ideals, namely patriotism and self-sacrifice. As such, her pacifist argument challenges the separate spheres division that would keep women from the domain of war by showing how the discourse of the Great War relies on the gendered participation of both men and women.

After the war, writers attempted to grapple with cultural grief, loss, and trauma, as well as offer a retrospective critique of war and gender. The 1920s and 30s were booming for high modernist works as well as war memoirs and fiction. Postwar Britain was a time of reconstructing the nation in symbolic and literal ways. Peace was far from peaceful at home or abroad, as the Spanish Civil War emerged and the threats of fascism pointed toward a second world war. After the Great War ended, society sought stability in a revised traditional gender ideology, a return to the separate spheres: "The perceived blurring of gender lines occasioned by war's upheaval led many in British society to see in a reestablishment of sexual difference the means to re-create a semblance of order" (Kent, *Making Peace* 99). While the realities of war disrupted the separate spheres, the

ideology—the cultural gender narrative—remained pervasive, and while women’s legal and institutional barriers to the public sphere started to crumble after the war, a significant gender backlash ensued, reinstating the separate spheres. As Kent argues, this backlash focused more on a psychoanalytic discourse than a legislative one: “The discourses on sexuality that predominated in the postwar years appropriated the language and imagery of war as psychoanalysts, sexologists and sex reformers sought in the study of sexuality the means for the maintenance and salvation of civilization itself” (*Making Peace* 108). All throughout, the language of gender was intimately connected to the language of war.

In order to intervene in this tumultuous period, I argue that both Brittain and Woolf advocated feminist pacifism by returning to the Victorians and the arguments of the New Woman writers. In *Honourable Estate*, Brittain writes,

A great South African author, Olive Schreiner, once wrote that because women bore children in anguish, they would never allow them to be sacrificed to the passions and hatreds of war if once they had political power. To-day women have that power, for the vote is the greatest of political weapons. Yet we still bear children not only in anguish but in avoidable peril; and the world is still an armed camp. (553)

Brittain consciously constructs herself as Schreiner’s successor, interrogating the legacies of feminism and war in order to argue for a reconstruction of peace both between the sexes and in society more generally. Drawing on the imagery of war, she contends “the world is still an armed camp.” In order to end war, Brittain argues that women must enter the realm of politics. Similarly, Woolf writes in *Three Guineas*:

What were they working for in the nineteenth century—those queer dead women in their poke bonnets and shawls? ... 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. Thus we are merely carrying on the same fight that our mothers and grandmothers fought. (121)

In this statement, Woolf argues that the objectives of the nineteenth-century feminist and the twentieth-century pacifist are the same—they both fight against tyranny. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf reaches back to the Victorians, combining the feminist politics of Schreiner and Egerton in order to advocate for women's equality and a reconfiguring of the private sphere as a space of resistance to the tyrannies of war and patriarchy. Both writers return to the Victorian separate spheres in order to understand the legacies of war; in doing so, they both challenge the separate spheres as a site of war and reconfigure Victorian feminism as a basis for pacifism.

While the war dismantled much of the separate spheres out of necessity, Brittain and Woolf lived within a cultural backlash that attempted to reinstate a postwar return to the separate spheres. Drawing on the New Woman writers' critiques of the separate spheres offered them a discourse from which to develop their own analyses. Both writers construct a feminist Victorian inheritance, but they diverge in their political emphases, as Brittain compels women into the public sphere of politics to intervene in war, and Woolf reconfigures the private sphere as a site of resistance to the tyrannies of gender and war. While the narratives of World War I and modernism traditionally reflect a break from the Victorians, both Brittain and Woolf interrogate the legacies of feminism and war by

reaching back to their Victorian foremothers. This discursive divide can be traced back to two New Woman interventions in the separate spheres debates—the sex war of the fin de siècle—represented by Schreiner and Egerton.

Brittain and Woolf's return to the arguments and ideas of late Victorian feminism represents the overarching argument and trajectory of this project. Brittain and Woolf reach back to New Woman interventions into the separate spheres discourse in order to understand the relationship between gender and war. I argue this genealogical relationship has not received enough critical attention. These writers illustrate how the relationship between gender and war is reflected not only in the descriptions of gender ideology itself, as a sex war, but in the justifications for war. Furthermore, their writing not only attempted to intervene in a cultural discourse of war, but also in the early discourse of feminism. Both writers demonstrate how feminism itself was appropriated into the war, and they argue that in order for feminism to continue its goals of equality and freedom, feminism should be pacifist.

To see post-World War I writers like Brittain and Woolf through the lens of the late Victorians has been a largely neglected topic because we often define modernists, as Raymond Williams argues, “by what they are breaking from than by what, in any simple way, they are breaking towards” (43). Similarly, the scholarship of World War I tends to emphasize its break from the Victorian past rather than contextualize progressions or continuities. My project traces a feminist continuum hitherto overlooked in World War I scholarship, largely because definitions of modernism and World War I studies are predominantly defined in masculine terms.

My dissertation puts two different scholarly debates in conversation with one another, asserting that the difficulties presented in both fields might productively speak to one another. The first problem is how literary scholars define periods. When scholars view modernism as a radical rupture from Victorian aesthetics and ideology, they privilege the experimental feature of modernism at the expense of other important characteristics, such as politics. What happens to period definitions when we view these women writers through the lens of politics rather than aesthetics only? The second problem emerges from the field of war scholarship, specifically that of World War I. Traditionally, the soldier's voice defines the canon of war writers, but this marginalizes women's writing about war. This raises the question—what defines war literature? What happens when we consider the full range and cultural significance of war experiences?

While modernism is conceived as a break from the past, recent scholarship explores the relationships between the periods. As Jessica R. Feldman argues in “Modernism's Victorian Bric-a-brac,” “when modernist writers insist upon radical discontinuity, we should not take them at their word. We should examine those words and the resulting works of art carefully, because Victorian practices often vitally inform modernist works. What is dismissed is also summoned” (454). My dissertation continues the work of locating what Feldman calls “Victorian modernism” through an examination of Victorian separate spheres representations operating in the works of New Woman writers and women writers protesting World War I. Prior critiques have laid the groundwork for such an analysis, as Ledger argues that New Woman writing shaped modern aesthetics, and Rita Felski's book *The Gender of Modernity* similarly examines gender and modernism in a longer historical progression of late nineteenth-century texts.

Lyn Pykett positions the crisis of war within a longer trajectory from the late Victorian period to modernism: “Although many contemporary writers attributed the crisis in/of masculinity directly to the war and to the experience of combat, the terms in which they articulated and defined this crisis are those of the fin de siècle discourse of gender and degeneration” (49). Similarly, Cole’s book on male friendship begins with late Victorian gender discourse and culminates in her analysis of war literature, but her book focuses on the construction of men’s relationships within their writing. Despite this important research that makes connections between the New Woman and modernism, scholars have not addressed the relationship between New Woman writers and the women writers of World War I. In this dissertation, I examine that relationship, arguing that their work shows a preoccupation with the recurring imagery of the separate spheres as a basis for intervening in both the sex war and the Great War.

In this way, my work follows from the historian Susan Kingsley Kent’s analyses of the women’s movement and its subsequent relationship to war in *Sex and Suffrage* and *Making Peace*. In *Making Peace*, Kent examines “the way gender was utilized to construct war, and of the way war, conceived in gendered terms, then shaped understandings of gender” in the interwar period (10). Her analysis of the first wave of feminism revolves around the separate spheres and feminists’ campaign for access to political representation. Her work largely focuses on the political history and ideology of the women’s movement, and I use this as a contextual backdrop for understanding how politics and aesthetics are negotiated in women’s writing about gender and war, particularly in the construction of feminist pacifism.

While Kent focuses on the cultural and political discourse of feminism, I situate my analysis in literature, arguing that cultural engagements with the separate spheres also operated within and were shaped by artistic discourse.³ My analysis shows that women writers were intervening in the cultural discourse of gender and war in much the same way as their political counterparts in the women's movement. In fact, the boundaries between literature and politics are unstable, as many of these authors were outspoken members of the feminist movement. This relationship between politics and aesthetics is a central feature of New Woman fiction, and as I will argue, an important feature of women's writing against World War I. As Ann Heilmann asserts, the New Woman writers contested "the conventional dichotomies between literature and political writing, art and popular culture" in order to "[open] up a largely gynocentric space for the discussion and dissemination of feminist thought" (1-2).⁴ Like Heilmann, I argue that New Woman fiction is shaped by an "intersection of cultural politics and political activism" and further assert that this intersection is a central characteristic for women writers protesting World War I. Scholars such as Claire M. Tylee and Sharon Ouditt provide broad analyses of women's writing about war, and Felski and Pykett furnish comprehensive overviews of gender and modernism; I offer a close reading of women writers and texts that resonates with and extends the broader structures and patterns they discuss in their comprehensive studies.

³ Kent's work does offer connections to literary works, but that is not her primary focus.

⁴ Rita S. Kranidis makes a similar claim and adds that this joint political-aesthetic feature led to their marginalization within a broader cultural context: "Mainstream, nonpartisan aesthetics served either to 'privatize' feminist concerns and themes, or to exclude them from High Culture and to group them with Low Culture and issues concerning the 'masses.' As a result, the potentially empowering referentiality between the feminists' novels and their social activism was compromised; negating any connection between life and literature, the dominant aesthetic ideology opposed feminists' attempts to make public, and to theorize and politicize, women's 'private' lives" (xv).

Seeing the affinities rather than the radical ruptures between New Woman writers and war writers locates a different kind of Victorian inheritance present in the moderns (both those who were modernist and those who were of the early twentieth century). Feldman writes that a newly considered “Victorian modernist aesthetic” reveals “both rupture and continuity” as well as “stark differences and relations across gaps” (453). Feldman insists that in order to locate Victorian modernism, scholars must “learn to consider works of art as webs of relations and ideas with multiple centers and gaps, a filigree-in-progress” (453). Such an undertaking emphasizes finding resonating ideas, structures, and themes, or as Feldman contends, interpreting “patterns” that “link to other patterns” (456). In order to trace a Victorian inheritance regarding gender and war, my focus has been less on locating biographical connections among the authors than on examining these “works of art as webs of relations,” which share common themes and political ideas. To do so has been to explore a genealogy of ideas in conversation with one another, demonstrating that these ideas were part of a broader cultural discourse on gender occurring through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When we consider both the ruptures and continuities, I argue we can trace a confluence of ideas regarding the legacies of the separate spheres within the domains of gender and war, as the writers I examine both break from the mid-Victorian separate spheres ideology and reconfigure its pieces to create a Victorian feminist legacy. This move shapes how women writers protested a war that continued to draw on the separate spheres. Furthermore, both Britain and Woolf interrogated the Victorian inheritance they wished to break from by reconfiguring a Victorian feminist legacy they wished to extend as the basis for feminist pacifism.

The Great War is often associated with modernism as a point of rupture with the Victorians, and this narrative is often told through male writers, as the trench lyrics of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon lead to the cacophony of alienated voices in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Scholars have investigated how New Woman writers and the war writers shaped modernist aesthetics, but the relationship between New Woman writers and World War I women writers has received less attention. While Feldman argues that the Victorian mid-century has been lost in the narrative of modernism, I argue that the New Woman has been lost in the writings about war. As such, this analysis not only furnishes a fuller picture of the relationship between late Victorian aesthetics and early twentieth-century writers, but it contributes to an on-going conversation within World War I scholarship regarding what counts as war literature.

While World War I literature tells a diverse story ranging from exhilaration to horror from both the home front and the battlefields, the soldier poet, and more specifically the dissenting one, has come to dominate the narrative of the Great War, as illustrated by Paul Fussell's landmark text *The Great War and Modern Memory*. His book directed critical attention to the diversity of texts largely written by combatants during and after World War I, and he established a literary history linking war writing and modernism. For Fussell, the "dominating form of modernist understanding ... is essentially ironic" and "originates largely in the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War" (35). World War I literature has been defined as a masculine discourse written by soldiers about their experiences, particularly in the trenches.

Since the 1980s and 90s, scholars have challenged the construction of this canon and what James Campbell calls "combat gnosticism," which he defines as "the belief that

combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience” (203). This experience acts as a “secret knowledge which only an initiated elite knows” (204). According to Campbell, this belief results in two problematic consequences for the war canon: it “has served both to limit severely the canon of texts that mainstream First World War criticism has seen as legitimate war writing and has simultaneously promoted war literature’s status as a discrete body of work with almost no relation to non-war writing” (203). In other words, the ideology of combat gnosticism both elevates soldiers’ writing as authentic war writing and separates it from other forms of writing.

In this study, I would like to extend the combat gnosticism discussion. As Campbell explains, much of war writing and the scholarship about war reinforces the belief that only those who have experienced the battlefield can speak about war, yet so often this assertion is couched in the inability to speak about it, its very incommunicability. Fussell writes, “the presumed inadequacy of language itself to convey the facts about trench warfare is one of the motifs of all who wrote about the war” (170). In accounting for this motif, Fussell explains,

The problem was less one of “language” than of gentility and optimism; it was less a problem of “linguistics” than of rhetoric.... The real reason is that soldiers have discovered that no one is very interested in the bad news they have to report. What listener wants to be torn and shaken when he doesn’t have to be? We have made *unspeakable* mean indescribable: it really means *nasty*. (170)

This gap between the rhetoric and reality of warfare reflects Fussell's assertion that "Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected" (7). But as Campbell discusses, combat is also depicted as an initiation to masculinity: "a definitive coming to manhood for the industrial age, in which boys and men by confronting mechanical horror and discovering their essential masculinity, perhaps even their essential humanity, in a realm from which feminine presence is banished" (204). The predominating theme of an unspeakable irony not only emerges from a masculine initiation into the trenches, but also on a reliance of its very incommunicability to and detachment from femininity. This does not originate in its entirety from World War I, but, at least in part, from the separate spheres ideology of the Victorians.

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Marlow returns from the Congo after witnessing Kurtz's damning last words "The horror, the horror" and finds himself unable to reintegrate into society, describing people as "intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating presence because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew" (70-71). Although Marlow has not fought in a war, his experience has created a form of knowledge that he cannot communicate, not only because it seems incommunicable, but because to communicate it would be to shatter their "assurance of perfect safety" (71). Marlow is haunted by his memory of Kurtz, and in an attempt to honor Kurtz's memory and purge some of his ghost, he returns Kurtz's letters to his Intended. His Intended is an image of the Angel in the House, whom Marlow describes as having an angelic countenance—"This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo" (74)—and a moral beauty: "a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering" (73). This angelic presence and her faith in Kurtz, representative

of the separate spheres, keeps Marlow from uttering the truth of Kurtz's last words: "But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether" (77). And so Marlow does not shatter the illusion of her faith in Kurtz, but more importantly he does not shatter the illusion of the separate spheres. Her faith in Kurtz as a great man and a symbol of empire depends on her ignorance of the truth and the purity of her faith in the ideals he represents. It depends on a feminine private sphere separate from the masculine world of imperial conquest. Moreover, her ignorance of the truth and her continued faith and mourning of Kurtz—reflecting the ironic gap between the rhetoric and the realities of imperialism—keep the cycle of imperialism going by relying on a reproduction of the separate spheres, on a detached and pure femininity. Marlow's complicity in reinforcing the separate spheres sheds light on the role of combat gnosticism and its relation to gender in World War I. What I would add to Campbell's critique is this: it is not just that war writing requires the soldier to convey the incommunicability of the horrors of the trenches, but that the ideology of combat gnosticism also more fully depends on the separate spheres for its reproduction. By not interrogating women's war writing, we risk replicating the very gender ideology which the war relied upon.

In making this point, I do not wish to say that the incommunicability of war is simply a matter of withholding a "dark" or unpleasant "truth," as there are certainly experiences which defy expression, nor do I wish to discount the real horrors of war that soldiers experience. Rather, the theme of war's incommunicability not only reproduces the ideology of combat gnosticism, but reiterates the ideology of separate spheres as well. In this way, I echo other feminist scholars in asserting that the experience of war needs a broader definition. As Mary A. Favret has recently shown in her work on Romantic

literature as wartime writing, war occurs “at a distance” and beyond the boundaries we ordinarily ascribe to space and time, including domestic spaces (4-5). Feminist scholars writing about World War I seek to open up the boundaries of war to include women, as Tylee redefines war as a “state of hostility between human beings” (13). Dorothy Goldman best summarizes this feminist critique:

To the untutored mind the literature of World War I consists of the poetry produced by a mythical band of gallant, yet somehow pacifist, warriors. Not only is this in itself a very partial picture, but it utilizes only half the possible referents. Women experienced the War too, though in a different way from their husbands and sons, their lovers and brothers; they suffered different torments, adopted new patterns of thought, new lives and sometimes new identities, because of it; and constantly they wrote about it. (1)

Asserting that “women experienced the War too,” feminist scholars have focused on redressing the imbalance of gender perspectives on World War I.⁵ This has been an important step in recovering women’s historical positions and many neglected works, and yet by focusing on women’s “experiences” of war, scholars have continued to reinforce that experience more authentically defines war literature. When I originally began this project I had hoped to posit an alternative to experience as the defining characteristic of war writing, and yet, repeatedly my own analysis comes back to it as an integral part of these writers’ protests of war. What became more interesting to me was not just that they

⁵ For further scholarship on women’s writing and World War I, see especially Nosheen Khan; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar; Claire M. Tylee; Sharon Ouditt; Dorothy Goldman; Debra Rae Cohen.

experienced war, but that they framed this experience as part of their rhetoric of dissent. In this way, the writers I examine here offer various sites of contestation; writers such as Sackville and Brittain intentionally posit their experience in the war as a challenge to combat gnosticism, and others such as Lee and Woolf explicitly mark themselves as “outsiders” to war in order to adopt a politics of pacifist indifference. What unites their writing about war is an investigation into the separate spheres, demonstrating that relying on the division between the private and the public and its corresponding gender roles for men to fight and women to mourn not only was appropriated into the discourse of war, but perpetuated it as well. In this way, women are not passive victims of the masculine domain of war, but more often than not, principal participants in reproducing war by keeping a faith in war in place. The writers I examine in this project seek to intervene in the discourses of gender and war by disrupting the separate spheres ideology that would separate the home front from the battlefield, and they situate feminism as pacifist.

This project is organized into six chapters, charting the development of feminist interventions into the discourses of gender and war from the late Victorian period through the 1930s. Chapter one sets out a political strategy of reform by showing how New Woman writer Olive Schreiner advocated moving women from the private to the public sphere, making the personal, or maternal, political. While scholarship often represents Schreiner’s politics and writing as contradictory and thwarted, I argue that her fiction and nonfiction reflect complex tensions between the individual and the community as well as tensions between utopian progress and the difficult and often failing road to that progress. What emerges from these tensions is a late Victorian feminist politics and ethics emphasizing a maternal altruism that moves women and their values from the private

sphere to the public sphere. Schreiner advocates for freedom and equality, but she illustrates the costs of pursuing them. She imagines the New Woman breaking away from traditions in order to pursue freedom and equality for all humanity; however, she emphasizes that the first who break away from their community are vulnerable to failure. Rather than depict these failures as a waste, Schreiner interprets them positively, showing how the first few steps toward freedom, even if they are missteps, are valuable. These failing sacrifices contribute productively to the collective movement toward progress. Working with Schreiner's writings on gender, war, and empire as well her short fiction, I utilize this concept of the valuable failure in order to reinterpret the complexities of Schreiner's New Woman Lyndall from *The Story of an African Farm*.

Chapter two reveals a second political strategy central to the New Woman's critique of the separate spheres. George Egerton challenges the separate spheres by focusing on how patriarchy corrupts the private sphere for women, making the home not a sanctuary of peace, but a landscape of war. Egerton analyzes women's sexual identity within the private sphere, rejecting patriarchal definitions of womanhood based on self-sacrifice in order to advocate self-development. She depicts an internal war between the competing identities of patriarchal womanhood and a more authentic female identity. While Ruskin asserts that women's identities are embodied in the moral home, Egerton rejects the Victorian definition of womanhood, and instead, focuses on a woman-defined identity within the private sphere. In doing so, she reconfigures women's identities as homes for themselves. Egerton, in contrast to Schreiner, reinforces an oppositional stance to the public sphere, which informs her resistance to feminism as complicit with the

patriarchal powers that subjugated women. Her feminism is not defined by equality in the public sphere but through the language of individualism and (sexual) freedom.

In chapter three, I argue that Margaret Sackville's wartime protest poetry is an extension of Schreiner's maternal arguments against war. Women's war poetry is often overlooked because it lacks the formal innovation of modernism, and as some scholars argue, it is too sentimental and therefore lacks a feminist politics. This claim assumes that sentimentality is antithetical to politics, which in turn reinforces the gender ideology of the separate spheres. In this chapter, I discuss a female poetic tradition which utilized the maternal as a platform of authority from which to protest the war. The use of the maternal may appear sentimental and even traditional, but it provides many women poets with the authority to speak about their own experiences of war; they position themselves as insiders to the war discourse. A focal point of this chapter is Sackville's pacifist book of poems *The Pageant of War* (1916), which refuses the redemptive rhetoric of the soldiers' sacrifice by linking this sacrifice to mothers. Sackville extends Schreiner's maternal feminist pacifism in order to call upon women to refuse sacrifice as a form of redemption. In doing so, Sackville subverts the separate spheres division between the home front and the battlefield. She calls upon mothers to intervene on behalf of the world's children and end war, even if that requires that they refuse the consolation of mourning.

In chapter four, I argue that while many feminist pacifists adopted the maternal as the rhetorical and political grounds to speak against war, Vernon Lee's allegorical closet drama *Satan the Waster* (1920) furnishes an alternate reconfiguration of the separate spheres ideology by mapping the public discourse of war onto the private self. Lee argues that the discourse of war relies on a synthesis of religious iconography and gender

politics to create what I call the sacred narrative of the Great War. Lee argues that the Great War depends upon a sacred narrative of gendered self-sacrifice, which is symbolically linked to the nation. She puts forward two critiques of this sacred narrative which she calls “ethical heresies.” In these ethical heresies, Lee questions and ultimately rejects the sacred virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice within the discourse of war. She argues it is her critical distance as an outsider—her spiritual detachment—from the war which enables her to see and speak about war more clearly.

Chapter five examines Vera Brittain’s negotiation of the separate spheres ideology in her analysis of war. In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain rhetorically constructs her authority to speak as an insider to both the home front and the battle field. When we examine Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* and its companion piece *Honourable Estate* through the lens of Schreiner’s politics, we can see Brittain’s redefinition of honourable estate as the fulfillment of Schreiner’s concept of the valuable failure. In both texts, Brittain utilizes Schreiner’s concept of the valuable failure to assert that the sacrifices of the war and the women’s movement are not only valuable, but can actually be redeemed by the feminist pacifist survivor. Envisioning herself as Schreiner’s successor, Brittain elevates sacrifice and failure as a valuable part of postwar reconstruction.

In chapter six, I argue that the two discursive threads built by Schreiner and Egerton lead to Virginia Woolf, who advocated for women’s equality in the public sphere as well as reconfigured the private sphere as a space of resistance to tyranny. The politics evinced in *Three Guineas* (1938) reflect a literary-political debate over feminist methods and establishes modes of resistance to patriarchy and war through Woolf’s community of outsiders. When Woolf’s persona in *Three Guineas* refuses to join the man’s pacifist

society and reconfigures the private house tradition as an outsider, she brings the work of Egerton and Lee together. In this chapter, I utilize the concepts set forth in *Three Guineas* to reinterpret earlier works such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Both Lily Briscoe and Clarissa Dalloway embody nascent forms of Woolf's outsider strategies and her ethics of nonviolence. This examination demonstrates that while we often think of Woolf as the modernist who divorced herself from her Victorian predecessors, she was deeply engaged with the legacies of Victorian gender ideology and how the Great War shaped that inheritance.

Chapter 1: Olive Schreiner's Reforming Vision of Maternal Altruism and Valuable Failures

We knew, this thing at least we knew,—the worth
Of life : this was our secret learned at birth.

—Margaret Sackville “Nostra Culpa” (1-2)

[L]et the cynics say what they will, we have gone forward.... No age ... will ever see the whole of salvation, but every age sees a part of it.... There are others to come which I shall not see.

—Vera Brittain, *Honourable Estate* (586)

Much of Olive Schreiner scholarship vacillates between admiration for her visionary work and disappointment with the contradictory nature of her aesthetics. She writes didactic prose and often interjects with allegories or parables. To some critics, she appears ahead of her time as a feminist critical of empire and racism, and to others, bound by the racism and imperialism of her time. A defining voice in this scholarship has been Elaine Showalter, who in *A Literature of Their Own* declared:

For someone so keenly aware of female oppression, Schreiner is sadly underambitious. When all is said and done, the novels are depressing and claustrophobic. The heroines are granted only the narrowest of possibilities; the treatment of them is disconcertingly unadventurous, even timid....[L]ike Schreiner, they give up too easily and too soon. (203)

In “‘A Literature of Their Own’ Revisited,” Showalter confesses that she was too harsh in her appraisal of the New Woman writers and their significance and therefore tempers

her critique of Schreiner's work. Yet she still finds Schreiner wanting, seeing Schreiner's turn to forms other than fiction as an assent to defeat or unfulfilled talent.¹

Showalter's evaluation reflects broader trends in second wave feminist criticism that focused on recovery of women writers and positive feminist imagery. Yet the tendency to evaluate Schreiner's limitations through her biography—the interpretation that her thwarted life plays out in her feminine heroine Lyndall and her disappointing turn to didactic short fiction—carries on in more recent scholarship. As Anne McClintock contends

Schreiner's life and writings were crisscrossed by contradiction. Solitary by temperament, she hobnobbed with celebrities. Hungering for recognition, she shrank from the publicity when it came. Insisting on women's right to sexual pleasure, she suffered torments in confronting her own urgent desires. At odds with her imperial world, she was at times the most colonial of writers. (259)

The tendency to read Schreiner biographically consistently suggests a plagued writer who never met her potential.² While I do not wish to simply reverse this evaluation and claim Schreiner as a feminist saint, I would like to initiate a reinvestigation of her work because it shaped subsequent generations of feminist thought. Rather than focus on her biography as the source of interpreting Schreiner's contradictory ideas, I examine the feminist

¹ This criticism carried into the 1980s when, for example, Merryn Williams states that Schreiner's "work has some glaring faults. One is formlessness; *The Story of an African Farm*, for instance, pauses for a chapter while the Stranger tells a quite unnecessary parable about the White Bird of Truth" (5). As I will demonstrate in this chapter, her aesthetics and politics are coherent and interconnected; the stranger narrative Williams derides is integral to Schreiner's overarching thematics.

² Williams comments, "Since the *African Farm* she had published nothing important; only *Dreams*, a collection of allegories, in 1890, and some stories and various articles on South Africa" (3-4).

politics present in her fiction, allegories, and political essays. Her ideas may appear contradictory; yet, a close analysis of Schreiner's imagery reveals a series of tensions in her thinking, tensions that lead to a complex engagement with the politics and ethics of reform, altruism, and failure. Schreiner's intervention into the separate spheres reconfigures the maternal as a source of political power in the public sphere, and this reconfiguration of the maternal significantly shaped feminist pacifist interventions into the discourse of World War I.

A reinvestigation of Schreiner's feminist politics enables a return to her New Woman heroine Lyndall of *The Story of an African Farm*. Though Lyndall often becomes the mouthpiece for Schreiner's feminism, she seemingly does not embody Schreiner's ideals regarding a woman's place in the world. Showalter laments: "Why does she give long speeches about the oppression of women and the need for women to work and yet behave with such fatal passivity?" (introduction, xvi).³ Laurence Lerner goes so far as to argue that Lyndall's death "is a most unfeminist way to die" (74-75). The contradiction between Lyndall's feminist voice and her seemingly unfeminist death carries into analyses of the novel as a whole. Ruth Robbins explains: "this is a political novel whose 'message' is hard to discern. It is clear that Schreiner had an explicitly feminist agenda.... At the same time, however, it does not tell its readers what to think in anything

³ Gilbert and Gubar similarly contend that Lyndall contradicts herself: "In fact, the central problems of this often incoherent work arise from its author's inability to find a plot commensurate with her own and her heroine's desires. Thus *The Story of an African Farm* is a story of contradictions precisely because, even while Schreiner argues for female freedom, she cannot seem to represent such freedom effectively in the life of her heroine" (52).

approaching a clear way” (172).⁴ While Lyndall’s death has been read alternately as a struggle between freedom and love, as an act of defiance and martyrdom, and as a contrast to Schreiner’s ideals, this discussion neglects to address how Lyndall’s death might be a failure in itself, but nevertheless a valuable one that Schreiner envisions as an important and necessary step toward feminist progress.⁵

While critics provide important analyses of Lyndall’s and Schreiner’s work, they do not reflect the full complexity of Lyndall’s death and Schreiner’s feminist vision. In this chapter, I investigate Schreiner’s feminist arguments for gender equality and maternal altruism in *Woman and Labour* (1911) and *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923). Schreiner’s arguments reveal that she simultaneously advanced an understanding of gender as socially constructed and an essentialist maternalism as a metaphor for ethics. Schreiner’s intervention into the separate spheres extends the maternal beyond the private sphere to the public sphere of politics and social reform. On the one hand, she argues women and men should be treated equally, and on the other, she argues the only specific gender difference is in the maternal as a site of knowledge.

While these texts contend for institutional reform, Schreiner also writes about the individual struggling for social change—both successes and the value of failures. By situating *African Farm* alongside Schreiner’s allegories, short fiction, and essays, Lyndall’s life and death are contextualized as one of many examples Schreiner puts

⁴ Mechel Camp further comments on the difficulty of reading *African Farm*: “Though we admire it, we can’t quite grasp the author’s intention. Indeed, after many readings of the novel, I find it more puzzling rather than less so” (17).

⁵ Critics such as Robbins, Carolyn Burdett, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis interpret Lyndall’s death as a tragic commentary on her struggle between love and freedom as a New Woman and then a fallen woman. Gilbert and Gubar depict her death as a heroically defiant act and consider her a martyr. Finally, critics such as Gerald Monsman contend that Lyndall is not Schreiner’s ideal: “Whatever admiration the reader may feel for Lyndall’s strength of will and whatever pity the reader may feel for her predicament, she is by no means Schreiner’s norm for human relationships” (73).

forward in her writing regarding the significance of failure. As a New Woman—one of the first fictional New Woman—Lyndall fits within a broader picture Schreiner paints concerning the nature of political work and the pioneers who strike out on new paths toward freedom and equality. As a late Victorian feminist, Schreiner reflects a Victorian commitment to future progress, but she also tempers that with a quintessentially fin-de-siècle ennui. Rather than see that alienation as contradictory with progress, she interprets it as part of the alienation individuals feel as they sacrifice communal and individual connections for future freedoms they might never see.

Schreiner's Reforming Political Vision

The Victorian fin de siècle was a time of tumultuous cultural change that resulted in various ideological tensions about the state of society and where it was heading on the brink of a new century. It was also a time of significant social anxiety as various groups contested political and artistic institutions. Cultural critics questioned whether British civilization was indeed progressing or was degenerating. Many of these debates revolved around gender, the “Woman Question,” and what was seen as a sex war. As Kent explains: “The ideology of separate spheres, contended feminists, exaggerated the differences between men and women and confined women to an exclusively sexual role; it did not, as claimed, further notions of harmonious complementarity. It thus led to ‘sex-antagonism’ between men and women” (*Sex and Suffrage* 168). While feminists argued the separate spheres set women against men, anti-feminists such as Hugh E.M. Stutfield argued it was feminists’ rebellion that resulted in the antagonism. Taking his cues from Max Nordau, Stutfield calls for an end of fin-de-siècle revolt and a return to “common

sense and common decency,” which he defines as “the old ideals of discipline and duty, of manliness and self-reliance in men, and womanliness in women” (126). Stutfield suggests the solution to the fin-de-siècle malady of degeneration evidenced by the sex war is a return to a gender order of sexual difference or the separate spheres ideology.

While many of her contemporaries argued the changes at the end of the century were signs of decay, Schreiner argues these difficult changes were in fact the sign of progress and advancement; the sex war was part of a much deeper social shift: “It is not the sex disco-ordination that is at the root of our social unrest; it is the universal disco-ordination which affects even the world of sex phenomena” (*Woman* 97). Schreiner identifies conflict and discontent as a sign of evolutionary change and part of the movement toward progress. Rather than reject the Victorian idea of progress, Schreiner reforms it for feminism.⁶ As Carolyn Burdett explains, “Part of Schreiner’s power as a thinker and writer ... lies in the fact that she became a critic of progress who never abandoned her commitment to it” (7). For Schreiner, progress begins with the individual, but she also shows how the individual is often constrained by broader social forces that are hostile to necessary change.

In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner critiques the separate spheres by arguing for women’s full entrance into the public sphere and sexual equality.⁷ Vera Brittain calls *Woman and Labour* “the Bible of the Women’s Movement,” explaining, “To the girl-children of 1911, as to their mothers still struggling for the vote, the message of that book

⁶ Ann Heilmann’s book *New Woman Fiction* discusses how the New Woman discourse was employed by both feminists and anti-feminists: “A vibrant metaphor of transition, the New Woman stood at once for the degeneration of society and for that society’s moral regeneration” (1).

⁷ It will become clear later in this chapter that she retains the “feminine” attributes of sacrifice to ground her politics and ethics.

sounded as insistent and inspiring as a trumpet call summoning the faithful to an urgent crusade” (“The Influence of Olive Schreiner” 125). Published in 1911, *Woman and Labour* became a central feminist text for early twentieth-century suffragists and feminists.

In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner utilizes the language of degeneration in order to critique the supposed true woman—the Angel in the House—who, she argues, is a parasite on society. Like her opponents, Schreiner agrees that gender is the litmus test for a nation; however, she shifts the terms of the discourse by arguing that the way forward is women’s equality; woman’s equality in the public sphere holds the key to regeneration.⁸ In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner traces a gendered history of work and production. She argues that up to the Industrial Revolution, men and women divided work based on assumed skills. During the Industrial Revolution, physical labor shifted to mechanical work, but this narrowed women’s work roles to a singular function of reproduction—women became “the Sex.” Schreiner characterizes this function as passive because with increased national wealth, women’s manual labor was taken over by hired servants and machines. Schreiner calls this lack of productivity and dependence on men and machines “sex parasitism.” This dependence fits within the middle-class nature of the separate spheres; Kent explains that middle-class values idealized leisure as a form of status: “One criteria of social status was the ability of a married man to afford enough domestic servants to keep his wife and daughters in expensive leisure” (*Sex and Suffrage* 90). What

⁸ As other New Woman writers argued, women were central to regeneration. These writers varied, however, on what regeneration looked like. Sarah Grand, for example, understood women as morally superior to men and therefore in charge of regenerating the nation: “It is the woman’s place and pride and pleasure to teach the child, and man morally is in his infancy.... [N]ow woman holds out a strong hand to the child-man, and insists, but with infinite tenderness and pity, upon helping him up” (143).

signals national wealth and progress to the middle-classes, signifies decline and decay to Schreiner. Schreiner provides various examples from history to demonstrate that when women are part of social life and work, a society thrives and produces its best men, but when wealth turns to excess and women become ornamental and parasitic, these women produce parasitic men and the nation declines: “Everywhere, in the past as in the present, the parasitism of the female heralds the decay of a nation or class” (33). In this way, it is no longer the family or the patriarch that becomes the litmus test for a nation, but the state of the woman that determines national progress or decline.

Over the course of *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner advocates dismantling the separate spheres through women’s equality in the professions, and she bases this argument on the social production of gender. In chapter five of *Woman and Labour*, she states that sex differences are the result of “artificial training” in childhood; however, she does argue that reproduction produces “psycho-sexual difference”: “the moment actual reproduction begins to take place, the man and the woman enter spheres of sensation, perception, emotion, desire, and knowledge which are not, and cannot be, absolutely identical” (67). For this reason, she distinguishes women from men as a class and argues they need full representation in government: “here one sex cannot adequately represent the other” (69). In making this argument, Schreiner argues both for gender’s social construction and for inherent differences between the sexes. She anticipates tensions within feminist theory over what defines essentialism and sexual difference.

Schreiner’s central thesis of *Woman and Labour* is a revision of the Victorian work ethic for women, moving them from the sex parasitism of the private house into the public sphere of the professions. Much like J.S. Mill before her, Schreiner asserts that

society cannot possibly know what women's natural fields of work are because women have never been properly trained or tested. Therefore, "there is no closed door we do not intend to force open" (59). Within the context of the separate spheres and the cultural sex war, Schreiner emphasizes finding work based on suitability rather than sex/gender: "every individual unit humanity contains, irrespective of race, sex, or type, should find exactly that field of labour which may most contribute to its development, happiness, and health, and in which its peculiar faculties and gifts shall be most effectively and beneficially exerted for its fellows" (76). Schreiner de-emphasizes essential sexual differences and focuses on how the individual fits within the social whole.

In contrast to separate spheres proponents, Schreiner argues that equality will lead to better social harmony between the sexes, not a sex war: "careful study of the movement will show that, not only is it not a movement on the part of woman leading to severance and separation between the woman and the man, but that it is essentially a movement of the woman towards the man, of the sexes towards closer union" (89). In this way, she envisions the New Man as the complementary figure of the New Woman; however, this complement is based on equality rather than the difference of the separate spheres. Schreiner redefines marriage and parenting as a labor of companionship and equality based on love rather than material gain, which she considers a form of prostitution.⁹ Man is woman's equal and companion intellectually and emotionally; together they take up the responsibility of raising children and working together for the

⁹ Throughout *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner discusses the role of prostitution as the worst form of parasitism on a society. Schreiner uses the term prostitution "in its broadest sense to cover all forced sexual relationships based, not on the spontaneous affection of the woman for the man, but on the necessitous acceptance by woman of material good in exchange for the exercise of her sexual functions" (87).

good of each other and the social whole (92). Her argument is a call for women to move into the public sphere on equal terms with men.

Schreiner's feminist politics emphasizes the constructed nature of gender, and she uses this construction as justification that women should be equal to men in the public sphere of the professions, which will lead to regeneration and progress. But when we examine her critiques of empire and war, a more pointed maternal feminist politics emerges. This emphasis on the maternal includes a complex form of essentialism. On the surface, Schreiner argues that the maternal offers a special kind of knowledge about power and human relationships that should be part of the political discourse. This is fairly straightforward feminist essentialism moving women's femininity out of the separate spheres and, in some ways, making a logical extension of Ruskin's call for women to extend their moral influence beyond their garden walls. But more significantly, her argument for the maternal becomes less about essentialism—something biologically innate about motherhood—than about an ethical model as a basis for politics. She calls this maternal ethics “the mother heart”—a maternal altruism often employed not for one's biological children, but as a metaphor, an ethical image, for the relationship between self and other, whether that other is child, political movement, or nation. The maternal offers a special kind of knowledge to women and Schreiner argues women should use that for political purposes. The mother heart is the core of Schreiner's feminism, shaping her ethics and politics.

Schreiner's call for equality and her maternalism form the basis of her pacifist argument in *Woman and Labour*. Schreiner argues separate spheres thinking divides not only the private and the public, but the relationship between gender and war, as women

are depicted as mothers separate from war, and men are identified as soldiers, those who experience war. Schreiner counters this division by explaining that women “have always born part of the weight of war, and the major part” (59). The separate spheres renders women’s part in war invisible, but Schreiner asserts women’s most significant participation in the system of war is as mothers: “Men have made boomerangs, bows, swords, or guns with which to destroy one another; we have made the men who destroyed and were destroyed. We have in all ages produced, at an enormous cost, the primal munition of war, without which no other would exist.... We pay the first cost on all human life” (59-60). Rather than interpret women as separate from war, Schreiner argues that women—specifically mothers—are central participants in war: they are domestic workers, victims of war’s destruction, nurses, and, most importantly, intimate participants as the bearers of soldiers.

Women’s roles as mothers furnish a special insight into the system of war. This essentialist knowledge, however, is an insight available to all women, regardless of birth experience:

There is, perhaps, no woman, whether she have borne children, or be merely potentially a child-bearer, who could look down upon a battlefield covered with slain, but the thought would rise in her, “So many mothers sons! So many bodies brought into the world to lie there! So many months of weariness and pain while bones and muscles were shaped within”....

No woman who is a woman says of a human body, “It is nothing!” (60)

Schreiner defines women as mothers or potential mothers, and she furnishes a concept of the maternal as a particular way of looking at the body of the other and the world at large.

While this statement is based on the assumption that no woman could look at the battlefield without acknowledging maternal loss, this is only the beginning for Schreiner. This insight must be adopted and cultivated in order to end war; women are not inherently pacifist, but as women, they have access to knowledge that might be deployed as pacifist.

According to Schreiner, war will end with women's equality and full participation in the war system they oppose (63). In contrast to cultural constructions, war is women's domain:

It is especially in the domain of war that we, the bearers of men's bodies, who supply its most valuable munition, who, not amid the clamour and ardour of battle, but singly, and alone, with a three-in-the-morning courage, shed our blood and face death that the battlefield may have its food, a food more precious to us than our heart's blood. (63)

Schreiner connects the battlefield with the work of birth, and she specifically uses language reserved for masculinity and soldiers to describe women's maternal work: their "three-in-the-morning courage," which requires that they "shed ... blood" and "face death." This language echoes the imagery connecting the soldier with Christ-like martyrdom, redeeming the world with his sacrifice; but Schreiner illustrates that the mother's sacrifice should lead to life, whereas in war, it only leads death. This is the maternal knowledge they must bring to bear on the systems of war: "it is we especially, who in the domain of war, have our word to say, a word no man can say for us. It is our intention to enter in the domain of war and to labour there till in the course of generations we have extinguished it" (63). Schreiner plays with the double meaning of "labour" to

reconfigure women's roles in society around work—both the professions and the work of motherhood. Her call to end war is a reforming vision; women's participation in the public sphere will end war when their voices are heard and their maternal knowledge is made visible.

Schreiner's gender politics include a simultaneous commitment to the social construction of gender and limited essentialism. In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner makes the case that maternal knowledge can end war, and while this is an essentializing argument, Schreiner contends that the insight into the worth of a human body is not exclusive to women:

[T]here is no need for enlightenment from the instincts of the child-bearers of society as such; their condemnation of war, rising not so much from the fact that it is a wasteful destruction of human flesh, as that it is an indication of the non-existence of that co-ordination, the harmony which is summed up in the cry, "My children, love one another." (62-63)

While she focuses on the maternal perspective as an argument against war, Schreiner argues that the maternal knowledge is only a glimpse of a much fuller picture of the relationships among human beings as a whole summarized in the cry of Christ to love one another.¹⁰

In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner argues that a maternal insight reflects a broader vision of human connection through Christ's cry which united all humanity as his children. Elsewhere, Schreiner extends the maternal beyond the biological act of giving

¹⁰ In "The Dawn of Civilization: Stray Thoughts on Peace and War. The Homely Personal Confession of a Believer in Human Unity" (1920), Schreiner sets out a more general set of objections to war based on a belief in human unity, responding specifically to the horrors of World War I.

birth to an ethical vision for a life's work, which she calls "the mother heart." In "The Buddhist Priest's Wife" (1923), Schreiner depicts a New Woman's parting conversation with the man she loves before she leaves England to pursue a life of independent work in India. While he is oblivious to her feelings, she consciously turns away from a life of love and motherhood, sacrificing a sexual and reproductive relationship in order to find meaningful work. She embodies Schreiner's ethics by extending a maternal labor to the whole world. The woman says of mothering: "[W]hat matters is that something should need you. It isn't a question of love.... It's the need of one thing for another that makes the organic bond of union" (94). This idea of mothering does not require a biological mother and child, but a maternal response to the needs of the other. For the poor and rejected of society, this woman gives with a mother's heart; to those far off, "you must love from a distance" (94). The man replies: "Oh, but a woman like you ought to marry, ought to have children. You go squandering yourself on every old beggar or forlorn female or escaped criminal you meet; it may be very nice for them, but it's a mistake from your point of view" (94). To the man, her talents should go into the domestic sphere, but the woman sees her gifts at odds with marriage and maternity. To her, marriage should be founded on equality and love; she does not see that as a viable option with the man, though it clearly pains her to relinquish this relationship. Therefore, she channels her mother heart toward those in need, leaving for work in India.

Schreiner's short story "The Woman's Rose" (1891)¹¹ further develops the concept of the mother heart. When the narrator enters a new town as a young woman of

¹¹ Originally published in *New Review* (June 1891), and then subsequently collected for *Dream Life and Real Life* (1893). See Andrea Salter's *The Olive Schreiner Letters Project*.

fifteen, she is flattered by the attention she receives from men: “I liked my power. I was like a child with a new whip, which it goes about cracking everywhere, not caring against what” (57). The narrator understands the sexual power she has over men and likes to use it to bend them to her will; but the narrator also understands in her reflection that this was an immature response: “The *mother heart* had not swelled in me yet; I did not know all men were my children, as the large woman knows when her heart is grown. I was too small to be tender” (57, emphasis added). The narrator reveals that her pleasure in manipulative power was the mark of a younger woman. The mother heart builds a politics and ethics from the maternal practice of meeting needs of the other, as a mother cares for a child. The separate spheres deemed women the moral guardians of the domestic sphere; Schreiner extends that moral influence outward to the public sphere.¹²

Schreiner takes what appears to be an inherent biological essentialism and transforms it into a basis for ethics and politics which extends from gender but is not bound by gender. Yet it is not without complication in its implications. In *Thoughts on South Africa*, Schreiner extends this maternal feminist politics to her reconceptualization of empire.¹³ The New Woman in “The Buddhist Priest’s Wife” utilizes her maternalism as a basis for rejecting marriage and motherhood in the private sphere and goes to work on behalf of those in need in India. This image of missionary work is a metaphor for

¹² In this case, the mother heart does not seem to represent the gender equality Schreiner advocates, but she reflects a particular strand of late Victorian feminism that she shared with other women writers such as Sarah Grand.

¹³ *Thoughts on South Africa* is collection of previously published essays on England’s relationship with South Africa. The essays were written in the 1890s and further revised in the early 1900s. They were an attempt to intervene in tense imperial struggles around the time of the second Boer War. The goal of the collection is to create sympathy for the Boer and the South African situation in order for Schreiner to make her case against the evils of empire and her argument for a new vision of empire, an empire of freedom.

Schreiner's reconceptualization of empire. Schreiner reconfigures the imperial mission from an exploitative paternalism to an altruistic mother empire.

If the Angel in the House is the mark of degeneration at home, an exploitative empire is the mark of degeneration abroad. Schreiner depicts the imperial relationship as an exploitative one that produces neither health nor happiness for self or other. She further represents this empire through the quintessential English symbol of John Bull, here as a degenerate greedy fat man, diseased and violent:

Our dream of the future of our race is of no John Bull seated astride the earth, his huge belly distended with the people he has devoured and his teeth growing out yet more than ever with all the meat he has bitten and looking around on a depeopled earth and laughing till all his teeth show and the peoples' bones rattle in his belly: "Ha! I reign alone now. I have killed them all out!" (354)

This is a John Bull whose body has been distorted by greedy excess of wealth and exploitation, reflecting his mission of dominance and extermination. Schreiner argues this can only lead to degeneration.¹⁴

Schreiner's reform of the British Empire as an empire of freedom draws on altruistic maternal imagery and the language of adoption. She asserts that adoption is

¹⁴ Schreiner takes on the hypocrisy of the civilizing mission, espoused by Imperialists such as Cecil Rhodes and Joseph Chamberlain. In a speech delivered to the Royal Colonial Institute in 1897, Chamberlain discusses the obligations of empire: "We feel now that our rule over these territories can only be justified if we can show that it adds to the happiness and prosperity of the people ... and I maintain that our rule does, and has, brought security and peace and comparative prosperity to countries that never knew these blessings before" (139). To Chamberlain, fears of degeneration in regards to empire are unfounded: "There are in our present condition no visible signs of decrepitude and decay.... The mother country is still vigorous and fruitful, is still able to send forth troops of stalwart sons to people and occupy the waste spaces of the earth" (141). Given that this speech was written between the two Boer Wars, Chamberlain's affirmation reads as an attempt to assuage existing fears of decay.

“one of the bravest and fairest in the whole domain of human fellowships” (380), because it demonstrates the altruistic quality of motherhood, which she elevates as essential to political work:

It is the bond which exists between a large and generous woman, who, through marriage having thrown into her hands children not her own by blood, yet through all their infancy and early childhood guards and labours for as her own, *asking nothing for herself, giving all: desiring not to use her power for her own ends, not favouring those of her own blood unduly, but seeking to aid those in her power to attain most successfully to the freedom and independence of adult life....* Such is the bond I have dreamed should permanently bind England to South Africa. (380, emphasis added)

This passage illustrates two significant issues for our understanding of Schreiner’s politics. First, the language and imagery she uses here establishes self-sacrifice as essential to her political vision and how power is used within that vision. This altruistic maternal imagery politicizes women’s traditional feminine virtues outward to the needs of the world, rather than in the private sphere alone. In fact, this traditional gender imagery is the basis for her vision of foreign policy. It is not based on privileging biological or national ties—all of her children are treated with love and are sacrificed for within the language of adoption. This maternal altruism is the foundation of Schreiner’s feminism.

The second significant issue raised by this passage is how Schreiner’s elevation of maternal altruism is complicit with the very power structures she would seek to unravel.

When Schreiner writes that the native South African people are “the eternal children of the human race” (107), she perpetuates the racist ideology that justified imperial domination in the first place. While this feminist revision of imperialism opens up an interesting reworking of power dynamics, it ultimately reveals a continued commitment to racist ideology. In its own way, the maternal becomes an imposition of altruism, as Schreiner proposes sacrifice based on knowing the needs of the other. Furthermore, because she extends this maternal altruism as an ethical metaphor—both individually, as with the New Woman of “The Buddhist Priest’s Wife,” and nationally, as a response to empire and war—she reveals a tension within her gender politics between gender as socially constructed and gender as a site of knowledge that is both related to a subject position, but not bound by it. Ultimately, Schreiner advocated a maternal feminist ethics that elevated self-sacrifice and an ethic of care to the world in need, thereby moving women from the private into the public sphere of politics. This formation of feminist politics will help us reexamine *The Story of an African Farm* and later uses of the maternal in this project.

Schreiner’s Conception of “Valuable Failures”

Schreiner elevates self-sacrifice as a primary component to her maternal feminist ethics and politics. For Schreiner, women’s freedom and equality is incompatible with the separate spheres because it severs them from meaningful work. In order to achieve political equality, she often depicts women who must renounce love and motherhood; in many ways, the private sphere gender roles are expanded outward to the public sphere and this requires a sacrifice of the private sphere roles. This sacrifice is contextualized

within a much larger movement toward progress; however, what has yet to be fully accounted for in scholarship is how these sacrifices are often failures in themselves. Schreiner contextualizes these failures as necessary and valuable for progress. The concept of the valuable failure further extends our understanding of Schreiner's maternal feminism and enables a rereading of Lyndall's complicated death as a valuable failure in *The Story of an African Farm*.

While critics often emphasize the theme of self-sacrifice in Schreiner's writing, they overlook or undervalue the productive role of failure, what can be termed a *valuable failure*. John Kucich and Scott McCracken, for instance, discuss Schreiner's presentation of individuals sacrificing for the collective good, but they neglect to account for Schreiner's insistence on the importance of failure as part of those initial sacrifices.¹⁵ Ann Heilmann, in particular, argues that Lyndall fails, but she neglects to account for how failure might be part of Schreiner's overarching feminist vision. For Schreiner, both failures and successes contribute to progress. A valuable failure reinterprets sacrifice and defeat as necessary and productive for a better future. It accounts for the invisible work and suffering of individuals striving to achieve political goals. A failing act might appear to be simply a loss or waste, but Schreiner asserts that those acts create something tangible within the broader collective. They open up possibilities for others to follow and go further; they are steps on the way to progress, even if they are sometimes missteps. In this way, failures can be interpreted as valuable rather than simply as wasteful or

¹⁵ For further discussion of self-sacrifice in Schreiner's writing, see especially Kucich; McCracken; Heilmann; and Laura Chrisman.

destructive.¹⁶

Schreiner's allegory "Three Dreams in the Desert" (1887) and *Woman and Labour* best articulate the concept of a valuable failure. The allegory tells the story of three dreams that represent the history of women's relationship to men: its past, present, and idealized future. The first dream examines the politics of gender, which corresponds with her analysis in *Woman and Labour*. It articulates the conditions of the sex war, as the woman is shackled to the man, unable to rise as his equal. The second dream sets out the idea of a valuable failure, showing the movement of the New Woman to rise and work toward freedom and equality. In the third dream, the narrator has a utopian vision in which men and women work together as equals in social harmony; only when men and women are equal will there be peace.

In that second dream, Schreiner depicts a pioneering New Woman crossing a desert for the land of Freedom. An old man identified as Reason (or Knowledge) meets her at the brink of a great river. To get to the Land of Freedom, Reason tells her she must travel down the banks of Labour and pass through the water of Suffering; there is no bridge and no one has crossed it yet. To cross it, she must shed the ideological clothing that weighs her down. Reason advises her to take off her garments of "Ancient-received-opinions," which are full of holes, and her "shoes of dependence," so that she will not be overloaded in the water. In the end, she wears only a small white garment of Truth ("Three Dreams" 19). But it is not only gender ideology that is an obstacle to her pursuit;

¹⁶ I am indebted to Renee Lee Gardner for suggesting that failure could be something other than waste. For other ways of approaching failure and sacrifice, see Gardner; and Judith Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*. While Halberstam utilizes failure in order to unsettle the dominant narrative of success in American culture, I would argue that an author like Schreiner is working failure into the narrative of collective progress, which contrasts with Halberstam's analysis.

she must also renounce unequal sexual relationships. Schreiner symbolizes this inequality through a man-child drinking at the woman's breast, thereby merging the sexual and maternal into one image. When she relinquishes him, the man-child bites her, and as she sets him down, the narrator describes her as going from "youth to age" as her hair turns white. Schreiner plays with temporality here to demonstrate that the act of renouncing companionship and motherhood is the mark of maturity as well as a life's work. Woman sheds everything that determines her oppression in the first dream.

As the woman stands on the banks of the river, she laments: "For what do I go to this far land which no one has ever reached? Oh, I am alone! I am utterly alone!" (20). In her loneliness, she wonders why she makes this journey at all. Reason explains that where she leads, others will follow: "They are the feet of those that shall follow you. Lead on! make a track to the water's edge!" (20). The woman learns that the stakes are high. She does not make this crossing only for herself, for her gain of freedom and eventually love; rather she makes it for the human race. Woman, who previously followed man, now leads them both into progress; her sacrifices contribute to a collective good.

Schreiner not only writes about self-sacrifice as a form of redemptive work for humanity as a whole, but investigates how those goals are achieved through invisible sacrifices that appear as but are not failures. Reason introduces a metaphor in order for the woman to understand the significance of her journey:

"Have you seen the locusts how they cross a stream? First one comes down to the water-edge, and it is swept away, and then another comes and then another, and then another, and at last with their bodies piled up a

bridge is built and the rest pass over.”

She said, “And, of those that come first, some are swept away, and are heard of no more; their bodies do not even build a bridge?”

“And are swept away, and are heard of no more—and what of that?” he said.

“And what of that—” she said.

“They make a track to the water’s edge.” (20)

The woman asks Reason “Over that bridge which shall be built with our bodies, who will pass?” Reason answers “The entire human race” (20). Here, Schreiner goes beyond self-sacrifice and examines the role of the first who try and fail. Their sacrifices do not even build the bridge that enables others to cross, but they are not wasted. They fail to pass, their lives are lost, but they create a path that facilitates future success.

The woman understands the significance of her act, and, though she knows she will likely not reach the other side, thereby attaining freedom and love for herself, the narrator states that, “the woman grasped her staff. And I saw her turn down that dark path to the river” (20). In a courageous act, she faces her own destruction with the awareness that her journey of suffering, renunciation of companionship, sacrifice, and ultimate surrender to the current are not a loss. They tangibly create the conditions for progress and eventual freedom.

Critics comment on the role of self-sacrifice for a greater cause, but they neglect the significance of failure. McCracken interprets the locust analogy as a comment on “the mass politics of the late nineteenth century” as well as “modernity’s capacity for mass

destruction,” seeing the locusts as an image of “waste” (152-53).¹⁷ But rather than presenting the woman’s sacrifice as a destructive waste, Schreiner reveals a constructive failure, a new way of conceptualizing invisible sacrifices as producing something tangible. The locust metaphor makes manifest the significance of failure within the long view of progress. The woman fails to make it across the river, but she makes a track to the water’s edge. This track becomes the only visible mark of the woman as she is swept away, but it is along this track that others will follow and succeed. A failing sacrifice becomes material and furnishes hope in a larger productive teleology.

While the second dream represents valuable failures in the symbolic language of metaphor and allegory, Schreiner also points to the importance of failure when she discusses political movements in *Woman and Labour*. In her discussion of the Woman’s Labour Movement, she argues that each individual woman contributes to the collective whole: “it is through the labours of these myriad toilers, each working in her own minute sphere, with her own small outlook, and out of endless failures and miscarriages, that at last the enwidened and beautified relations of woman to life must rise, if they are ever to come” (50). Echoing the language of the locust allegory, Schreiner identifies the relationship between the individual and the collective as the movement of “myriad toilers,” who work in their own ways through “failures and miscarriages” to attain political goals. She asserts that it is only through these individual failures and successes that the ultimate goals of equality can be achieved. The language of “miscarriages” recalls maternity, and Schreiner expands the moral sphere of the private maternal to the

¹⁷ See also Burdett’s reading of the locusts as representing a “suicidal biological instinct” (82). Heilmann also compares Lyndall to the woman in “Three Dreams,” but only as a point of contrast, whereas I interpret them as complementary figures. See *New Woman Strategies* 143.

public sphere of work, thereby reinvesting the maternal with political power.¹⁸

Schreiner's feminist vision of failing maternal sacrifices clarifies the complex representation of her New Woman heroine of *African Farm*. Like the first locust, Lyndall is swept away, but she creates a way for others to follow and succeed.

To better understand Lyndall's valuable failure, we need to contextualize it further within Schreiner's discussion of pioneering figures, who are some of the first to strike out and pursue freedom often at the cost of love and connection. In *Woman and Labour*, she writes, "It is the man or woman who first treads down *the path* which the bulk of humanity will ultimately follow, who must find themselves at last in solitudes where the silence is deadly" (96, emphasis added). For those who make the evolutionary move forward, there is intense pain, as they no longer fit within their communities. Schreiner's path imagery represents the journey of political work, which requires a sustaining vision to nourish that work. While a spatial image, the path reflects the psychological and emotional obstacles and coping mechanisms the individual undergoes while undertaking political work. Schreiner asserts that individuals on the path must often sacrifice what they hold most dear, breaking ties with the community. The path is one of suffering, but Schreiner balances this suffering with an anchoring vision that provides the motivation to continue. In the same way that she finds value in every individual's contribution toward equality regardless of its success, Schreiner believes great pain and isolation are necessary for such a movement. In the second dream, the woman must renounce love to work for freedom. The thought of future women attaining freedom

¹⁸ Stephanie Eggermont similarly states that "Schreiner's ethics of motherhood puts an end to asymmetrical power relations between the sexes. She gives the traditional Victorian value of motherhood a feminist twist by making it serve not only a private, but also a public, moral purpose. She thereby cancels the dichotomy between public and private" (50).

provides her with the conviction and strength to go through the waters of suffering, knowing full well her life is likely to be swept away. Schreiner states that only the commitment to the ideal of progress keeps the movement going, the leap of faith and hope in a better world, even though those presently working must relinquish everything they hope to gain and will never likely see the fruit of their labors. This gritty pessimism blended with a visionary perspective accounts for her consistent imagery of the solitary individual on a path of pain tempered by idealist or utopian dreams.

Like the woman in the second dream, individuals must cultivate an awareness concerning the value of their sacrifices in order to embrace them. Without vision and conviction, the individual falters and despairs. In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner describes two contrasting types in the Woman's Labour Movement. The first nurtures a vision: "For her, whose insight enables her to see... beyond the present, though in a future which she knows she will never enter, an enlarged and strengthened womanhood bearing forward with it a strengthened and expanded race, it is not so hard to renounce and labour with unshaken purpose" (50, emphasis added). The second type of person is unable to envision that future: "but for those who have not that view, and struggle on, animated at most by a vague consciousness that somewhere ahead lies a large end... who, out of many failures attain, perhaps, to no success, or but to one, and that so small and set so much in the shade that no eye will ever see it; for such as these, it is perhaps not so easy to labour without growing weary" (50). Schreiner characterizes two kinds of women: the one who sees into the future and finds strength in that vision, and the other, who labors blindly, struggling through a mix of failures and minor successes; yet she states both continue the progress of women's rights. In *African Farm*, Lyndall is the latter

woman: weary in her attempts to break free from gender conformity, she does not find nourishment in her feminist vision, nor does she have the strength to renounce love and work toward equality. But Schreiner urges her readers, through the novel's central allegory "The Hunter," to identify with that conviction, seeing Lyndall's life and death for what it is: a valuable failure.

Lyndall and "The Hunter"

"The Hunter" allegory, set in the middle of *African Farm*, acts as a metafictional moment, providing an interpretive framework for the complexities of the text. It suggests how to read Lyndall's life and its failures. While Lyndall's death seems like a cynical end to a New Woman story, the allegory furnishes hope. It spreads out over the text in many ways: as a commentary on art, as the quest for truth, but, most importantly, as a representation of *the path* writ large, reflecting a journey of renunciation similar to the second dream. Each stage of the hunter's life sets up ways of reading Lyndall's life, and situating her life within a longer movement toward freedom and equality. While Lyndall does not envision herself as part of that progression, the reader is called to see her that way.

"The Hunter" is told by Waldo's French stranger, but in a move that underscores its importance to Schreiner, she also published it separately in the *Fortnightly Review* in August 1887. The stranger tells the story of a hunter seeking after the white bird Truth. After consulting old man Wisdom, the hunter embarks on a quest to the "mountains of stern reality" (*African Farm* 126). When the hunter asks if he will capture Truth with his own hands, Wisdom replies that he will not, because "The time is not yet" (126). The

hunter's question reflects Schreiner's theme about the path as a journey of suffering and denial: "Upon the road which you would travel there is no reward offered. Who goes, goes freely—for the great love that is in him. The work is his reward" (127). His only reward is a chance to find one white feather; when enough white feathers are gathered, a net may be made that will hold Truth. In this way, the hunter's work participates in a broader collective movement.

The allegory asserts that truth must be pursued at the cost of connections with others. On the path to the mountain, the hunter travels through the "Land of Negation and Denial" where there is only darkness, and he eventually sits down to wait out the night: "And it was night in his heart also" (128). The twins Sensuality tempt him with their companionship, crying, "All else is delusion, but *we* are real" (129). By rejecting a spiritual reality, sensuality might appear to be the only meaning or truth in the world. In the darkness of the night, the hunter shuns Sensuality, and the narrator acknowledges the hunter's lonely state: "All who leave the valley of superstition pass through that dark land; but some go through it in a few days, some linger there for months, some for years, and some die there" (130). He lives through the darkness and comes into the light of day before "the almighty mountains of Dry-facts and Realities" (130).

Having struggled through a liminal space between the valley of superstition and the mountains of Stern Reality, the hunter embarks on a new part of his journey. Now he needs the strength to continue and see the work through until the end. After a while, the hunter tires as the footprints grow fainter on the mountain path; he continues where others leave off, and eventually he finds his own way, beginning to carve out a stair: "With his shuttle of imagination he dug out stones; but half of them would not fit, and

half a month's work would roll down because those below were ill chosen" (131). He loses much of his work through mistakes, but those individual failures are contextualized through his life's work on the stair as a whole.

Like the woman of the second dream, the hunter continues his work even though he will never see its fulfillment. While he longs to see the white bird Truth, he knows his work ultimately rests within the community of the future:

Where I lie down worn out other men will stand, young and fresh. By the steps that I have cut they will climb.... They will never know the name of the man who made them. At the clumsy work they will laugh; when the stones roll they will curse me. But they will mount, and on *my* work....

They will find her, and through me! And no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. (133)

The hunter takes pride in knowing that his work endures and that his life has become an essential building block toward truth, in spite of the fact that his identity will never be acknowledged and his work will often be considered insufficient. While longing for a present community, the hunter says, "no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself," and in so doing, he claims the community of laborers with common goals as his consolation. The man dies in satisfaction holding a single white feather, symbolizing the promise of the future and his only reward. This promise nourishes his work, enabling him to laugh off temptation and despair. The hope lies beyond his life in those who follow after him.

In his exegesis of the hunter allegory, the stranger warns Waldo: "To all who have been born in the old faith there comes a time of danger, when the old slips from us, and

we have not yet planted our feet on the new.... We have proved the religion our mothers fed us on to be a delusion; in our bewilderment we see no rule by which to guide our steps day by day; and yet every day we must step somewhere” (137). Schreiner mixes temporal and spatial language to situate Waldo and Lyndall within a cultural liminal state.¹⁹ This liminal state must be wrestled with, but it makes them vulnerable to exhaustion and ennui: “When the day has come when they have seen the path in which they might walk, they have not the strength to follow it” (137). For the first who turn away from their communities and convention in pursuit of freedom or truth, there is uncertainty and difficulty finding their way on the path.

While many critics associate “The Hunter” with Waldo, the allegory also guides readers toward a richer interpretation of Lyndall’s decisions and her legacy. The stranger tells Waldo that “the attribute of all true art, the highest and the lowest, is this—that it says more than it says, and takes you away from itself” (133). Schreiner leaves much unanswered at the end of the novel, until readers return to the hunter allegory. Lyndall, like the woman of the second dream and the hunter allegory, strives to embark on a path toward freedom and equality, but she struggles to renounce her desires for companionship and love. She also lacks the same self-awareness that her sacrifices will have meaning. Lyndall’s valuable failure offers the reader the possibility to attend to her call for feminist strength and the work for equality, even if she fails to achieve those goals herself.

¹⁹ This language connects back to the “Times and Seasons” chapter in which the soul does not have a sure footing in the world.

Unlike the woman and the hunter, who have an epiphanic self-awareness in which they learn that while their sacrifices may be unrecognized they make a way for others to succeed, Lyndall has no such epiphany. She has a utopian ideal but cannot find the strength or motivation to pursue it. In contrast to the hunter's resistance to Sensuality's temptation, Lyndall self-destructs while trying to have both love and freedom. The idea of renunciation, a prominent theme in both "The Hunter" and the second dream, is reinforced in Schreiner's allegory "Life's Gifts" (1889),²⁰ in which Life offers a woman a choice between love and freedom. The woman chooses freedom, and Life says to her: "Thou hast well chosen. If thou hadst said, 'Love,' I would have given thee that thou didst ask for; and I would have gone from thee, and returned to thee no more. Now, the day will come when I shall return. In that day I shall bear both gifts in one hand" (29). In Schreiner's writing, she contends that women are at a crossroads where though they hunger for both love and freedom they must forsake romantic relationships, choosing freedom in order for love to return. In *African Farm*, Lyndall struggles to have both love and freedom, and life deserts her.

In part two of *African Farm*, Lyndall returns to the farm after going abroad for an education. As a child, she craves both knowledge and power, but as an adult, she learns that women are given limited access to both. As a result, she struggles to redefine gender and power for herself. Like the woman of the second dream, Lyndall examines her clothes of "Ancient-received-opinions" and finds them full of holes. She explains the process of gender socialization to Waldo: "We all enter the world little plastic beings...

²⁰ Originally published in *The Woman's World* 2 (1889): 408, and subsequently published in her short story collection *Dreams* (1890). See Salter's *The Olive Schreiner Letters Project*.

and the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you [Waldo] it says—*Work*; and to us [women] it says—*Seem!*” (*African Farm* 154). Lyndall’s use of the word “seem” suggests artifice and illusion rather than the authentic self-determination she desires: “We fit our sphere as a Chinese woman’s foot fits her shoe, exactly, as though God had made both—and yet He knows nothing of either” (155). Lyndall critiques the separate spheres that dictates women’s identity in relation to work.

In a few pages, Lyndall expresses with fiery intensity the entire argument of *Woman and Labour* in which Schreiner builds a case for dismantling the separate spheres and opening up all fields of work for women. She explains that society excludes women from many fields of labor, and thus she finds herself trapped within an ideology that allows her little freedom of movement: “What she would be she cannot be because she is a woman; so she looks carefully at herself and the world about her, to see where her path must be made. There is no one to help her; she must help herself” (183). Lyndall demonstrates the frustration of a woman who cannot find a suitable outlet for her passions, ambitions, and talents—who cannot find new forms of work.

Lyndall laments the limitations of gender in her ability to find meaningful work and change the gender roles that define her through the private sphere identity of wife and mother; her desire for independence conflicts with her dependence of men. She isolates the problems of the separate spheres and offers a future ideal to counter those problems: “Then when that time comes . . . when love is no more bought or sold, when it is not a means of making bread, when each woman’s life is filled with *earnest*, independent labour, then love will come to her, a strange and sudden sweetness breaking in upon her *earnest* work; not sought for, but found. Then, but not now—” (161-62,

emphasis added). Echoing the arguments in *Woman and Labour* as well as the allegory of “Life’s Gifts,” Lyndall envisions a world in which women’s lives are free, nourished by work, and love returns to them. The repetition of the word “earnest” as an adjective for work suggests an authentic individual freedom contrasted with the artifice of the passive “seem” in Lyndall’s prior statements about gender.

While Lyndall articulates a vision, she resists the path to that future ideal. Waldo asks why she does not work to “bring that time,” and she explains: “To see the good and the beautiful ... and to have no strength to live it, is only to be Moses on the mountains of Nebo, with the land at your feet and no power to enter. It would be better not to see it” (162). In both *African Farm* and *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner offers two ways of reading this biblical allusion as a metaphor for political work. Lyndall contends that to be Moses is in a sense to be cursed, to see what one desires but forever be severed from achieving it. Lyndall further laments: “I will do nothing good for myself, nothing for the world, till someone wakes me. I am asleep, swathed, shut up in self; till I have been delivered I will deliver no one” (162). In a recurring maternal metaphor, Lyndall longs to be birthed before she participates in a broader deliverance for others, despite her identification with Moses, who was himself a resistant deliverer. Schreiner, however, offers another way of reading this allusion. In both *Woman and Labour* and the hunter allegory, to see the promised land (or the white bird Truth) is to find strength and nourishment in the knowledge that though Moses will never enter, others will, and hope lies in their entrance.²¹ Schreiner urges her readers toward this altruistic work and vision.

²¹ See *Woman and Labour* (49-50) for a series of metaphors representing the work and sacrifice of those pioneering individuals who labor on, knowing they may never see the fulfillment of their work, yet who are

Like the hunter's rejection of religion and journey toward truth, Lyndall too has turned away from Victorian religious and social beliefs; unlike the hunter, however, she fails on her path. In her description of the New Woman's unconventional work in the world, Lyndall explains:

Before her are endless difficulties: seas must be crossed, poverty must be endured, loneliness, want. She must be content to wait long before she can even get her feet upon the path. If she has made blunders in the past, if she has weighted herself with a burden which she must bear to the end, she must but bear the burden bravely, and labour on.... If she does all this,—if she waits patiently, if she is never cast down, never despairs, never forgets her end, moves straight toward it, bending men and things most unlikely to her purpose—she must succeed at last. (183-84)

In Schreiner's hunter allegory and the second dream, both characters eschew love and community, which results in their feelings of isolation. Similarly, Lyndall explains that in order to get onto the path, she must do the same. She defines her pregnancy as a "burden" and one of the "blunders" for which she must take responsibility. Echoing the voices of Reason and Wisdom, Lyndall states that if she can continue in the world without despairing, she will succeed.

This passage highlights the progression of the novel and part of Lyndall's complex failure. While she has a vision, she lacks the strength and conviction to pursue it. But she also thinks of power as a force of manipulation, whereas Schreiner urges her

inspired to keep going; this includes Moses and precedes her discussion of the two contrasting types of women in the Woman's Labour Movement.

readers to see it as a tool of compassion. When Lyndall states that in order for a woman to make her lonely way in the world, she must do so by “bending men and things most unlikely to her purpose,” she illustrates her desire to work against men and society rather than for their good. Schreiner sympathetically portrays Lyndall’s desire for power and her strength of spirit, but she also shows how these desires thwart her attempts for equality, because Lyndall’s actions are constrained by a society which does not accept her desires for freedom.

Her story is the New Woman’s lament, the grief of all she struggles to renounce in order to pave the path to freedom. Her struggle against the gendered power structures in society and the conflicts within herself leaves her weary; she cries to the German’s grave, saying, “I am so tired.... why am I alone, so hard, so cold?” (209). Reiterating the woman in the second dream who cries out in the isolation of her task, Schreiner portrays the loneliness and pain associated with the path of the New Woman. As Schreiner explains in *Woman and Labour*, there are some women who are not able to see the promised land, and for them, life is weary and alienating. Lyndall envisions gender equality and freedom, but lacks the individual conviction that her life and work move toward such a goal. She is shut up in the self, in her own internal gender prison, unable to work for freedom and unable to find an ethic of compassion that enables her to get outside herself and see the other, to conceptualize power as a tool of compassion rather than manipulation. In contrast to the hunter and the woman of the second dream, Lyndall does not believe that her work and suffering have meaning; she does not find any nourishment in that conviction. That work is left to the reader.

The varying interpretations of Moses suggest Schreiner's and Lyndall's differences in regard to their perspectives on self and other. Lyndall, who is shut up in the self, conceives of power as a tool of manipulation. Schreiner indicates in *African Farm* and in her short stories that in order for women to achieve freedom, they must often sacrifice not only love but motherhood as well. Rather than reject motherhood, she redefines the maternal toward meeting the needs of the world. Returning to "The Buddhist Priest's Wife," the New Woman sacrifices a traditionally feminine life of marriage and motherhood in order to pursue a more urgent maternal work in India. She embodies the mother heart by treating the needs of the world as more insistent than the needs of the private sphere. She does what Lyndall is not able to do.

Schreiner's reworking of the maternal results in a personal and political cultivation of compassion toward the other that challenges the binary of the separate spheres ideology, but more broadly it also becomes part of Schreiner's feminist investment in the path, the sacrifice for future progress. Lyndall fails to make that investment in part because she does not develop the mother heart. Her relationship to motherhood is one of conflict. On the one hand, she argues that motherhood is a noble calling for women: "*We bear the world, and we make it*" (*African Farm* 160). On the other hand, Lyndall does not want that calling. She tells Em: "I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man's foot; and I do not so greatly admire the crying of babies.... There are other women glad of such work" (150). Amidst these assertions, she is pregnant, and the pregnancy forces Lyndall into a vulnerable position as an unmarried mother. Lyndall explains her short experience of motherhood as a failure, as she does not respond to the dependent creature with love: "They laid it close by me, but I never saw it;

I could feel it by me.... It crept close to me; it wanted to drink, it wanted to be warm.... I did not love it; its father was not my prince; I did not care for it; but it was so little”

(246). Her indifference to the baby horrifies Lyndall; when presented with an opportunity for a maternal response, she shuts down. This indifference leads to her despair and ultimately her death.²²

Through her grief, Lyndall learns the mother heart: “I see the vision of a poor soul striving after good. It was not cut short; and, in the end, it learnt, through tears and such pain, that holiness is infinite compassion for others; that greatness is to take the common things of life and walk truly among them; that ... happiness is a great love and much serving” (249). She asserts that holiness and goodness are defined by the self’s response to the other, articulating Schreiner’s maternal feminism. Yet Lyndall’s despair is too great, and she ultimately submits to it: “she looked up at him, and Gregory saw that all hope had died out of the beautiful eyes. It was not stupor that shone there, it was despair” (251). In a sense, Lyndall dies clutching a white feather of Truth, but in contrast to the hunter, she dies in despair rather than triumph.²³

Lyndall dies in failure as a “life cut short,” yet Schreiner asks readers to identify with Lyndall’s turn away from Victorian gender roles and to find a way to pick up where Lyndall leaves off. Lyndall cannot be more than what she is, and she dies trying to find a

²² Ruth Knechtel argues Lyndall’s failed maternity acts as a critique of Victorian society: “Lyndall is incapable of survival as a mother because society has not yet evolved to accept her androgynous mind” (“Olive Schreiner’s Pagan Animism” 266). DuPlessis adds: “Lyndall’s dead baby, the imagery surrounding the birth, and the fact of Lyndall’s death constitute as an ensemble the climax of the conflict between old and new scripts for female action. It is not that Lyndall went too far, in the geopolitical terminology of the sexual terrain, but that she did not go far enough. Her despairing cry—rejecting her potential vocation as polemicist, intellectual, or political agitator—uses chrysalis, fairy-tale, and pregnancy imagery in an anatomy of various female dilemmas” (27).

²³ Elizabeth Lawson similarly argues that both Waldo and Lyndall secure a white feather of truth at the end through their deaths, but her focus is on how their deaths form an imperial protest against colonialism.

path to freedom and gender equality. In this way, Schreiner participates in the realist plotline; Lyndall cannot realistically achieve the utopian ideal she longs for within the conditions of Victorian gender ideology and her position as an unwed mother. The reader, however, can find hope in the track she makes to the water's edge.

The Valuable Failure of African Farm

Critics question how Lyndall can be a voice for Schreiner's feminism and yet, as Showalter says, "behave with such fatal passivity" (Introduction xvi). As we see, this contradiction can be resolved by examining Schreiner's feminist aesthetics as a whole. *African Farm* is both realist and allegorical; while those two forms seem at odds, they represent Schreiner's broader political investments in an unflinching examination of reality alongside a deep, abiding vision of a possible future, an ideal. Rita Felski argues that New Woman writers turned to realism and idealist writing in order to examine gender: "Within the constraints of a predominantly realist format... most of these novels could offer only a pessimistic conclusion... [O]ther genres such as the utopian novel and the political essay offered a more hospitable framework for inspirational and programmatic writing, inviting the imaginative projection of alternate scenarios" (146-47). While for many writers realism and utopian writing are separate if not mutually exclusive genres, Schreiner pulls them together in *African Farm*, seeing them as making up an organic whole of her feminist ideas also explored in her short fiction, allegories, and political essays.

Lyndall embodies the tensions of fin-de-siècle skepticism while still longing for progress; her pessimism contrasts with Schreiner's optimism in her nonfiction and

especially in her dreams and allegories, wherein she envisions a better world created through the labor and suffering of individuals who work for the social good. Because Lyndall is so often the voice of Schreiner's views, many readers expect Schreiner to deliver some kind of self-awareness on Lyndall's part that her sacrifice is meaningful and make her a martyr. Schreiner does not do this, and instead Lyndall dies in despair. This signals the realist plotline for Schreiner because Lyndall cannot overcome the ideology that confines her, and she does not share the convictions that her sacrifice and failure are meaningful; she does not have the mother heart. But if readers will carefully consider the allegory set within the center of the text, they can begin to understand how Lyndall fits within the broader picture of political work that Schreiner offers in the novel and in her other writings. The hope of *African Farm* lies beyond the ending in the symbolic significance of Lyndall's death for progress and the Woman's Labour Movement.

As one of the first New Woman novels, *African Farm* helped pave the way for others to follow as the discussions in the 1890s about the New Woman and the Woman Question escalated into a fully-fledged women's movement, with women winning partial voting rights in 1918 and full equality with male voters in 1928. Schreiner's maternal feminist vision, with her belief in the value of both failure and success for progress, contributes to this movement. This conviction led her to appeal prophetically to future generations in the introduction to *Woman and Labour*:

You will look back at us with astonishment! You will wonder at passionate struggles that accomplished so little.... —but, what you will never know is how it was thinking of you and for you, that we struggled as we did and accomplished the little which we have done; that it was in the

thought of your larger realization and fuller life, that we found consolation for the futilities of our own. What I aspired to be, and was not, comforts me. (7-8)

Echoing the hunter's final words, Schreiner's call to future generations summarizes her political approach and her maternal ethics, as well as foresees the historical movement of women's rights and feminism. Schreiner argues women must strive for future gender equality, knowing full well their own finite limitations, and in fact investing those limitations with faith and hope. This is part of the history of feminism—the fits and starts, unrecognized sacrifices and suffering, amidst the passionate convictions about equality and freedom.

Schreiner's recurring maternal imagery sets out various tensions and themes regarding her feminist reform of national and gender ideologies. She consistently imagines ideals reflecting her commitment to individual freedom and human unity—among races, sexes, and nations. But she also offers a connected and more intimate analysis of the costs of political work—the pain and isolation of renunciation for a greater cause of freedom. This links her maternal revision of gender and empire with a more nuanced vision of an altruistic mother heart. Her ethics focus on sacrifice and compassion for the other. The self can be nourished by this sacrifice if she will invest her own limitations and failings with the promise of collective progress. Her works inspired many feminists' fight for equal rights. As Heilmann explains, "Some fifteen years before the emergence of militancy, Schreiner thus gauged with astute foresight the potency of the Christian iconography which was to become a standard motif in suffragette literature, and which underpinned the political strategy of passive resistance through self-inflicted

suffering (hunger-strike) and even more extreme cases of self-harming” (*New Woman Strategies* 132). Her vision of pioneering individuals striving to gain freedom through their suffering and sacrifices—even failures—encouraged early feminists to fight, sometimes through violence, for the vote and social change.

Chapter 2: George Egerton's Radical Feminist Vision in *Keynotes and Discords*

[S]uppose all this nun's sacrifice is founded upon a misconception, on stupid rites of primitive magic misinterpreted by later though scarcely less ignorant ages; suppose there is no eternal punishment whence to release souls, no original or mortal sin calling for vicarious redemption, no life save the earthly one which this woman might have spent bringing up children, doing useful work, or merely moving freely and happily, erect, warm, clean, and without sores?

—Vernon Lee, *Satan the Waster* (198)

But to continue my story. The Angel was dead; what then remained? You may say that what remained was a simple and common object—a young woman in a bedroom with an ink pot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is 'herself'? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know. I do not believe anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skills.

—Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women" (280)

In "Women in the Queen's Reign" (1897), the editor of *The Ludgate* asks a variety of women—writers, emerging professionals, and notable women—to comment on women's progress, their "many blessings" and "advantages" during Victoria's reign (213). While Sarah Grand applauds the entrance of women into higher education, George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne) comments:

I am the last woman in the world to be of service to you, and outside my books I do not care to obtrude my opinion on the public in any way. I am not greatly concerned in the social, so-called educational, or political advancement of women. They are exotics—what interests me is her development from within out as a female, briefly: that woman as a whole has begun to tell the truth about herself, or at least the half truth. (216)

While other women interviewed comment with enthusiasm and at much greater length, Egerton's remark functions as more of a rebuke. In doing so, she distances herself from the formal interests of the women's movement—institutional reform and political equality—and instead emphasizes that what really interests her is a woman's identity as a woman: her self-development, reflected through the language of wholeness and authenticity.

This emphasis on authenticity and wholeness carries over to her aesthetic goals in her popular short story collections *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1895).¹ Egerton echoes the literary goals of the Victorians, namely writers like George Eliot, whose commitment to “truth-telling” defines her realist moral aesthetic. But Egerton's fiction is distinctly *late* Victorian in its form—the short story—and in its themes of sexual agency. In her essay “Keynote to ‘Keynotes’” (1932), Egerton reflects on her aesthetic goals: “I realized that in literature, everything had been better done by man than woman could hope to emulate. There was only one small plot left for her to tell: the *terra incognita* of herself, as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her—in a word to give herself away, as man had given himself in his writings” (58). In one sense, Egerton identifies herself in a masculine tradition of writing, but in another sense, she identifies literature—the text itself—as a form of self-revelation as an author “gives” herself away. Furthermore, Egerton echoes J.S. Mill when he writes in *The Subjection of Woman*, “What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others” (155). Egerton argues

¹ These collections are often paired together through their similar themes, and they shocked London audiences with their erotic agency and scathing critiques of Victorian gender ideology.

woman has been written by men, yet she remains a terra incognita—an unmapped terrain. As if responding to Mill directly, she takes up his charge to understand the nature of women and create a literature of their own. But rather than see this as case for women's equal involvement in the public sphere—as Schreiner does—Egerton embarks on a quest for the female self, a female-constructed narrative of her identity.

For Egerton, women's liberation comes through examining the patriarchal construction of femininity and getting to the terra incognita of women: their character, their essence, their souls. She specifically marks herself as a woman writer, explaining: “Unless one is androgynous, one is bound to look at life through the eyes of one's sex, to toe the limitations imposed on one by its individual physiological functions” (“Keynotes” 58). Much like Virginia Woolf's, Egerton's fictional landscape is the psychology of gender. Writing in 1932, Egerton reflects on her psychological characterization in order to map out identity: “If I did not know the technical jargon current to-day of Freud and the psycho-analysts, I did know something of complexes and inhibitions, repressions and the subconscious impulses that determine actions and reactions. I used them in my stories” (“Keynotes” 58). Egerton's construction of character anticipates the modernist impulse toward advancements in psychology. She frames her study of women's nature by contending that patriarchal constructions of femininity repress authentic womanhood: “I recognized that in the main, woman was the ever-untamed, unchanging, adapting herself as far as it suited her ends to male expectations; even if repression was altering her subtly. I would use situations or conflicts as I saw them with a total disregard of man's opinions. I would unlock a closed door with a key of my own fashioning. I did” (58). In order to challenge the separate spheres, Egerton begins with the private sphere, where

women are defined within a sexual economy. She aims to break through the patriarchal artifice of the separate spheres in order to locate the authentic woman underneath. The essence—the authentic self—Egerton searches for draws on sexual difference, specifically imagery of the maternal and an association of women with Nature. In writing this way, Egerton anticipates the *écriture féminine* of the French feminists.

Egerton challenges the separate spheres by focusing on how patriarchy corrupts the private sphere for women, making the home not a sanctuary of peace, but a landscape of war. Feminist critiques of the separate spheres often focused on this sex war, arguing that the division of the sexes into different spheres created an antagonism between the sexes: “Feminists countered that relations between men and women already resembled a ‘sex war’ because of the separation of the sexes in distinct spheres. The ideology of women’s private sphere rested on definitions of female sexuality; indeed, it was always depicted in those terms. It is not surprising, then, that women who challenged the ideology of separate spheres addressed the central premise of the ideology—the question of women’s, and men’s, sexual identity” (Kent, *Sex and Suffrage* 57-58).² This is Egerton’s domain: women’s sexual identity within the private sphere. While many feminists sought to establish peace through institutional reform, Egerton focuses on women’s identity construction, seeking liberation within the self rather than in politics. Egerton demonstrates that the sex war occurs because women are defined by men within a patriarchal system that demands their self-abnegation and not their own self-determination. Egerton demonstrates that this lack of self-determination results in an internal war between competing identities. Patriarchal constructions of sexual morality

² For more on suffrage and the sex war, see chapter six in Kent’s *Sex and Suffrage*.

reflected in the discourse of feminine virtue and fallenness divide women from themselves and their essential womanhood, leading to a split identity.

Ruskin asserts in his reinforcement of the separate spheres that women's identities are located within the private sphere and in fact, their very being becomes a moral home; their identity is constructed as a shelter for others. Schreiner reworks the maternal and the feminine virtue of self-sacrifice as the basis of her gender politics, moving women into the public sphere. While Egerton envisions the maternal as a site of authentic womanhood, more often she rejects Ruskin's definition of women's identities through moral beauty and self-sacrifice, and instead focuses on self-development. But rather than utilize this as a politics which rejects women's private sphere role, Egerton reconfigures women's identities as homes. She focuses on reclaiming women's abilities for self-determination and the home as a site of patriarchal resistance. While she dismantles the separate spheres divide by showing how the public discourses on morality and sexuality corrupt the private sphere—woman/home—she reinforces an oppositional stance to the public sphere of patriarchal discourse. Many of Egerton's characters become outcasts or outsiders, but while Schreiner's characters mourn their rejection from society, Egerton's characters embrace their oppositional status as a site of liberation.

To some readers, Egerton's emphasis on woman's essential nature might not look like feminism at all, and certainly she sets herself in contrast to both the Victorian "true woman"—the angel, which she argues is an artificial construction of womanhood, a "half-doll"—and the suffragist, whom she considered to be "half-man" ("The Regeneration of Two" 148). She did not ally herself with the women's movement, yet she was considered a New Woman writer. Whether we assign her a feminist identity or not,

Egerton's resistance suggests that her feminism is not defined by political activism and what we ordinarily associate with liberal feminism—rights. She locates her politics in the private sphere and in the most private space—character, the self, or one's identity. This is not to say that other writers were not interested in self-development or character—this is the stuff of fiction—but that the imagery and didactic speeches of Schreiner and Egerton move in different directions. Schreiner retains women's redemptive power for the nation. Egerton moves away from society; she sets up a community of outcasts attempting to operate in resistance to social institutions, whereas Schreiner attempts to reform them. For Schreiner, there is a giving away of self; for Egerton, a coming to the self. Egerton retains woman as embodied home, but she reconfigures this as a home for self-determination, not self-renunciation.

Two related issues dominate Egerton scholarship: her feminism and her essentialism. As in her assessment of Schreiner, Showalter asserts that Egerton “has no coherent feminist politics to argue” and can only expose the problems women face regarding their sexual desires (*Literature* 212). This reading and those that have come after Showalter link her “incoherent feminist politics” with, as Ledger explains, “a fault line of biological essentialism” (Introduction xix). This reflects the shift from second-wave feminist recovery work to third-wave critiques of essentialism. Scholars debate the value of Egerton's essentialism—is it strategic or inherently problematic?³ While Iveta Jusova concludes that Egerton's essentialism is complicated, she argues that it “re-asserts

³ Ledger asserts that Egerton's essentialism is complex: “throughout *Keynotes* and *Discords* there is an unresolved *tension* between an essentialist, biologically driven maternal impulse associated with femininity, and a less tangible ‘excess’ of desire that has, in the stories, nothing to do with reproductive sexuality” (Introduction xix). Therefore, Ledger concludes that Egerton does not consistently fall into the trap of essentialism but deals with gender and desire in complex ways.

the traditional unproductive binary division between (female) nature and (male) culture” (58). By contrast, Kate McCullough asserts that Egerton’s essentialism plays a particular political function; by constructing an essential feminine, Egerton creates a feminist solidarity among women as grounds for her vision of “female identity” (222). But ultimately McCullough concludes that this essentialism leads to a limitation within Egerton’s work: “Egerton’s strategic essentialism allowed her to offer a new representation of female identity, but only by erasing the other sorts of differences among women which were so crucial in shaping her own life” (222).⁴ Adding a further layer of complexity, Ruth Knechtel argues that while Egerton often writes overtly of women’s biological differences, her fiction undermines the stability of that essentialism with a strong theme of androgyny.⁵ As these critics illustrate, Egerton’s writing is undoubtedly essentialist, but the stability and significance of that essentialism is contestable.

While Egerton is not campaigning for women’s rights in the public sphere, she engages the sex war within the private sphere. She seeks refuge in a maternal essentialism, which becomes a metaphor for woman’s nature. Essentialism becomes a vehicle for challenging patriarchy. She seeks to teach a new doctrine of liberation within the soul—the interior life which she explores in fiction. Egerton rejects Victorian sexual morality and advocates a triumph of the outsider or outcast. This radical feminist vision is initiated in “A Cross Line,” the first story of *Keynotes*, developed in her critiques of

⁴ Laura Chrisman, McCullough, and Lisa Hager all argue that Egerton’s essentialism leads to obscuring class and racial differences. Chrisman argues that Egerton’s essentialism, while critical of empire, reintegrates a eugenic and racist ideology in her reformation of a feminist identity. McCullough sees a contradiction between “the material forces ... which determine women’s lives” and Egerton’s tendency to “[elide] material differences among women in order to underscore a commonality of gender” (222).

⁵ See Knechtel’s chapter four on Egerton in *The Mother and the Androgyne*.

fallenness in *Discords*, and fulfilled as a utopian space in the concluding story of *Discords*, “The Regeneration of Two.”

Gender: “a struggle between instinctive truths and cultivated lies”

In *Sex and Suffrage*, Kent describes the political goals of the women’s movement: “Educational and employment opportunities; the opening of medicine to women; the right to own property, to dissolve a brutal marriage, to obtain custody of children; and, above all, the vote, were the means by which feminists hoped to throw off their male-defined identity as sexual objects and to establish and receive acknowledgments of their individual humanity” (157-58). This is the direction of Schreiner’s feminist politics. Egerton also desires that women “might escape the role of victim and find scope for their own agency in establishing the conditions of their lives,” but she does not seek to do this through an opening up of the public sphere or reforming institutions. Instead, she hopes “to throw off [women’s] male-defined identity as sexual object” through a female-defined identity.

Rather than argue for a reform of women’s gender roles within the public sphere, Egerton strives to cultivate a radical private space in which women can pursue psychological liberation from Victorian gender ideology, embracing a feminist politics of difference. This occurs in her short stories that explore the harms of Victorian patriarchy and the value of nurturing a more authentic self. The self or soul is the landscape of politics in Egerton’s fiction—an embattled terrain fought between the lies and artifice of culture and the instinctual truths of the body. The maternal is the “natural” instinct that taps into this authentic self, and thus, the mode of resistance to gender oppression takes

place in the mind and heart of the woman—in her agency in the private sphere, not necessarily the public. This is not to say that Egerton’s work is not political, but that Egerton locates her mode of resistance, her politics, within the private sphere and within the self. Similar to Schreiner, the maternal operates as a feminist metaphor, but in contrast to Schreiner, Egerton’s use of the maternal emphasizes not a sacrifice of self, but a coming to self. Egerton’s community of women aims to teach this coming to self through her illustration of oppression and its harm to the self or through characters’ modes of resistance to oppression. Oppression is defined less as a denial of rights than as an ethical harm or an obstacle to self-development and fulfillment. Patriarchy defines women’s identity, and Egerton seeks to peel back the layers of gender in order to get at a more authentic agency.

Many Victorians took refuge in the ideas of liberal humanism, responding to the bleak and violent face of Darwin’s natural selection, and in a sense, trying to combat Alfred Tennyson’s “Nature, red in tooth and claw” with George Eliot’s “wide fellow feeling.” But as a late Victorian writer, Egerton is quick to point out that the march of progress has often trampled over women: “Every social revolution has told hardest on us: when a sacrifice was demanded, let woman make it” (“Now Spring has Come” 16). In “Now Spring has Come,” the narrator asserts that women are “half creatures.... Hermaphrodite by force of circumstances” (16). Egerton pinpoints the morality of the separate spheres as initiating a sex war, but this sex war creates not only an antagonism between the sexes, but an antagonism within woman’s identity itself: “[M]en manufactured an artificial morality, made sins of things that were as clean in themselves as the pairing of birds on the wing; crushed nature, robbed it of its beauty and meaning,

and established a system that means war, and always war, because it is a struggle between instinctive truths and cultivated lies” (16). The separate spheres ideology not only divides men and women between the public and private, but also divides women into pure women and sinful women. Egerton argues that this artificial construction establishes the language of war, an internal war between “instinctive truths” and “cultivated lies.” For Egerton, a truer form of morality emerges from the self, not from society. She defines society as a “moral and legal [prison]” for the individual, and she specifically links religion, the law, and social progress to this imprisonment (16).⁶

Generally speaking, the Victorians believed in a natural progression of history leading toward progress; this produced optimism about the future. Writers such as Matthew Arnold reflect this movement in his work *Culture and Anarchy* by conceptualizing “culture” as “a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (5). But by the end of the century, this general optimism shifts to questions about the sustainability of progress and growing anxieties about the future of society and the individuals within it. In contrast to Matthew Arnold’s hope in culture as the best of a society, Egerton defines culture as enslavement and a lie. The language of war emerges from within the individual herself.

Egerton examines the inner lives of her women characters, and she also explores what initiates repression of women’s instincts and thwarts their self-development. Throughout these short stories, she seems to ask, “what leads to self-fulfillment?” While

⁶ As critics have shown, Egerton was strongly influenced by Nietzsche. For further discussions of Egerton and Nietzsche, see Jusova; Brown; D’hoker; and Knechtel’s *The Mother and the Androgyne*.

Egerton elevates the maternal as “the divine instinct,” this is a different emphasis from Schreiner. Egerton highlights the altruistic components of the maternal, but this is not her resting place of politics and ethics. Throughout the stories, women are challenged to consider what causes repression of their authentic selves and how they might challenge those forces—either from within or without.

Both story collections are troubled by fraught characters, but whereas *Keynotes* tends toward lighter stories with more positive relationships, *Discords* largely turns violent and destructive. “A Cross Line” and “The Regeneration of Two” bookend the paired collections and they offer an introduction and a utopian conclusion to Egerton’s mapping of women’s soul as a terra incognita. Consistently, Egerton shows how cultural constructions of sexual morality, largely anchored by religion and the marketplace, privilege men and oppress women. She critiques this sexual-social-moral discourse throughout *Keynotes* and *Discords*, less because it creates inequality and more because it creates inauthenticity within a woman’s identity. This authenticity creates conflicts with Victorian sexual morality and many of her characters are in some cases unconventional or in others complete outcasts from society; in *Discords* especially, she focuses on the moral concept of fallenness, demonstrating its corruption of women’s self-development. Whereas Schreiner writes of alienation from the community with a purifying vision of sacrifice and despair, this alienation is something to be mourned and the community is longed for; for Egerton, it is potentially a source of strength and something to embrace. In what follows, I examine this terra incognita that Egerton explores and the imagery that emerges from her exploration of a woman’s soul. Throughout the stories, characters learn something significant about themselves—a liberating revelation—which is often

conveyed to the audience through their own self-reflection or through a sympathetic conversation between women, emphasizing Egerton's value of self-development and sex solidarity.

The opening short story of *Keynotes*, "A Cross Line," is one of Egerton's most widely discussed New Woman stories for its frank depiction of women's sexual agency, as the main character engages in an erotic fantasy with herself as the subject. More importantly, the story opens up the collection with a foundation for understanding Egerton's terra incognita of a woman's soul. The story sets up a tension between the woman's desire for adventure and her grounded domestic life with her husband. She meets a wandering fisherman who invites her to run away with him and engage in the adventurous life she craves. She discovers she is pregnant and decides to stay with her husband. Egerton constructs a narrative that rides the line between gender conformity and gender subversion. On the one hand, Victorian audiences were no doubt scandalized by the wife's erotic agency and speeches about women's nature, but on the other, she ultimately accepts her coming maternity and relinquishes her fantasies of wandering. Ultimately, the woman makes a choice that emerges from her own self-determination, rather than as a choice between men.

Egerton depicts many of her protagonists as "untamed" spirits, strongly associated with nature. The woman of "A Cross Line" introduces an Egerton character-type: richly imaginative, a free spirit, erotic. The woman's rich fantasy life reflects her desires for freedom and adventure: "Somehow she thinks of Cleopatra sailing down to meet Antony, and a great longing fills her soul to sail off somewhere too—away from the daily need of dinner-getting, and the recurring Monday with its washing; life with its tame duties and

virtuous monotony. She fancies herself in Arabia on the back of a swift steed” (8). This sensual fantasy connects her to her essential nature: “Her thoughts shape themselves into a wild song, a song to her steed of flowing mane and satin skin; an uncouth rhythmical jingle with a feverish beat; a song to the untamed spirit that dwells in her” (8). In many ways, Egerton’s essentialism confirms gender binaries by associating women with nature and men with culture, but she inverts the values associated with each, claiming strength, not weakness in her essentialism, and rejecting patriarchal culture as something that corrupts a woman’s nature.

Egerton depicts the woman as wild and untamed, and she extends this nature to other women, creating a sex solidarity around the desires for freedom and adventure:

And her thoughts go to other women she has known, women good and bad, school friends, casual acquaintances, women workers—joyless machines for grinding daily corn, unwilling maids grown old in the endeavour to get settled, patient wives who bear little ones to indifferent husbands until they wear out—a long array. She busies herself with questioning. Have they, too, this thirst for excitement, for change, this restless craving for sun and love and motion? (9)

The woman questions her own desire for activity and sets this against the patriarchal constructions of women. The woman asserts to the wandering fisherman that men attempt to control women’s “eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best women” (9). This nature “may be concealed” but it is “never eradicated by culture.” This, she argues, is “the keynote of woman’s witchcraft and woman’s strength.” This wildness is repressed in order to conform to cultural femininity,

but she contends that any woman who “tells the truth and is not a liar about these things is untrue to her sex and abhorrent to man.” While men create a version of woman they can love, the woman asserts this is based on a lie (9-10). This establishes a prominent theme within *Keynotes* and *Discords*: nature is associated with truth and culture is associated with artificiality or lies.

The wandering fisherman entreats her to leave domesticity and lead a life of adventure with him, thereby offering her what she desires. The man says to her, “I can’t for the life of me think how you, with that free gipsy nature of yours, could bind yourself to a monotonous country life, with no excitement, no change. I wish I could offer you my yacht. Do you like the sea?” (11). He paints a picture of their life together in which she is free and a queen. When he asks her if she likes the picture he has created, she replies he is the only part she does not like. She explains, “Can’t you understand where the spell lies? It is the freedom, the freshness, the vague danger, the unknown that has a witchery for me, ay, for every woman!” (11). While she finds his offer attractive, she makes it clear this is a desire which does not include him, but rather the life he offers. This assertion challenges gender ideology of the separate spheres. Ordinarily, the desire for adventure, the images of wandering freedom, is reserved for men; women are associated with the private sphere. Here, Egerton breaks that boundary, contending that women have restless spirits yearning for freedom. The woman defines her nature not through the language of others, but through her own desires.

Her desire, however, is kept in tension with the domestic itself. After the woman rejects the man’s yacht fantasy, he asks her if she does not have the capability for affection, interpreting her rejection as an inability to love. She explains that her desires

for adventure are tempered by her affections, what she calls “that crowning disability of my sex” (11). Yet, she states, “I chafe under it” (11). The woman argues that if women were not kept grounded by affections, they “would master the world,” because she says, “[at] heart we care nothing for laws, nothing for systems. All your elaborately reasoned codes for controlling morals or man do not weigh a jot with us against an impulse, an instinct” (11). In this statement, Egerton sets women’s identities in contrast to social system and legal structures, arguing they emerge from men’s identities, not women’s. Within the Victorian ideology of the separate spheres, women are the moral guardians of the home, self-sacrificial agents of satisfying others’ desires rather than their own. Egerton upends that construction by asserting that the Romantic Ego dwells within woman, not man alone. In fact, she asserts that men are the moral guardians through social and legal institutions. When Egerton does this, she identifies women with nature and instinct and men with culture and laws; this influences her distance from the women’s movement, which prioritized legal reform and political equality. Egerton is setting herself in opposition to the public sphere.

Ultimately, once the woman discovers she is pregnant, she chooses to stay with her husband, who does not understand her, rather than run away with the man who offers her adventure. This has proven to be a disappointment to many critics. The ending has been variously interpreted as “a return to convention” as Ann Ardis explains (116) and as a reinforcement of women’s communities.⁷ What I would emphasize about the ending is that Egerton depicts the maternal as a grounding anchor for women, and while this

⁷ Showalter writes about the ending’s emphasis on “kinship” between women; Chrisman and Hager discuss the troubling implications of class and imperial differences ignored in these communal assertions.

woman “chafes” against the domestic in her desire for adventure, her choice is both gender-conforming and gender-subversive. While the story might appear to situate her choices between men, the woman makes her choice based on her own desires and determination. Her decision to stay is based on her maternity, but not because it connects her to her husband or disconnects her from her suitor, but because of her own desires for motherhood. Egerton shows that she cultivates her agency within her rich fantasy life. While the woman craves understanding, she longs for her mother—she seeks to find that companionable understanding in women. She accepts the maternal and the domestic on her own terms.

The Triumphant Fallen

The majority of Egerton’s women characters are at least unconventional if not overtly radical when it comes to Victorian gender norms. Their behavior is motivated by their own agency and desire, whether they smoke, ride bicycles unchaperoned, fish alone, or court affairs. They are often writers, like the woman in “The Spell of the White Elf” or the tenant in “Wedlock.” Some of them are happily married; others desire free-love contracts. But sometimes their actions push the boundaries of Victorian convention so strongly, it is no wonder Egerton shocked her audiences. She participates in the literary tradition of cultivating sympathy for fallen women—mistresses, adulterers, prostitutes—but she is part of a late Victorian turn which complicates the fictional convention of social ostracism and punishment for sexual sins. Whether her characters struggle against culture or succumb to their own destruction, they invoke sympathy for behaviors Victorians would have found scandalous, and it is this invocation of shame that Egerton

seeks to dismantle for her audiences. In this way, her stories offer a critique of the gender norms that harm women, and she suggests a mode of resistance by claiming strength in the very outcast status she critiques.

Discords is a much darker collection of stories, almost all about women who are fallen or outcast from society. “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods” focuses on a woman Egerton depicts as an untamed, creative seer, who is pursued by a predatory lover and is ultimately outcast from respectable society as a fallen woman. Throughout *Discords*, fallenness is an oppressive Victorian gender construct that thwarts women’s agency and freedom. In “Psychological,” the main character accepts her status as an outcast and finds strength in this position. This sets the tone for the stories that follow, in which other outcast characters navigate their fallen or compromised positions.

“Psychological” charts three moments: child, girl, and woman. As a child and girl, Egerton establishes a sensitive soul who reads “greedily” with her “elf-locks” (67) and is a seer into the world’s suffering. The girl cries out against social injustices and declares herself against God: “I wanted to love you, God; indeed, you know I did, but I can’t, I can’t, I can’t.... if I were a great queen I would build a new tower of Babel with a monster search-light to show up all the dark places of your monstrous creation. I would raise a crusade for the service of the suffering, the liberation of the idiots who grind the music for the world to dance” (75). The girl-child is deeply touched by the pain of the world and sets herself against religion, desiring to craft a new space of liberation from injustice and suffering.

As a woman, her free sensitive spirit is troubled, but she makes the British Museum her oasis: “She has found life a hard battle, but there have been beautiful books

and beautiful pictures to worthen it, and, best of all, a free spirit and a free heart to fight the demons” (77). Pursued by an unwanted lover who is married, she finds her respectability compromised. He threatens her, she relents, and a scandal ensues which tarnishes her purity: “Her dream of a White Knight waiting for her, if only she keep her spirit free and her heart clean, has been dispelled by her own action; she has smirched her white robe: never more can she stand waiting to meet her knight with fearless glad eyes” (87). Here, she accepts the moral terms of the dominant discourse and leaves England and takes up residence in France as an outcast from respectable society. She has fallen and accepts her ostracism, but refuses to tread the inward path of the fallen woman: “She feels so bruised, so shamed, and yet she asks herself, Why shame? Is not that, too, a false conception based on customs? No, not in her case. Her soul-soiling is not because she lived with him, but because she lived with him for a reason other than love—because it involved a wrong to another woman” (88). Egerton offers a twist on the fallen woman narrative. The protagonist feels shame, not because she sinned against society, but because she betrayed her own moral integrity and harmed another woman. It is for this reason that she leaves England.

As in other Egerton stories, the final part of this story takes place as a conversation between women that builds sympathy and expands Egerton’s larger critiques of the concept of fallenness. The fallen woman argues that she has two choices: to become repentant but branded morally impure for life or to self-destruct as a social outcast, rejected by women and preyed upon by men (91-92). She asserts that she chooses neither; rather, she says, “I shall apologise to no man, court no woman’s friendship, simply stand by my own action, and I defy them to down me, and that is what I would

teach every woman” (92). Rather than accept the terms of the discourse, the protagonist refuses both repentance and degradation, creating an alternate option. This choice emerges from her own integrity as a subject: “No power on earth, no social law, written or unwritten, is strong enough to make me tread a path on which I do not willingly set my own foot” (92). The woman carves out a path in opposition to convention and refuses shame by clinging to her own moral integrity. She has ambition, strength, and, crucial for Egerton, an awareness of her “intuition,” her essential nature.

Egerton’s protagonist resists social convention and finds strength in this opposition. She sets herself against both private and public moral constructions, seeking work to make herself independent—she is an image of the New Woman: “no man need starve, but the hungry man or woman must buy his bread at the world’s terms—work. I cannot demand the place I would have sought in it before; my character or want of it ... is against me; but I can get a living and I mean to. I know more than the average woman, ay, more than the average man; and I have intuition” (92). The protagonist disrupts the separate spheres division of public/private, but she also disrupts the moral division between pure and fallen woman. Her emphasis on intuition and skill locates her resistance within the self. Her goals are now shaped by her own self-development, not social status: “All that is best, and strongest, and most beautiful, because most love-worthy ... in the world is a common inheritance, and I mean to take my share in it” (92). This common inheritance transcends sex and class as an equalizing force.⁸

⁸ Yet, as critics persuasively argue, this equalizing force figures as an abstract ideal that obscures women’s real lived differences based on class and race. Hager contends, “When Egerton’s female characters have the most agency to choose what sort of life they want to lead and what role their sexual desires will play in that life, they remain always inside the system that they seek to challenge. Egerton’s positing of an essential womanly wildness ultimately obscures the very real differences between her upper middle-class English

Egerton's protagonist locates resistance within the self and her common inheritance in art and nature. This leads to her further critique cultural constructions of morality: "No Russian peasant bows more humbly to his ikon than does the average man and woman to the mangy idols of respectability, social distinctions, mediocre talent with its self-advertisement and cheap popularity. Great God! think how many miss a glorious sunset they might see from the doorstep because it is genteeler to peep over the window-screen" (93). According to Egerton, social conventions shaping gender create obstacles to an authentic life—even how a woman is able to view a sunset. Egerton's protagonist desires to teach others of an alternate path of authenticity, which she has learned through her ostracism:

I wish I could start a crusade and preach a new gospel to all my weaker brethren, who have suffered and sinned and are being driven to despair for the sake of their pasts. I would make them arise with renewed hope; teach them to laugh in the faces of the hackneyed opinion of the compact majority who are always wrong; stir them to joy of living again; point out to them well-springs of wisdom and love, that no speculator on the world's change has power to make a corner in; prove to them that the world is to each of us if we have canning, or cunning, enough to take our share in it; and that when all is said and done there is no particular kind of maggot to feed on the king any more than the peasant. (93)

mistresses and their lower-class and often culturally-other women companions, kindred spirits, and protectors" (par 5).

In this speech, the woman envisions an alternate path emphasizing self-fulfillment and joy if individuals will turn from social custom. She offers laughter as a form of resistance to institutions of morality.⁹ This resistance emerges from self-determination, as she tells her friend: “You must find yourself. All the systems of philosophy or treatises of moral science, all the religious codes devised by the imagination of men will not save you— *always you must come back to yourself*” (93). Egerton reconstructs the woman’s identity by emphasizing self-development. If Ruskin defines women’s identities as synonymous with the home, Egerton’s protagonists link their home-identity as a woman-identified natural world, rather than a male-identified domestic sanctuary. The woman of “Psychological” cultivates an alternate path to the discourse of fallenness by developing her own moral integrity and finding strength in her outsider status. She rejects shame as a marker of her identity and defines her purpose through a reconfigured home within the natural landscape.

While “Psychological” takes on the discourse of shame, “Virgin Soil” critiques the discourse of purity and launches one of Egerton’s most radical and scathing critiques: her rejection of the Victorian mother. Egerton utilizes the dominant image of “virgin soil” to further her investment in authenticity. In this story, Egerton takes a virgin girl and exposes the ways that the ideology of the separates spheres—with the Angel in the House as the moral reformer—perverts and crushes women’s natural growth. This two-part story explores the destructive marriage of a young woman to an older man and her return five years after the wedding to her mother. As she does in other stories, Egerton illustrates how the sexual discourse positions women as moral judges of other women, invoking

⁹ By contrast, in Schreiner’s work laughter symbolizes shaking off despair, the enemy of real work.

shame, and how this discourse turns men into predatory sexual animals, justified by economic, religious, and legal institutions.¹⁰ “Virgin Soil” focuses on the daughter’s rejection of the mother, because the mother participated in the marriage market that turned her daughter into a commodity of sexual and economic trade. The daughter joins the ranks of the fallen outcasts by leaving her husband, but this act is the beginning of new growth and returns readers to the strength of the fallen woman in “Psychological.”

Part one depicts the purity and ignorance of the girl as she approaches marriage. Her mother tells her as she readies to join her new husband: “You are married now, darling, and you must obey ... your husband in all things—there are—there are things you should know—but—marriage is a serious thing, a sacred thing” (127). The mother reinforces the gender norms of submission, yet sends her daughter to her wedding night in sexual ignorance. The husband is portrayed as predatory, and the daughter seeks her mother for refuge: “the bridegroom’s voice, with an imperative note that it strikes the nervous girl is new to it, that makes her cling to her mother in a close, close embrace, drop her veil and go out to him” (127). Part one ends with the girl going to her husband in fear. Part two picks up five years later; the wife is now a bitter woman for whom “the keynote of her face is a cynical disillusion” (129). Her transformation is one of bitterness: “She can recall how she used to run to the open window on summer mornings and lean out and draw in the dewy freshness and welcome the day, how she has stood on moonlight nights and danced with her bare white feet in the strip of moonlight, and let her fancies fly out into the silver night, a young girl’s dreams of the beautiful, wonderful

¹⁰ See Egerton’s stories “Gone Under” and “Wedlock” for further examples of how the sexual discourse leads to women’s rejection of other women and situates men to violently oppress women.

world that lay outside” (128). This is a quintessential Egerton image of femininity—a free spirit associated with nature, but this spirit has been crushed by marriage.

The heart of this story is the daughter Flo’s verbal assault of her mother. Writers such as Sarah Grand depict men as morally corrupt predators of women’s sexuality, but Egerton launches her attack on the mother. For Egerton the true maternal is the divine instinct within women’s nature to protect, love, sacrifice for their children, whether adopted or biological. But the maternal has been corrupted by Victorian gender, making the mother the arbiter of economic marriages, degrading her daughter in a form of prostitution. The daughter returns to her mother a disillusioned woman who has been traumatized by her husband’s sexual appetite and infidelities. The mother defends herself, resists her daughter’s choices, and continues to assert the cultural beliefs about the positive moral influence true women should have on their husbands, saying: “you should have tried to save Philip—from—from such a shocking sin” (130). Flo surprises her mother by asserting that her husband’s infidelities were a relief to her: “These little trips have been my one solace. I assure you, I have always hailed them as lovely oases in the desert of matrimony, resting-places on the journey” (130). This assertion of the true woman’s moral guardianship of the home contrasted with Flo’s relief at his infidelities pushes against both traditional gender norms and facets of the feminist movement, which asserted that men should be held to the same moral standards of purity as women. Here, Egerton strikes out differently, arguing that an economic marriage not only prostitutes women, but harms their self-development. Flo asserts this critique of marriage and her desires for love and motherhood outside the confines of social convention:

as long as marriage is based on such unequal terms, as long as man demands from a wife as a right, what he must sue from a mistress as a favour; until marriage becomes for many women a legal prostitution, a nightly degradation, a hateful yoke under which they age, mere bearers of children conceived in a sense of duty, not love. They bear them, birth them, nurse them, and begin again without choice in the matter, growing old, unlovely, with all joy of living swallowed in a senseless burden of reckless maternity, until their love, granted they started with that, the mystery, the crowning glory of their lives, is turned into a duty they submit to with distaste instead of a favour granted to a husband who must become a new lover to obtain it. (131)

Flo's charge against marriage is specifically against the separate spheres ideology and the inequality it creates. The public institution and cultural ideology of marriage legally, economically, and morally supports men and gives them license and power over women. This power constrains women's bodies and lives by reducing them to "legal prostitutes" through the obligations of sex and maternity. Within the institution of marriage, power is distributed unequally to individuals on the basis of sex, which creates inequality and violence both publicly and privately. Rather than reform the institution of marriage, Egerton more often envisions free-love contracts between individuals.

What makes an arranged marriage a crime to Egerton is the lack of agency and knowledge by the daughter. Motherhood itself is not the problem; it is how maternity has been coopted into a patriarchal construction of feminine gender roles. For this reason, Egerton levels her critique at the mother who has become a mediator in a patriarchal

exchange: “Philip is as God made him, he is an animal with strong passions, and he avails himself of the latitude permitted him by the laws of society. Whatever of blame, whatever of sin, whatever of misery is in the whole matter rests *solely* and *entirely* with you, mother” (131). Society creates an oppressive marriage market (public), but her mother was responsible for her sexual education and protecting her daughter (private). When the mother partakes in the economic trade of daughters, she perverts the highest calling of maternity, which Egerton argues has been corrupted by patriarchal discourse. The mother was to protect that virgin soil, enabling true growth of her daughter’s agency and desire, but she failed. The mother tells her daughter she should have reformed her husband’s behavior, reinforcing the Angel in the House, but Egerton demonstrates that by participating in the marriage market, the daughter has been turned into a prostitute.¹¹ The divisions between public/private are not separate in a sexual economy.

Flo insists that by not preparing her for marriage and motherhood, her mother left her defenseless: “I say it is your fault, because you reared me a fool, an idiot, ignorant of everything I ought to have known, everything that concerned me and the life I was bound to lead as a wife; my physical need, my coming passion, the very meaning of my sex, my wifeness and motherhood to follow” (132). The discourse of purity denies Flo the sexual education and agency she needs in order to navigate the terrain of marriage. Egerton depicts a separate spheres marriage utilizing the terms of the sex war: “You gave me not one weapon in my hand to defend myself against the possible attacks of man at his worst. You sent me out to fight the biggest battle of a woman’s life, the one in which she ought

¹¹ Schreiner also discusses marriage as a form of prostitution in *Woman and Labor*. Similarly, Mona Caird associates marriage with prostitution and a form of vampirism: “We are also led to conclude that modern ‘Respectability’ draws its life-blood from the degradation of womanhood in marriage and in prostitution” (196).

to know every turn of the game, with a white gauze ... of maiden purity as a shield” (132). In other words, the separate spheres constructs marriage within a sexual economy that creates a sex war. The daughter’s sexual ignorance and her lack of self-development and agency in her own marriage leaves her defenseless.

During the marriage debate of the 1880s and 90s, Julia M.A. Hawksley writes in “A Young Woman’s Right: Knowledge,” “The knowledge, a claim to which I urge on behalf of all maidenhood, is.... a knowledge the possession of which would mould differently many lives, change the destinies of sundry families and prevent the wreckage of much faith and hope. It is a knowledge the bestowal of which is at the option of each mother and is the right of each daughter” (203). Hawksley argues sexual knowledge is withheld from many daughters, and she charges, like Egerton, that it is the mothers who are responsible: “The matter remains with the mothers—mothers not merely in the carnal, but also in the moral and spiritual sense—those elder women, in fact, in whose hands rest the education of the rising generation” (206). While Hawksley urges, Egerton attacks. Marriage is depicted as a battle in which women’s solidarity as a sex is first and foremost.

This radical assault on the Victorian mother has not sat well with scholars such as Showalter, who argues that Flo’s attack of her mother is not a “struggle ... between mothers and daughters, but between husbands and wives” and concludes that “Ultimately, Egerton’s avoidance of these central confrontations depresses the reader. One feels repeatedly an atmosphere of wasted talent, a capacity never really stretched” (214). Showalter asserts that this is an issue of husbands and wives, but in doing so, she misses Egerton’s point. Women are not merely victims of Victorian sexual ideology;

rather they are agents within a patriarchal culture that pits woman against woman, even in one of the most intimate of relationships, mother and daughter. For Egerton, the Victorian maternal ideal is corrupt and must be radically rejected in favor of the authentic maternal which nurtures self-development rather than renunciation.

For Egerton, the institution of marriage turns the daughter's body into a commodity to be traded, much like Thomas Hardy's Tess, who similarly charges her mother with transacting her in the marriage market. Flo declares: "You delivered me body and soul into his hands without preparing me in any way for the ordeal I was to go through. You sold me for a home, for clothes, for food; you played upon my ignorance" (132). Flo condemns her mother for participating in a gender discourse that keeps women ignorant about sexuality under the guise of purity and innocence. She also levels her condemnation at her mother, because Egerton's goal is for women to be able to define their own lives. Flo's mother has participated in a patriarchal definition of femininity; she has defined Flo for male expectations according to marital standards of sexual purity.

Flo powerfully asserts her own agency by declaring that she is leaving her husband. Her mother is shocked and asks her daughter to consider the social disgrace. The mother continues to participate in the separate spheres ideology as she blames Flo for Philip's behavior. Flo rejects her role as moral guardian and contends: "Bosh, mother, he is responsible for his own sins, we are not bound to dry-nurse his morality. Man is what we have made him, his very faults are of our making. No wife is bound to set aside the demands of her individual soul for the sake of imbecile obedience" (131). The separate spheres divides men and women by their subject position within a sexual marketplace, giving advantages to men through social and legal institutions. Flo argues that her own

self-determination and moral integrity take priority over submission to gender roles. The “demands of her individual soul” lead her to reject the marriage and her mother’s teaching.

Flo states her plans to leave Philip, and she asserts her own desires for a fulfilling relationship of her own choosing:

until I found the man who would satisfy me, body and soul—to whom I would have gone without any false shame, of whom I would think with gladness as the father of a little child to come, for whom the white fire of love or passion ... in my heart would have burned clearly and saved me from the feeling of loathing horror that has made my married life a nightmare to me—ay, made me a murderess in heart over and over again. This is not exaggeration. It has killed the sweetness in me, the pure thoughts of womanhood—has made me hate myself and *hate you*. (132)

This shocking declaration that her traditional marriage has crushed her purity spirit to the point of hatred leads her to further ask, “why didn’t you strangle me as a baby? It would have been kinder; my life has been a hell” (132). According to Victorian gender norms, Flo’s mother has done her duty—secured a wealthy home with a respectable man. But to Flo, she has committed the greatest sin—sold her daughter for money, with no regard for her own desires or well-being. This leads her to violently express hatred for herself and her mother, and to wish for her own destruction. I am not sure Egerton could have written anything more radical as a woman to a Victorian audience—she commits a domestic heresy against the sacred heart of the nation.

The story concludes by returning to the title image of the virgin soil. As Flo leaves her husband and her mother, she prays, “Wither and die, wither and die, make compost for the loves of the spring, as the old drop out and make place for the new, who forget them, to be in their turn forgotten” (134). This prayer initiates her relinquishment of her old life led by conventional gender norms, and her desire for a new life. The flower of her life has been destroyed by this marriage, but in leaving her husband, joining the community of Egerton outcasts, she hopes for renewal.

Regeneration: “my sinners laugh and sing”

Egerton’s radical imagery and assault on Victorian gender norms culminate in her most hopeful vision of a New Woman and a New Man in the concluding story of *Discords*, “The Regeneration of Two.” In “A Cross Line” Egerton introduces the terra incognita of a woman’s soul—the tension between wild freedom and a strong maternal instinct or domestic affections. In “Psychological,” Egerton shows how that wild free nature is threatened by the sexual discourses of fallenness and shame; however, she depicts a resilient fallen woman who embraces her ostracism. Similarly, Flo rejects the discourses of social disgrace when she rejects her marriage and mother in “Virgin Soil,” asserting her agency in hopes of renewal. All these characters illustrate Egerton’s radical assault on the separate spheres. But what if the woman in “A Cross Line” could find a lover who satisfied her soul? Egerton portrays such a relationship in her utopian short story “The Regeneration of Two,” which illustrates that while she may depict men as sexual predators in some stories, this is usually the result of the violence she exposes within the sexual discourse, not the nature of men individually. Egerton’s New Man is a

wandering artist, and her New Woman transforms from a bored and decadent widow to a vivacious protector of fallen women. She transforms not only her self—claiming her own development—but she transforms her house as well. The embodied home becomes a woman-defined space set in opposition to masculine culture.

Many critics take issue with this story's utopian narrative, faulting it for glossing over the real differences among women that would enable this space. Hager argues that this story reinforces an ideal agency for women that cannot transcend real class and ethnic differences: "the utopic aspects of the story severely limit the availability of such a life to Victorian women by placing the woman too far outside the real-lived experience of those women" (par 20). What this criticism points to is Egerton's inability to see how her essentialism covers over differences that would make this vision impossible in real life.¹² As with her essentialism, this is valid critique—the real lived experiences of actual women challenge the ability to make this real. Yet, as with Schreiner, utopian writing calls for something different: it illuminates ideals rather than realism. Rather than compare it to current feminist politics, I would urge us to examine how Egerton utilizes essentialism in order to reconfigure women's identities by reimagining the female-embodied home as a women's sanctuary, not a men's sanctuary. Egerton's essentialism reworks the separate spheres, retaining women's association with the embodied home, but she reorients it toward self-determination rather than self-sacrifice.

¹² Chrisman further argues the entire fantasy is predicated on that which Egerton critiques: "In 'The Regeneration of Two', for instance, the woman is enabled to develop her colony of women only because she has inherited property and wealth from her dead husband. The achievement of self-sufficiency through 'honest' cottage labour, in other words, is possible only through the unearned wealth of an inheritance which precedes it" (47-48).

In “The Regeneration of Two,” Egerton establishes a space of resistance by cleansing the private sphere of destructive patriarchal constructions of femininity through a rediscovery of the truths of the female body, Egerton’s alternate femininity. A decadent widow contemplates her life and yearns for something undefinable. When she comes in contact with a wandering poet, they exchange ideas about gender and the meaning of life. He challenges her constructed femininity, and she eventually breaks through the artifice of femininity in order to find herself. This coming to self unleashes a regeneration. She uses her wealth to open up a safe house for fallen women and other outcasts. She and the poet enter into a free-love contract, and her life is fulfilling. In part one, Egerton voices her critiques of society, women, and degeneration through a wandering poet and suggests a solution or regeneration through the maternal. In part two, she embodies those abstract critiques and solutions in the transformation of the two characters in Egerton’s vision of a New Woman and New Man, who work together in a domestic space set in opposition to patriarchal culture. While Schreiner envisions regeneration as political equality, Egerton depicts regeneration as a rebirth and a return to the body set against the artifice of culture.

In the first part, a young, wealthy widow, called Fruen, which means “mistress” in Danish, complains about her general discontent with life. She luxuriates in the afternoon sun, bored in her decadence and ennui: “taking her altogether, she is seductively attractive, a thing of piquant contrasts—the attractive artificiality, physical lassitude, and irritable weariness of a disillusioned woman of the world, and the eyes of a spoilt child filled with frank petulant query” (135-36). When her servant suggests she find some philanthropic work or join the women’s movement to keep her busy, Fruen says of the women’s movement, “they go in for suffrage, social reformation, politics, all sorts of

fatiguing things. I thought of doing something of that kind myself, of having a mission; but it would last just as long as it was a new sensation. Besides, I didn't care much for any of the advanced women I met, they were so desperately in earnest, they took it out of me so. I am too selfish, I am afraid.... *I want something for myself!*" (136). Fruen rejects the path of both the society wife and the emerging feminist; she wishes for something different. The widow epitomizes the decadent malaise associated with the fin de siècle—the world weariness so many saw as evidence of decline. Egerton draws on this association but is critical of the widow's artificiality. The narrator describes her appearance in decadent terms: "She is scarcely beautiful, but she is undeniably striking.... the orbs of her wonderful eyes, with their changeful lights, are large; there are weary lines about them, the lids are heavy with bistre stains; her skin has an anæmic tinge, and to-day it looks shriveled like a waxen flower with the first touch of wilting over it; the little touch of rouge, though it is artistically applied, only heightens this effect" (135). Her skin is a contrast of decay and artificial vivacity. This is authentic degeneration for Egerton: the combination of inactivity and artificially constructed femininity.¹³

When she encounters a poet sleeping in the park, she realizes the roots of her malaise. As a nomadic artist, the poet lives in contrast to the social norms: "I am the most fruitless of all things; the thing of least commercial value to the state—a poet. I belong nowhere, the whole world is mine! Poor in all the world counts of value, and yet I am rich in all she has of best—in myself—in freedom" (144). He shares in the common

¹³ Like Schreiner, Egerton is critical of decadence and the aesthetes. The New Woman writers and the Aesthetes are often lumped together in culture as evidence of decay, yet they were often at odds with one another in their aesthetic goals and gender politics, especially since Oscar Wilde reveled in artifice.

inheritance of the world that the fallen woman in “Psychological Moment” speaks of and lays claim to. He does not participate in contributing to the nation-state and he defines himself in opposition to it. He is a poet and “a new type of man and she is attracted powerfully” (144).¹⁴ Egerton’s New Man identifies himself within a frame of masculinity that defies Victorian masculine values: wealth, status, and productive work.

Through the poet, Egerton situates her analysis of gender within a broader cultural critique, linking gender to the discourses of industrialism, nationalism, and empire. The poet provides Fruen with an apocalyptic vision of a world in decay: “A great crowd of human beings. Take all these men, male and female, fashion them into one colossal man, study him, and what will you find in him? Tainted blood; a brain with the parasites of a thousand systems sucking at its base and warping it; a heart robbed of all healthy feelings by false conceptions, bad conscience, and a futile code of morality” (145). The poet argues that it is civilization—the social discourses and institutions of morality—that creates a parasitic decay.¹⁵ The artificial constructions of morality shape these relationships and distort “all healthy feelings.” It is a code that “makes the natural workings of sex a vile thing to be ashamed of; the healthy delight in the cultivation of one’s body as the beautiful sheath of one’s soul and spirit, with no shame in any part of it,

¹⁴ He is also articulating himself against Victorian masculinity associated with work and duty to the state, much like the aesthete or Oscar Wilde; yet, in contrast to the Decadents, he draws on more Romantic images of the alienated poet in nature.

¹⁵ Egerton’s depiction of parasitism relates to her construction of the battle between nature and culture. Culture is the parasite to the natural truths of the body. By contrast, Schreiner sees the parasitical woman as a vision of excess; she is the one who lives dependently off others and never contributes to society. Both images of parasitism emphasize their political ideas about what limits gender. For Schreiner, women’s labor and adherence to the separate spheres ideology limits women. For Egerton, the moral-sexual discourse envisioned in the separate spheres ideology limits women through an artificial sexual straightjacket. Liberation occurs for Schreiner, when women have full entrance and equality in the public sphere; for Egerton, women are liberated when they reject their citizenship in patriarchal society and cultivate a self or community in resistance to society.

all alike being clean, a sin of the flesh, a carnal conception to be opposed by asceticism” (145). This sexual code sets up a dichotomy between purity and shame and deforms the image of the body as shame requires severity and punishment. It is a code that has made too much of sexual love; it “has thrown man out of balance and made sexual love play far too prominent a part in life—it ought to be one note, not even a dominant note, in the chord of human love)” (145). The poet condemns the religious and moral underpinnings of Victorian society that establish a discourse of purity and shame, thereby obscuring and perverting the natural truths of the body.

The poet links individual parasitism with broader systems of oppression and violence, focusing on imperialism, war, and industrialism. He argues that the lust for power produces these systems meant to tame citizens into submission: “And I look to the rulers of the world,” the poet says, “and I see an emperor hold up a withered hand, and yet in that hand the threads of the destinies of nations are held as an old wife curls the flax for her distaff; and he tangles them into a ball, and throws it down with his gauntlet to the other nations, and says, ‘Fight for it!’” (146). The relationship between nations mirrors the relationship between individuals, fighting in the dust-heap of culture. In allegorical images not unlike Schreiner’s, Egerton asserts that the competition between nations for power and wealth is destructive and oppressive. War emerges out of this call for competition, and the poet envisions war as “the battlefields where the brethren of Christ, the Peacemaker, meet as foes, the brown earth is soaked with blood, and the vultures, with gore-dripping beaks, flap heavily from dead horse to conscious men, alike their prey” (146). The poet highlights the hypocrisy of national competition within a religious discourse which claims peace, yet provokes war. Finally, the poet links

nationalism and jingoism with industrialization: “I see factory doors open and troops of men and women and children, apologies for human beings, narrow-chested, stunted, with the pallor of lead-poisoning in their haggard faces, troop out of them” (146). The same social system that pits individual against individual, nation against nation, treats its subjects as expendable in both war and industrialization. In this narrative, Egerton extends her critique of gender to other systems of oppression and power. The poet identifies himself in opposition to society by rejecting the values of this system.

Thus far, the poet has described this violent system through masculine language and degeneration; he then calls for regeneration through women: “And I said to myself, ‘Salvation lies with the women and the new race they are to mother’” (146).¹⁶ Utilizing the language of eugenics, he turns to women of “advancement” or the women’s movement for this “new race,” but finds they are still participating in this system of power and exploitation he rejects: “I found them no whit less eager to employ every seduction at their command to win men over to their particular narrow cause, than their frivolous sister to keep him at her beck and call... And underneath it all I saw vanity, the old insatiable love of power that is the breath of most women’s nostrils” (146). He criticizes their willingness to engage in political manipulation to achieve their ends. He argues that what ultimately motivates the women’s movement is a desire for power, which he links with vanity. Thus, he asserts that the women’s movement still participates in the very system they seem to be challenging.

¹⁶ This language invokes the eugenics movement; for more on Egerton’s relationship to the eugenics movement especially Chrisman and also Jusova.

Like other New Woman writers, Egerton envisions regeneration through women and their maternal function. But in contrast to writers like Schreiner, this does not lead Egerton to public politics. The poet challenges the role of female activists, charging them with participating in the problems of patriarchal society: “And I went amongst the advanced women ... and I knew that in hovels and cellars in the dens of the ‘angel makers’ the foredoomed fruitage of human mating wailed pitifully on heaps of reeking straw, sucking their lean thumbs hungrily; and no woman of the crowd of reformers had courage enough to cut the father if she knew him to be amongst her acquaintance” (147). These women challenge gender politics openly in public, but they do not have the courage to confront the real injustices they see on daily basis. Both literally and symbolically, they do not have the “courage enough to cut the father.” They are still interested in working within the patriarchal social structure the poet entirely rejects.

The poet longs for a woman with whom he can live his life: “I found no woman, to whom, if I had said: ‘Love is a divine gift, it is the strength of the game of life! Come with me, work with me, be the mother of my children to come, let us try to live the broad life purely, and soberly, in like freedom for the development of the best in us,’ who would have placed her hand in mine with the courage of womanhood, sure of herself, and come” (146). The poet seeks a simple life of equal companionship and children; he defines his own attraction through Egerton’s language of freedom and self-assurance. Unable to find what he desires among women, he turns to nature to satisfy his need for companionship: “I lay my heart on the brown lap of earth, and close my eyes in delicious restfulness.... I sought that in woman, for I thought to find her nature’s best product, of all things closest in touch with our common mother” (148). Egerton replicates the

conventional mother-nature imagery here, but locates it within her resistance to culture. The woman-embodied home includes an association of women with nature. The poet hoped to find this rest among women, but instead found a “half-man or half-doll” and he concludes that “it is women, not men, who are the greatest bar to progress the world holds” (148). The issue here is how the “half-man” and the “half-doll” are both male-defined constructions within patriarchal culture; the poet—like Egerton—seeks a woman-defined subject.

He blames women for barring progress as either “half-man” or “half-doll,” either suffragist or angel, but the widow challenges him to think about how society is implicated in the production of women: women are not the problem; society is the problem. She states, “we are always battling with some bottom layer of real womanhood that we may not reveal; the primary impulses of our original destiny keep shooting out mimosa-like threads of natural feeling through the outside husk of our artificial selves, producing complex creatures” (148). Like the hermaphrodites in “Now,” she asserts that women are always struggling between their natural instincts and their falsely constructed gendered selves. Of women’s artificiality, she asserts, “our powder and our paints! Aren’t they rather tributes to the decay of chivalry in your own sex? It’s not to woman but to pretty woman man pays deference” (148-49). Decay is associated with gender and culture; it is men who define women’s nature and value, therefore, Egerton argues, women must learn to define themselves. The widow lives in a culture that defines women as either dolls or half-men who reject their sexualized definition in rebellion. But Egerton asserts that to do so is only another form of repression: “and the desexualized half man, with a pride in the absence of sexual feeling ... what is she but the outcome of centuries

of patient repression? Repress and repress—how many generations has it gone on?” (149). The widow then asks, “Isn’t feminization a result of all civilization [?]” (149). While Egerton seeks to supplant one definition of femininity for another, she presents this as an opposition between artificial gender and authentic gender.

Part one of the story establishes Egerton’s critiques of gender and culture through the poet’s vision and the widow’s critique. She sets out a possible salvation to this cultural decay: the maternal. Part two embodies these abstract ideas through the vain widow’s redefinition of herself within the private sphere and as an outsider to society. The widow “has turned the many spare rooms of her big house into dormitories, where a limited number of waifs and strays, generally nameless, find a temporary or permanent home” (151). With maternal care and compassion, she opens her home to social outcasts, tramps, drunks, gypsies, fallen women; they are all welcome to find a home, acceptance, and work: “she espoused the cause of all women, without reference to character or exhortations to repentance” (151). Status and character do not matter here; it is a place where women work and children play. This new purpose renews her body, and when her former friends see her in the city, she “[looks] stronger and bonnier each time” (151). The widow transforms the domestic space from a place of decay and vanity to a space of radical liberation and resistance to patriarchal society. She and her house are a reconfigured embodied home.

She does not have the acceptance of the town or church, and she heartily embraces this resistance. She tells the Pastor, “your church has been closed since Sunday ... mine is open every day, and all day, and my sinners laugh and sing, and find new hopes and self-reliance in measure as they better their work, and then chicks will grow up

to be proud of their mothers. For ... the fathers were only an accident. I can trust you and society to look after them, to welcome the erring rams to the fold; the mothers are my look out" (151). The maternal is reshaped into a focalizing point of resistance to patriarchy. The widow tells the pastor that women are morally superior to men: "Her maternity lifts her above him every time. He has fought, and drunk, and rioted, lusted, and satisfied himself, whilst she has rocked the cradle and ruled the world, borne the sacred burden of her motherhood, carried in trust the future of the races" (152). The maternal is set against the violence and power of masculine culture. This culture defines woman by telling her to "curb the voice of your body, dwarf your soul, stifle your genius and the workings of your individual temperament, ay, regulate your conscience in accordance with mine and my church, be good, and I will feed you and clothe you in return for your services; what more can a woman desire?" (152). Egerton asserts that this definition is based on repression and oppression. The Church, constructed around the social morality of purity and shame, does nothing for the women in need; she, however, accepts them and gives them a home: "I think music and dancing and laughter and work lead to decent living; a fig for your stool of repentance!" (152). The widow invokes laughter as a form of resistance, creating an open space of valuable work and meaningful life through a common humanity and equality. While Egerton shows some men who are able to resist the power structures and ideology of society, she primarily associates them with patriarchy. Thus, she turns against that culture and the power of men to a solidarity broadly conceived of between women, though this woman-centered community still operates within a frame of heteronormativity.

Fruen transforms her home and learns to resist patriarchal femininity; she is fulfilled, but still desires the poet as her lover. After a mystical coincidence, his faithful dog leads the widow to the poet, who has been injured. When they are reunited, he is shocked by how different she is. She summarizes her transformation: “I was sorry for myself, resentful because I had been reared in ignorance, because of my soul-hunger, but I had found myself all the same, and I said: From this out I belong body and soul to myself; I will live as I choose, seek joy as I choose, carve the way of my life as I will” (165). Egerton’s *New Woman* configures her identity within what she calls a “soul-hunger”; her new purpose in life is to satisfy that soul-hunger by dictating the terms of her life and cultivating her own moral integrity. Her goal is to teach women “a new standard of woman’s worth” through a woman-defined identity, because “Woman has cheapened herself body and soul through ignorant innocence, she must learn to worthen herself by all-seeing knowledge” (165). Patriarchal femininity of the separate spheres defines women through what they are to others, but Fruen reclaims women’s identities as something they must determine. This male-defined femininity occurs because “[m]ost churches and all social law have tended to cheapen women, and in some measure woman has been the greatest sinner against woman by centuries of silence” (165). Cultural institutions determine women’s identities, but Egerton contends they must wrestle to determine their own lives; women are part of the problem when they perpetuate male-define femininity based on the separate spheres. They must reclaim their identities for themselves, but also work to create woman-defined communities—they must break the silence.

With this New Man and New Woman, Egerton presents the possibility of reconciliation between men and women on terms of equal and free companionship, working together for each other's self-development and mutual freedom set in opposition to the values of patriarchal society. Fruen offers the poet a free-love contract: "You want a home, you are not fit to be alone. Your body and spirit wage war.... Yet you need freedom, freedom to go when you will, but you ought to have a place to return to" (166). Here the New Woman offers the New Man a home for their relationship, but it is not one constrained by public institutions that inherently create an unequal power struggle between husband, wife, and church. While this relationship guides part of the story's resolution, the story itself ultimately concludes by focusing on the house situated in the countryside: "outside the snow falls softly and the darkness gathers, but inside the music of women's voices singing at their work and the patter of children's feet and cooing laughter fill the house in which love is making a carnival of roses" (169). Egerton's radical feminist vision reclaims the domestic space as a woman-embodied home where the New Man and New Woman are free to work and love; they find peace because they refuse to follow the moral discourse of shame regarding human sexuality. Egerton's outcasts culminate in Fruen's home for outsiders.

Critics fault Egerton for an essentialism which establishes problematic politics regarding race, class, and sexuality, and while I agree with them, I am not convinced feminism has moved beyond essentialism or that conversations about essentialism are not relevant or important for gender politics. Egerton essentializes women as a category, but in doing so, she offers a significant reconfiguration of the separate spheres ideology, which is neither wholly gender-conforming, nor gender-subversive. Egerton's

essentialism offers not a singular definition but a site of multiplicity, as a woman's "nature" becomes an individual investigation. It becomes an internal landscape in which Egerton urges women to wrestle back womanhood from patriarchal definitions of femininity. The extent to which this is possible becomes significant as Egerton redefines femininity in contrast to the separate spheres ideal of self-sacrifice at the same time that she turns away from the public sphere of political rights, maintaining women's association with the home.

Egerton's resistance to both the "half-doll" and "half-man" demonstrates that both are defined through patriarchal discourse; she attempts to offer an oppositional stance in which women can define their own identities. A significant strength of this work is her analysis of the complicit nature of women within the patriarchal discourse, either as the Angel in the House or what she considered the de-sexed suffragist. In this way, Egerton contends that while patriarchy positions women as moral guardians of society, it is those who are in power who determine morality; in other words, men are the moral guardians and women are their reinforcers. Thus, Egerton argues that women must wrest their gender and their moral integrity from society in order to find a more authentic and truthful self. Egerton reworks traditional gender expectations about domesticity in order to advocate radical female liberation, and her essentialism opens up alternate ways of thinking about Victorian definitions of femininity. Most importantly for this project, she maps the sex war onto the individual—the battle over gender is within identity.

Egerton's resistance to feminism and yet arguably feminist work offers a different kind of feminist politics, one that is invested in thinking about women as women, putting women's identities into the foreground in order to unsettle patriarchal definitions of

femininity and power relations. Her emphasis on reclaiming identity through the private sphere offers a contrast to Schreiner's extension of women's moral guardianship to politics. Schreiner builds on Ruskin's conservative call for women's moral influence in war in order to argue for a maternal pacifism. While Egerton was not a pacifist, her work illustrates how the language of warfare is entangled with the discourse of the separate spheres. Egerton's engagement with the sex war leads her to situate the language of warfare within the individual. This relationship between gender and war is a central way I interpret the works of women writers protesting World War I. Egerton's resistance to feminism and to participation in patriarchal culture resonates with Vernon Lee's pacifist dissent in *Satan the Waster* and Virginia Woolf's analysis of the separate spheres in *Three Guineas*.

Chapter 3: The Subversive Mourning Mother: Margaret Sackville's

Poetic Protest of World War I

There is, perhaps, no woman, whether she have borne children, or be merely potentially a child-bearer, who could look down upon a battlefield covered with slain, but the thought would rise in her, "So many mothers' sons! So many bodies brought into the world to lie there!".... No woman who is a woman says of a human body, "It is nothing!"

—Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* (60)

[I]f ever you get married and have a son, don't, whatever you do, let them make him fight in a war. Don't let them cheat him into thinking it's all fine and glorious, but tell him the truth as I have tried to tell you.

—Vera Brittain, *Honourable Estate* (337)

In September 1914, a woman anonymously published a series of articles regarding women's war work in *The Academy and Literature*. In part one, entitled "Women's War Opportunity: From a Woman's Point of View," she writes that traditional gender duties during wartime require that "men must work and women must weep," further explaining conventional women's work based on: "the beauty of woman's sympathy and her fitness to nurse the wounded, minister to the desolate, and safeguard the supplies" (298). Following Ruskin's lead, the conventional gender roles during wartime emerge from the separate spheres discourse of creating nurturing shelters from the chaos of the public sphere. But the author goes further, and argues that the women's movement has been working for an expansion of responsibilities and that while this is an unfortunate time of war, the time for women's work expansion is now:

Women clamoured for the franchise thinking it contained the freedom of the City of Life and would unlock all doors to them, but the cry has been answered from a very different quarter and in a way that none could have

desired. It appears that woman will step into her inheritance over portals lined with the dead and hung about with all the terrors and miseries of the most bloody war the world has ever known. (298)

Her conclusion is that women must seize the opportunity before them, uniting their feminism with their patriotism: “it remains for the women and girls of England to go forward and grasp with both hands the opportunities which lie at their doors. The necessity of the hour is preparedness” (298). Her call to action extends women’s moral influence from the private sphere to the nation-state as they must urge their men to take up arms: “The battle front demands that more and more of our young men in whatever class should volunteer for service, and this call will become more imperative beneath the strain of continued fighting. Woman must give heed to the nation as to the home” (298). This expansion of her work from the home to the nation relies upon an extension of her self-sacrificial nature: “This should be easy, for women have always been taught to think more of others than of themselves.... It needs but to exchange an outlook bounded by an individual, a family or a cause, to one that embraces the country itself” (298). Much like Ruskin, the author argues for a moral expansion from the home to the nation, but she differs from him by situating this within the women’s movement, as she argues that this extension will satisfy the feminist goals of expanding education and work roles. The author argues that this exchange by which women expand their moral reach by encompassing the nation-state is already underway:

Many and many of our women have done it in giving of their dearest joyfully, even eagerly; may all the women of our great Empire follow their example and prepare for their new and larger role by inducing every man

who is fit and available to join in this most righteous war against an impious and dishonourable foe, and by themselves battling in their particular sphere of influence against triviality and incompetence and waste. The future of our country lies in the hands of her women. (298-99)

The moral expansion from the home to the nation-state is put in the service of war through the ideals of self-sacrifice—here, the mothers and lovers who not only relinquish their men, but do so “joyfully” as an active part of service to the country. Women’s war work—at this early stage in the war—is defined by reinforcing their private sphere function of nurse and mourner as well as their role in supporting a “righteous” war by sacrificing their own men to the front. The author argues that most of the focus has been “on the battle field,” but that more attention needs to be focused on this most private work.

This description of women’s war work illustrates two important issues that will be discussed in this chapter. First, the author connects the gender identities of the separate spheres to civic roles within the nation-state: men to fight and women to mourn. Second, she makes a similar move to Olive Schreiner’s by expanding women’s moral influence outward into the public sphere of work and politics; however, in contrast to Schreiner who deploys maternal feminism toward pacifism, this author deploys women’s moral influence and their feminine virtue of self-sacrifice for the service of war. The home has been expanded outward to embody the nation, preparing the home front for the service of war. In this chapter, I examine how the separate spheres became part of the war discourse within women’s World War I poetry. While I situate this analysis within the context of pro-war responses, my focus is on the protest poems of Elinor Jenkins and Margaret

Sackville. Both pro-war and anti-war discourse draws on the re-deployments of the separate spheres during wartime. The ideology of the separate spheres becomes its own battleground within a broader domain of warfare. Much of women's war poetry both reinforces the gender roles associated with the separate spheres—particularly in the imagery of mothers mourning their lost loved ones—and disrupts the division between the public and the private by identifying their experiences as *war* experiences. While the author of “Women's War Opportunity” puts women's self-sacrifice into the service of war, both Jenkins and Sackville redirect it toward protest (Jenkins) and pacifism (Sackville). Both poets reclaim the maternal as a site of protest, extending Schreiner's maternal feminist pacifism in *Woman and Labour*. In the first half of this chapter, I discuss a female poetic tradition that utilized the maternal as a platform of authority from which to protest the war. In the second half, I extend this discussion through an analysis of Margaret Sackville's *The Pageant of War* (1916). I argue that *The Pageant of War* subverts the separate spheres division between the homeland and the battlefield and utilizes Schreiner's maternal feminism in order to call upon mothers to intervene on behalf of the world's children and end war, even if that means refusing the consolation of mourning.

The author of “Women's War Opportunity” writes, “All eyes have been focussed [sic] on the battlefield” (298), and this vision of the battlefield extends not only to her discussion of women's war work, but to the general narrative of World War I existing in scholarship. While there have been more recent attempts by feminist and post-colonial scholars to diversify the narrative of World War I, it remains the soldier poet, and the

dissenting one, who tells the story of World War I.¹ The voices of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon as well as the scholarship of Paul Fussell's landmark text *The Great War and Modern Memory* have come to represent World War I writing. Even though, as Claire Buck points out, "[women] wrote over a quarter of the poetry printed during the war, more that is, than the soldier-poets," women's war poetry continues to be marginalized and excluded from the canon of war literature ("Elegy" 434).

Feminist scholars have engaged in rigorous recovery efforts, but women's poetry is still consistently undervalued and neglected.² The reasons for this neglect can be found in discussions of what counts as authentic war poetry. The exclusion of women war poets is largely shaped by the heart of World War I scholarship itself—experience. As Philippa Lyon contends, "Many anthologies and critics write of war poetry in terms of its 'truth' to experience or its 'authentic' representation of the history and experience of war, particularly combat experience" (7). James Campbell calls this form of representation "combat gnosticism," which he defines as "the belief that combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience" (203). As such, much of women's war poetry has been excluded because it does not represent what is considered *legitimate* war experience. Campbell's critique uncovers a central assumption regarding the role of experience driving the discourse of war literature. This experience

¹ See especially the recent collection of essays on imperialism and World War I, edited by Santanu Das: *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (2014).

² Buck explains elsewhere: "We have only to turn to the recent *Oxford Handbook of British and Irish Poetry* (2007), which assigns no more than 100 of 754 pages to women's poetry, to see how persistently women poets are marginalized and erased from the history of war poetry" ("Reframing" 25).

functions as a form of essentialism, and since war is considered men's domain, women, seemingly, cannot occupy this site of knowledge.

Women's war poetry is additionally marginalized because it generally lacks the formal innovations of modernism that are present in poets such as Sassoon, Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg. For Fussell, the "dominating form of modernist understanding ... is essentially ironic" and "originates largely in the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War" (35). Fussell connects the irony utilized by trench writers to a modernist aesthetic, but in doing so, he establishes a definition of war poetry that would exclude women's poetry. While Dorothy Goldman, Janet Montefiore, and Simon Featherstone all assert that the majority of British women's World War I poetry is valuable from a historical perspective, they argue women's poetry is ultimately inferior to that of poets like Owen and Sassoon because it lacks a strong female literary tradition. Goldman states, "It was not simply their lack of first-hand military experience that inhibited women's poetry, but the inheritance of worn-out and inappropriate modes and language" (Introduction 7). Montefiore's argument extends this critique to include not only the form but the themes of women's poetry as well: "Most of the women's poems of the Great War are ... bounded by the assumptions of patriotism, just as formally they are mainly governed by the norms of traditional Georgian rhetoric and metre" (53-54). Both Goldman and Montefiore argue that women's poetry is inferior because it generally worked within male literary traditions that supported masculine notions of patriotism, particularly in its idealization of the Crucifixion. Because women poets relied on Georgian poetics, sentimentality, and patriotism, Featherstone contends that much of women's war poetry lacks a "distinctively female political or public discourse" (98).

Ultimately, he argues that the majority of women's poetry represented in Catherine Reilly's anthology *Scars Upon My Heart* participates in the "patriotic and sentimental discourses ... [which are] the only poetic languages readily available to women, whether in peace or war," and therefore he concludes, "female experience, in war as in peace, could only be represented as a refraction of male experience" (98-99).

The marginalization of women's war poetry results from its inability to speak to the experience of war and from its reliance on sentimental poetics, which has been interpreted as insufficient politically or stylistically. But this exclusion replicates the separate spheres' division between the public and the private. As Buck contends, "Even while poetry is arguably the most central of women's wartime genres, readers have often found it disappointingly backward-looking in both style and subject matter, many poems reiterating a version of femininity rooted in home front experiences of waiting and mourning. This may say more about readers and critics than about the poetry itself" (89). Excluding women's war poetry and contending that it lacks aesthetic value perpetuates a canon which elevates the public (i.e. men and the battlefield) over the private (i.e. women and the home front), and this exclusion neglects a rich and complex relationship between women's responses to war and their cultural negotiations of gender discourse. Interpreting sentimental poetics as apolitical overlooks the close relationship between poetics and politics, and it devalues the politics of grief.

War Poetry: Speaking from the Mother's Heart

Women's war poetry is often accused of replicating the patriotism of Georgian poetics, and indeed, it often does. Georgian verse was a natural complement for both

patriotism and nationalism during the chaos of wartime, offering an anchoring stability, as the poet meditates on the restorative power of nature by idealizing the English rural landscape. As Vivian de Sola Pinto asserts, “it is a poetry that deliberately turns away from the contemporary situation (the lies, the truths, and pain) and uses the daydream of an unspoiled English countryside as an anodyne” (117). Georgian imagery offered comfort, and the mythic rural landscape helped establish a sense of national unity.

While Georgian poetics complemented patriotism, it also relied upon the separate spheres ideology. As Nosheen Khan explains, “Pure patriotism, the Georgian celebration in rich sentimental tones, of the sights and sounds of rural England could be exploited in order to argue the necessity for sacrifice and the need to keep the home fires burning” (56). As I discussed in the introduction, the separate spheres divides the sexes not only into spheres—the private and public—but into civic roles: man, the defender of home and country; woman, the nurturing healer of home and country. The separate spheres sets out both private and national duties, and this was drawn on during wartime. Men were pressured to become soldiers and women were to “keep the home fires burning.” Often this gender ideology emerges through the linking of Georgian imagery and religious iconography, such as God, Christ, and Mary. A popular image was identifying the sacrifice of Christ with the sacrifice of soldiers (Khan 49-50). As Adrian Gregory asserts, “patri-passionism, the redemption of the world through the blood of soldiers, was the informal civic religion of wartime Britain” (156). The image of soldier as Christ reinforced the ideals of honor and sacrifice: “Shedding of blood was basic to the redemption of man; by offering their lives to save society the soldiers thus were at one with the Saviour” (Khan 49-50).

Rupert Brooke's poem "The Soldier" exemplifies the "patri-passionism" of Georgian poetics, and it is often put forward as the representative patriotic war poem. As James Persoon explains, "'The Soldier' came to stand for England's war aims when those aims were increasingly unclear. One fought, not for any cause in particular, but out of a love of England" (16). As Brooke's speaker prepares to make his patriotic sacrifice, he requests, "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England" (1-3). He dies defending his country, and his sacrifice preserves the rural landscape of an ideal England. This sacrifice—his body—saves England by enriching the land: "There shall be / In that rich earth a richer dust concealed" (3-4). Furthermore, his sacrifice purifies him: "And think, this heart, all evil shed away, / A pulse in the eternal mind, no less / Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given" (9-11). While Brooke's speaker is consoled by his sacred immortality, his joining the abstract eternal also signifies becoming part of the ideological symbolism for nationalism, as his sacrifice creates a reinforcing cycle of redemption through memory and the future happiness of British citizens: "Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day; / And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness, / In hearts at peace, under an English heaven" (12-14). The soldier and the nation are purified and redeemed through his sacrifice.

This conventional Georgian patriotism is wedded to gender ideology as the nation is represented as the feminine mother—Ruskin's sanctuary of peace. The speaker identifies his body as a "body of England's" (7), one that "England bore, shaped, made aware" (5) and a body that was "Washed by the rivers, blest by the suns of home" (8). All of England becomes a broad natural home-scape for him, bathing him and blessing him.

His sacrifice preserves his home—England, the mother country—and the soldier’s body and the maternal body are linked through the imagery of sacrifice and redemption.

Nationalism is imagined in a maternal home front which receives his sacrifice. In this way, the soldier and the mother are paired under the rhetoric of sacrifice.

In response to Brooke’s “The Soldier,” May Herschel-Clarke’s “The Mother” (1917) extends this paired imagery. “The Mother” is a maternal lament: “If you should die, think only this of me / In that still quietness where is space for thought / ... One whom you loved has drained the bitter cup” (1-2, 6). While Brooke’s poem abstracts the soldier and England into a state of peace and happiness, Herschel-Clarke depicts this state as a bitter memory. While her grief is painful, the speaker honors her son’s sacrifice with her mourning and suffering:

She lives as though for ever in your sight,
Loving the things *you* loved, with heart aglow
For country, honour, truth, traditions high,
—Proud that you paid their price. (And if some night
Her heart should break—well, lad, you will not know.) (10-14)

The mother’s grief actively honors her son’s death, as her life becomes a monument to his death. She lives her life according to the ideals he died for: country, honour, truth, and traditions; in other words, she honors him by keeping faith with the ideals of war. His sacrifice is a source of pride even though it breaks her; in fact, her brokenness through mourning becomes part of the sacrifice she gives in order to honor him. His sacrifice becomes her sacrifice. If Brooke’s poem speaks the from soldier’s heart, Herschel-Clarke

responds from the mother's. Both construct poems emerging from a cultural discourse that links nationalism, patriotism, and sacrifice.

While men's duties to their country were clarified through military service, women's sense of patriotism and citizenship were complicated by the separate spheres ideology. Much of the propaganda emphasized women's domestic duties until the war effort required their participation in the workforce; however, women's roles as mothers prevailed and were drawn on by feminists, anti-feminist, propagandists, and pacifists. Nicoletta F. Gullace explains that "As patriotic sources increasingly depicted soldiering as a domestic duty performed on behalf of the women and children of Britain and their counterparts in Belgium, they correspondingly presented mothering as a military duty essential to the prosecution of the war. Indeed, one of the most difficult tasks recruiters faced was to persuade mothers to give up their sons, and they appealed continually to women's boundless sense of duty in order to do so" (55). Motherhood itself became a civic virtue in wartime—not only as a justification for war (to protect women and children of the home front), but as a form of patriotism in itself. Women's complex roles as mothers and war workers surface in the Red Cross poster "The Greatest Mother in the World," which depicts a Red Cross nurse cradling a wounded soldier, mimicking Michelangelo's pieta in which Mary cradles the dying Christ. The image sets up a gendered pairing within the rhetoric of sacrifice in the Great War discourse. The soldier—Christ-like—sacrifices his life for the redemption of the nation; the mother both relinquishes her son to the front and offers of healing and/or mourning when his body returns.

The maternal is often dismissed as sentimental and therefore apolitical, but according to Tricia Lootens and Buck, the sentimental poetic has a long-standing tradition as a part of national discourse, stemming from poets like Felicia Hemans and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Lootens contends that Hemans' patriotic verse attempts to negotiate the relationship between "family ties" and a "feminine national heroism" (241). This feminine verse "mobilize[s] the 'domestic affections' to the service of militarist patriotism" (242). Far from providing a private response to war, Hemans engages in a tradition connecting feminine domesticity to nationalism. Buck, furthering the work of Lootens, applies this tradition to women's World War I poetry and argues that many women were writing within a feminine elegiac tradition, which she calls the national domestic: "Women poets in the nineteenth century could speak for the nation from the position of the domestic, as a space with an explicitly acknowledged national function" ("Elegy" 436). The domestic was a morally sacred space within the separate spheres ideology, and in wartime, women's poetry spoke from this sanctioned space. As Buck further explains, "Women's mourning converts the soldier's violent actions on behalf of the state into pure and sacred sacrifice by the private individual for the nation, as he is received back into the home/heart of the nation" ("Reframing" 34-35). When we consider the longer poetic tradition and the negotiation of patriotism, nationalism, and domesticity, we see that women's war poetry lacks neither a female literary tradition nor a political engagement.

The role of mourning in women's war poetry reflects a broader political and nationalist function of grief in relation to gender. If women's gender roles and citizenship were imagined through domesticity—men fight and women weep—then women poets'

engagement with the sentimental tradition becomes as complex as it is political. The maternal emerges as a complicated site of nationalism, not only for the New Woman writers engaging with the separate spheres, but for women writers responding to the discourse of war. Within this context, the maternal becomes a complex platform from which to argue both for and against war.

If the maternal lament participates in a broader war discourse by reinforcing the rhetoric of sacrifice, what happens when the maternal becomes a platform for protest? One possible avenue for protest is to make maternal grief a site of outrage rather than a site of honor, as in Elenor Jenkins's poem entitled "Dulce et Decorum est?"³ While Wilfred Owen challenges the idea that war is glorious and sweet in his poem "Dulce Et Decorum Est," by locating his protest in battlefield horrors, Jenkins centralizes her protest poem in the home front as a mother buries her dead son. On the surface, this poem appears to follow the feminine duty to mourn in service of the soldiers' sacrifice, but Jenkins's grief becomes a source of anger and protest as she rejects the abstract ideals of patriotism and sacrifice.

While Owen's poem shows the soldier's death on the battlefield, Jenkins follows the soldier's body home to the grave. The poem begins as parents bury their dead son next to an old tree: "Here then let him lie, / And they may find the place, when all is done, / From the old may tree standing guard near by" (2-4). The tree and the burial site conjure up a private and rural scene; the words and rhythm are a soft elegiac lament of their dead son. The tree is a memorial marker—a shelter and image of protective grief,

³ Not much is known about Elenor Jenkins, except her birth and death dates (1893-1920), as noted by Khan (184). Jenkins's book *Poems* was published in 1915. The tone of grief dominates the poems, but in some poems, grief appears to reinforce patriotic ideals and in others, challenge them, as "Dulce et Decorum est?" does.

standing guard over the son's body. Stanza two, however, shifts from soft language to grotesque images of the decaying body. As in many other protest poems, the soldier's body is not abstracted in the high rhetoric of war, but rather as a real body, vulnerable and broken. The boy's physical attributes connect to the life that has been extinguished. His early death has cut off all potential for love, marriage, and children, just as "his scholarly brow" and "valiant eyes" will never again reveal his intelligence and bravery (5-7). All these contrasting images of the life and its loss in death converge in the mother lamenting, "Henceforth [he] shall pleasure charnel-worms alone" (8). The positive memories of her son contrast with his dead and mutilated body left to rot. In Herschel-Clarke, maternal memory is a source of consolation, knowing that he sacrificed his life in honor. In Jenkins's poem, the body of her son has been returned to England, but the speaker refuses the sacred abstraction of "some corner of England." There is no comfort in her memories of him, because all that he was has been wasted—he has no future. His body has been returned to the mother, but this becomes an image of waste rather than redemption.

The poem transforms grief into a maternal politics of protest through the tone of anger. Stanza three begins like the others, with a soft, caring tone that will become grotesque:

For we, that loved him, covered up his face,
And laid him in the sodden earth away,
And left him lying in that lonely place
To rot and moulder with the mouldering clay. (9-12)

These lines reflect the shift from romanticized language to the hideous as the mother moves from grief to outrage. The repetition of “moulder” reinforces that his sacrifice is a signal of decay, not regeneration. The link between the soldiers’ sacrifice and England’s redemption takes a dark turn within this poem as his decay joins the decay of England. Stanza four returns to the tree of the first stanza that was set to “guard” the grave. Now, it becomes an image of maternal grief as well:

The hawthorn that above his grave head grew
Like an old crone toward the raw earth bowed,
Wept softly over him, the whole night through
And made him of her tears a glimmering shroud. (13-16)

The tree has gone from an upright protector to an “old crone,” burdened by grief and bent over the grave, constantly weeping.

Instead of relying on horrific images of the battlefield to protest war, like Owen, Jenkins creates her dissent from the personal experience of losing a son. Like Herschel-Clarke, Jenkins’s speaker considers the value of her son’s life to the nation, thereby making the maternal political; but whereas the mother in Herschel-Clarke internalizes her grief as a source of pride, Jenkins’s mother internalizes her grief as a source of rage. Her son’s body is not returned to the abstract maternal memory, but becomes a physically decaying body, one that Jenkins links to the future of the nation. Stanza five relinquishes all pretense of soft language and addresses God directly: “Oh Lord of Hosts, no hallowed prayer we bring, / Here for Thy grace is no importuning” (17-18). Jenkins’s speaker rejects God, as her address refuses reverence, stating that she has “No room for those that will not strive nor cry / When lovingkindness with our dead lies slain” (19-20). The

speaker will no longer submit to a God that wastes life. The poem ends with the speaker's only plea: "Give us our Father's heathen hearts again, / Valour to dare, and fortitude to die" (21-22). The speaker rejects God and reflects the continuous cost on the speaker's future, asking only for enough strength to die. Life has lost meaning; her future was bound up with her son. Now that he's dead, her future has been sacrificed as well, but unlike Herschel-Clarke, there is neither pride nor consolation in this maternal memory. Jenkins's protest undermines the nationalist rhetoric of poems like Brooke's "The Soldier" and Herschel-Clarke's "The Mother" in her refusal to reinforce the ideals of war. The poem's title questions: is war "sweet" and "decorous"? The poem confidently answers absolutely not.

Jenkins's poem works within the sentimental tradition—the national domestic—in order to challenge the maternal acceptance of the soldiers' sacrifice. Her poem offers no consolation in mourning, as the weeping mother never dries her eyes. This grief leads her to reject God. Given the cultural context of conflating religious imagery, the rhetoric of sacrifice, and nationalism, Jenkins's poem does not simply protest the war, but it protests the patriarchal ideology that sent her son to war in the first place. If religious imagery is used to justify nationalism, then God would be symbolic of British society in general and British government in particular, as the one who sent the soldiers to die.⁴ When poems engage in this kind of critique, they are also making political statements against war and the governments and societies that support them. Jenkins challenges the separate spheres division of private and public by making the sentimental and domestic political.

⁴ Owen makes this association in "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young." He retells the story of Abram's sacrifice of his son Isaac. Over the course of the poem, Abram stands in for British fathers and the leaders of government, and Isaac symbolizes the sons, the soldiers sent to war. Owen criticizes the leaders who waste their sons in war.

Sackville's Maternal Politics: Redeeming the Mother from War

When Jenkins connects her life with her dead son's and rejects God, she protests not only the war, but the ideology that elevates redemption through sacrifice. Jenkins's speaker resists the national domestic in which mothers offer their sons to the front and find consolation in their memories of the dead, knowing their death redeems the nation. Sackville's book of poems *The Pageant of War* extends dissent by redirecting the maternal away from the discourse of war to one of peace, echoing Schreiner's maternal pacifism in *Woman and Labour*.

Schreiner's feminist pacifism relies on linking the maternal body with the battlefield—the soldier's sacrifice is the mother's sacrifice. The separate spheres ideology excludes women from the domain of war, but Schreiner argues that they have an overlooked and intimate contribution to warfare: "We have in all ages produced, at an enormous cost, the primal munition of war, without which no other would exist.... We pay the first cost on all human life" (59-60). This maternity creates a special kind of knowledge and insight into war for Schreiner; however, it is an insight available to all women as women, regardless of birth experience, which leads her to argue in *Woman and Labour*, "No woman who is a woman says of a human body, 'It is nothing!'" (60). Schreiner defines women as mothers or potential mothers; in fact, she furnishes a concept of the maternal as a particular way of looking at the body of the other and the world at large. According to Schreiner, war will end with women's equality and full participation in the war system they oppose (63). This is a vision of reform—women's participation in war will end war when their voices are heard and their maternal knowledge is made visible.

Sackville aims to restore this maternal knowledge in *The Pageant of War*. It is in need of restoration because the maternal has been appropriated into the discourse of war, specifically in the sacrificial exchange between the mother and the battlefield. Schreiner argues the soldier's body is linked to the mother's, and as such, his sacrifice costs too much. But for those women who put the maternal in the service of war, the cost reinforces the greatness of the sacrifice, emphasizing its redemptive qualities for the nation. As Gullace explains: "Although Schreiner's imagery remained a staple of pacifist thought throughout the [World War I], the language of motherhood was increasingly appropriated by patriotic women who used the idea of women's stake in the bodies of their sons to claim recognition for their own vicarious service on the battlefield" (56). Sackville's appropriation of motherhood for pacifism challenges the rhetoric of redemptive sacrifice; like Schreiner, she argues that maternal pacifism is a perspective that is cultivated rather than innate to mothers, as Sackville neither married nor was a mother herself. In order to demonstrate this perspective, she shows how the maternal has been adopted by the war discourse. She argues the maternal is in need of reform in order to reclaim its rightful place of pacifism. In *Pageant of War*, Sackville demonstrates that the sacrifices of war—both the mother's and the soldier's—rely on a narrative of redemption through the language of gender and religion, but she argues these are false narratives.

The Pageant of War is comprised of nineteen short poems, all on the subject of war. Published in the same year as the Battle of the Somme (1916), they reflect a

minority position of dissent in the middle of war.⁵ Throughout *Pageant*, Sackville adopts a variety of speakers—detached observers, mothers, and soldiers—who voice the experiences of war. Soldiers are presented sympathetically, but their sacrifice is complicated by Sackville’s rejection of the redemptive nature of those sacrifices. Instead, she relocates Christ within the pacifist and the mother figure. In her essay “Woman and War” (1916), Sackville argues that the Great War reflects a contradictory position of a nation which “[tries] ... to be militarist and pacifist at the same time, to combine the maxims of Napoleon with the teachings of Christ” (454). This contradiction, she argues, has led to “an uncomfortable and dangerous state of muddle-headedness,” and she demands action: “The time has come for the world to choose one side or the other—it must either be frankly Pagan or frankly Christian” (454). In addition to her argument that militarism and Christianity are incompatible, Sackville argues that the solution to war is to admit women into public and political discourse, asserting that the State needs women’s perspectives as a corrective to masculine militarism: “The State becomes a body with the heart left out, and it is with the idea of making it a living organism that women are anxious to have their share in the guiding of it” (456). Sackville argues that women’s perspectives are needed in the governing of the State and in the domain of war in order to initiate peace. In *Pageant of War*, she illustrates the incompatibility of Christian pacifism with national militarism, and while she locates peace and hope in the maternal, she first calls women to see their own motherhood as incompatible with the sacrifices of war.

⁵ Brian Murdoch’s essay on Sackville further compares *Pageant* with two other books of women’s war poetry published in 1916: C. A. Renshaw’s *England’s Boys*. *A Woman’s War Poems* and Nadja Malacrida’s *For Empire and Other Poems*.

The title poem, "The Pageant of War," acts as an interpretive lens for the book overall. Like Schreiner's "The Hunter," it establishes prominent themes that will be explored over the course of the book. Sackville defines war beyond a singular historical event in order to suggest a connection between all wars and nations. The poem is an allegorical dreamscape, reminiscent of Schreiner's allegories and a corollary to Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of Nations* (1915). Sackville wants to challenge the religious imagery used to justify war, because she argues militarism and Christianity are contradictory. The speaker is an observer witnessing a grand procession of "triumphant War" (3) through an empty village square; War is described as "like Death sitting astride / A pale and neighing horse" (35-36):

Only he swayed from side to side
Like one gluttoned in every sense;
His lids were coarse
And overhanging eyes glassy with pride;
There was no trace
Of laughter, tears or pity
In his blue-veined, swollen face (35-43)

War, much like Schreiner's personification of Empire, is a degenerate figure, bloated and unfeeling, and Sackville utilizes biblical imagery from the book of Revelation to situate War within apocalyptic imagery. War leads the procession through the town, followed by the army of the dead, making its sacrifice to him as though he were a god. The speaker explains that they make their sacrifice not knowing the true face of war, who "had come to them disguised / In the garb sometimes of Peace, sometimes / of Christ" (69-70).

War's mask of "Peace" and "Christ" symbolize the religious justification of war, which Sackville depicts as a false disguise. As she suggests in "Women and War," the militarist Christian is a contradiction.

Following the army of the dead is a line of veiled grieving women, described as a "troop of shadows" (73). The grieving mothers follow in the wake of the army, but the speaker shows that they are an integral part of the military procession. These "silent" and "pale" mothers cover their tears with a veil of grief (73). The presence of the grieving mothers as part of the military procession initially suggests maternal grief as a possible voice of dissent, yet it becomes clear that Sackville's speaker wants us to see that they are part of the production of war itself. They are participating in their traditional gender roles—men fight, women weep—but rather than portray these as symbolically different spheres, Sackville situates them as all of a piece within the discourse of war.

War leads the parade, followed by his priests, warriors, and mothers, but the remainder of the poem focuses on the road they travel. At the outset of the poem, the speaker was "amazed" to see the pageant coming through the town, and she "marvelled" at the bright whiteness of the road. It is not until the speaker looks closely at the road that she discovers it is made of the trampled bones of "children, bones of men" (127-28, 131): "Road of triumph—road of glory!— / This road conceived by men and then / Built from the ruins of man" (133-35). This road has been called "the road of God" and it has led to "rape, / Destruction, mutilation, wrath" (139-40). The speaker calls this road "man's gift to man" (144), and sees the road as the longest procession of all: the history of war itself. This history is one of and between men, a cycle of patriarchy. The allegory enables

Sackville to portray war as a unifying experience regardless of nationality; all countries walk down that road; the pageant cycles through a patriarchal history.

The crowd also plays a role in the parade, which it seems to enjoy in part because the whiteness of the road only amplifies the magnificence of the pageant: “the crowd shouts in its delight / To see along the road so white / The pageant pass in the sunlight” (161-63). This demonstrates that the pageant of war is not only about the parade itself, but also about the participation of the crowd and the contrast of the road. The speaker is able to detach and look at War as a bloated figure of excess and decay rather than a purifier. She is also able to see the road not simply as white, but as trampled bones. But in her continued consideration of the road, her tone shifts to include a bitter edge. War, the army of the dead, and the grieving mothers all trample the innocent as part of their movement. These trampled innocents are “children, peasants of the soil, / And women—ravished, torn / And murdered at their toil” (157-59). Within the system of war, Sackville’s speaker asserts, “It is for this that they were born” (160). The innocent are the victims of patriarchal war, paving the long historical road of war; they are the true sacrifices of war.

Once the speaker has seen the road for what it actually is, she attempts to return to the mindset of the parade and engages in an internal dialogue about the two visions of the pageant. At first, she says with a tone of despair: “I will forget the road, the stones / Are less than nothing—dust and bones: / And what has life to do with bones?” (164-66). She tries to put the victims of war out of her mind. But then the second voice of dialogue emerges offering a hopeful suggestion: “Unless they should rise up, these bones!” (167). The speaker’s visionary suggestion imagines the weak rising up against the strength of

war, but she returns to a voice of despair and states, “They are silent—let them so remain, / These very humble folk, these quiet slain” (169-70). They are the trampled, the forgotten and innocent victims of war.

Sackville demonstrates the all-inclusivity of war as a patriarchal system that depends on a religious elevation of sacrifice wedded with nationalism and an exploitation of the downtrodden. The speaker’s internal dialogue shifts back to the crowd that is enjoying the parade:

And let the living smile—
Until they too shall suffer the same pain.
Whilst the long pageant stretches mile on mile—
As though these innocents had died in vain. (171-74)

The living crowd is as much part of the parade as triumphant War and the trampled bone road. They smile upon the parade, signaling their consent and obscuring the other casualties of war. The speaker situates a performance that leads to patriotism, nationalism, and a sacred sacrifice, but this perpetuates a systematic exploitation of those lives made invisible by the parade of war. The speaker shifts the gaze from the parade to the road in order to make those lives visible within the allegory. The prominent imagery of war is the soldier and the grieving mother, but they are both part of the performance of war. They walk the white road—the forgotten slain—and keep war’s mask in place. Sackville’s strategy is to interrogate the ideology of war depicted by the pageant in order to help her audience see beneath the mask.

Much of Sackville’s analysis in *The Pageant of War* focuses on religious imagery: soldiers are Christ-like redeemers and the grieving mothers follow in their wake, which

invokes pieta imagery. Sackville wants to demonstrate how the maternal has been made part of the pageant of war in order to reveal her authentic pacifist vision. This maternal vision enables her to see the invisible victims of war. Like Schreiner, Sackville shows how the maternal enables an authentic vision of war as an irredeemable waste of both soldiers and the trampled innocent. In *Pageant*, mothers are neither innocent victims nor separate from the battlefield, but rather, shown as active participants in the perpetuation of war through their yielding and mourning of soldiers, while ignoring the innocent slain.

In "Sacrament," Sackville makes maternal grief pacifist by undermining religious imagery, Georgian conventions, and pro-war patriotism. The Eucharist guides the imagery of the poem, in which the bread and wine become symbolic of Christ's redemption. Within the discourse of war, the sacrament is associated with the national sacrifice of the soldiers, but Sackville challenges this discourse in order to illustrate that all death in war is a terrible sacrifice, and in effect, she creates a reverse transubstantiation. In stanza one, the speaker describes spring in religious terms, utilizing Georgian imagery: "Before the Altar of the world in flower" (1). This sets up an initially positive and traditional image of redemption and life, but as Sackville moves through the stanza, she undermines this image with the refrain, "Grant us, O Lord, thy wine. But not this wine" (4). The speaker contemplates the sacrifice of the soldiers, seeking redemption within the sacrament of the wine, but asserts "not this wine," indicating a desire to reconfigure the terms of the discourse. Stanza two continues this structure by calling up pastoral images contrasted with the final lines of the stanza spoken by pitiable children who plead with God: "'Grant us, Lord, Thy bread!' But not this bread" (8). Sackville describes all death in war as a wasteful sacrifice, imbuing it with horror and lament, not

honor and redemption:

This wine of awful sacrifice outpoured;

This bread of life—of human lives. The Press

Is overflowing, the Wine-Press of the Lord!...

Yet doth he tread the foaming grapes no less. (9-12)

This sacrifice is not specifically identified as that of the soldiers alone, but of all those lost in war. In contrast to Brooke's "The Soldier," who gives his life to save the English country he loves and in essence becomes part of the landscape, Sackville illustrates that the sacrifice is not redemptive; rather, it is grotesque. The wine is an image of agony and anguish; the sacrifice is great, yet God "doth . . . tread the foaming grapes no less."

Sackville depicts God as the indifferent crusher of human lives.

Until this point, the landscape has been presented as one of springtime blossom, an idealized image linked to redemptive sacrifice. In stanzas four and five, the landscape has shifted to extend Sackville's protest and lament. The landscape is now one of "stricken lands!" (13) and characterized by death: "The green time of the year / Has found [the lands] wasted by a purple flood" (13-14). These lines progress into the overwhelming chaos the speaker feels at the sheer loss of life that does not redeem the landscape or by proxy the nation: "Sodden and wasted everywhere, everywhere" (15). The repetition of "wasted" and "everywhere" reinforces the speaker's sense of loss and protest that characterizes not only the battlefield but the home front as well. Sackville writes against this national domestic by demonstrating the sacrifices of war as something that taints, not redeems, the home front. Stanza four ends, "Not all our tears may cleanse [the lands] from that blood" (16); there is no relief and no redemption in this sacrifice. No

amount of mourning will make the soldiers' sacrifices "pure" or "sacred." The bread of human life has been destroyed and the wine of human blood stains the landscape of the poem. The sacrament has been wasted.

Stanza five moves into Sackville's final grounding for this protest plea by shifting more specifically into maternal loss: "The earth is all too narrow for our dead, / So many and each a child of ours—and Thine" (17-18). The earth, far from Brooke's small corner of England preserved by the soldiers' death, is now presented as an overflowing grave. But what connects this re-envisioned home front as a grave is the mourning of mothers. This loss does not preserve the nation; in effect, it destroys it. The maternal—as it is in Schreiner—is extended to the whole world as each is identified as a "child of ours."

Sackville ends the poem with this forceful maternal statement that relates the sacrifice of soldiers, imagined in the traditional religious imagery of the Eucharist, to the mothers who bore them; together their sacrifices are linked: "This flesh (our flesh) crumbled away like bread, / This blood (our blood) poured out like wine, like wine" (19-20). The Eucharist becomes maternal, but it is not redemptive. Here the Eucharist only becomes a reference point; the sacrifice has lost its redemptive and divine quality and is only merely *like* bread and wine. As Buck contends, "the blood pollutes and destroys.... Sackville detaches the symbolism of blood and sacrifice from its Christian support, implicitly refusing the use of Christianity as support for a militaristic nationalism" ("British Women's Writing" 92). The bread and wine are not taken and eaten for the benefit of the world; rather the bread is "crumbled away" and the wine is "poured out." The dead are connected back to the maternal, wherein the cost strikes deeply. The

children have been wasted, and as a result, the mothers' flesh and blood has been destroyed.

While this poem clearly voices protest, Montefiore argues that ultimately Sackville adheres to traditional imagery, showing the soldier's sacrifice as Christ-like and thus, redemptive: "Sackville's poem 'Sacrament' uses the symbolism of bread and wine as much to protest as to accept.... It is as if the poet wants to repudiate the tenets of mass slaughter, and yet her sacrificial imagery makes the dead bodies in some sense holy and redeeming" (67). What Montefiore fails to recognize is the way Sackville begins with the traditional imagery only to subvert it in each stanza. Sackville's poem invokes traditional images of Christ's sacrifice and conventional Georgian images of spring, only to contrast them with the overwhelming waste of human life that acts as a stain on the world, thereby undermining both traditions. The consistent repetition of the pleas of women and children center this poem's rhetoric on the domestic and the maternal. The sacrifices of war, while initially identified with Christ, lose their redemptive quality and become, in the end, merely wasted bread and wine.

Within Sackville's poems is a tension regarding the maternal. On the one hand, grief politicizes the maternal. The soldiers' sacrifices as well as the forgotten and displaced dead become the mothers' sacrifice, but Sackville contends those sacrifices are not redemptive. On the other hand, Sackville critiques the appropriation of motherhood into support of the war, and therefore, she also critiques mothers and their mourning as part of the cycle of patriarchal war. If in patriotic motherhood, mothers' surrender of their sons and consequent mourning functions as civic service, then Sackville asserts they are complicit in the system and perpetuation of war. This leads her to critique and condemn

patriotic motherhood. As her book unfolds, it becomes clear that the line of shadows, the grieving mothers, are part of the pageant of war, not separate from it. This critique is made clear in “Nostra Culpa,” “Ora Pro Nobis,” and “The Challenge.”

By critiquing the maternal, Sackville refuses to offer consolation or redemption for the sacrifices of the dead. In this way, her poetry contains anti-elegiac qualities, but her poetry lacks the modernist innovation with form.⁶ Instead, she works within the conventional parameters of Georgian verse, but refuses the ideological implications of patriotic motherhood. Her innovations work in more subtle ways, echoing the allegorical aesthetics and maternal politics of Schreiner. But her critique of the maternal also resembles Ruskin’s harsh critique of women in “Of Queens’ Gardens.” The line between feminism and pacifism becomes difficult to distinguish as Ruskin is arguably not advancing a feminist argument, and feminists who argued for patriotic motherhood were. Sackville, like Schreiner, argues for women’s enfranchisement and an end to war, but this call requires interrogating how the maternal has become complicit in the system of war.

“Nostra Culpa,” Latin for “our fault,” quite harshly accuses mothers of complicity in war and calls on them to work for peace instead. Sackville identifies maternal mourning as a site of national participation in the war system (the pageant), but she does not radically reject it as a site for pacifism. Instead, she interrogates the maternal, emphasizing Schreiner’s feminist claim that war is a mother’s domain. Sackville contends that women should neither remain silent nor joyfully send their sons to the front. Sackville’s speaker reveals this reformed maternal position in stanza one, asserting:

⁶ In his book, Jahan Ramazani describes the “anti-elegy” as a poetic form, which “violates previous generic norms” of the elegy by “becom[ing] anti-consolatory and anti-encomiastic, anti-Romantic, and anti-Victorian, anti-conventional and sometimes even anti-literary” (2). Ramazani argues the modernists created an anti-elegy as part of their aesthetic innovations.

“We knew, this thing at least we knew,—the worth / Of life : this was our secret learned at birth” (1-2). Maternal knowledge yields a special insight into the value of human life neglected by the language of sacrifice. The speaker adds another layer of knowledge: “We knew that Force the world has deified, / How weak it is” (3-4). In contrast to maternal knowledge is the cultural value of force, but the speaker argues the mothers remained silent about this knowledge and “so men died” (4). The speaker further contends that this was motivated by fear: “Fearing that men should praise us less, / we smiled” (6). As in “Pageant,” the smile signals participation in war and here complicity in the deaths of their sons in women’s refusal to challenge patriarchy.

The speaker establishes that contrary to the separate spheres, mothers have an intimate stake in the battlefield and are not separate from war. In stanza two, the speaker explains that mothers knew that war, fueled by pride, is “accursed,” yet where men led, the women silently followed. The speaker then asks, “Dare we now lament our dead?” (12). The speaker seeks to disrupt the discursive practices of war and the cycle of defense and mourning. While patriotic motherhood links the maternal sacrifice to the soldiers’ as a form of patriotism and war work, Sackville argues that their mourning only further solidifies the perpetuation of war. Stanza three develops this scathing critique by continuing her “Pageant” imagery; the mothers, again called “shadows,” are now also called “Shadows and echoes, harlots! We betrayed / Our sons; because men laughed we were afraid” (13-14). Grieving mothers are part of the procession, the pageantry of war trampling the innocent dead, following in the wake of dead armies. Sackville complicates the function of grief within the discourse of war.

This scathing indictment against mothers hinges on their complicity in patriarchy. Sackville extends Schreiner's argument that women have an intimate knowledge about war in order to condemn mothers for their submission to war. This similarly echoes the scathing critique of mothers in George Egerton's "Virgin Soil," in which the main character, Flo, charges her mother with selling her daughter on the marriage market and participating in a destructive patriarchal system. The speaker of Sackville's poem similarly charges that mothers of soldiers kept their "silent wisdom" and refused to act: "thousands perished; still we slept" (16). But as throughout the book, it is not only the soldiers who are the victims of war, but women, children, working people, and the land that nourishes them: "Children were slaughtered, women raped, the weak / Down-trodden. Very quiet was our sleep" (17-18). Sackville focuses her critique on the mothers who willingly surrendered their sons to the front.

The speaker laments the silent sleep of the mothers who did nothing to stop the slaughter of their sons. With a sarcastic and bitter tone, the speaker asserts that their silence and sleep resulted in destruction: "Reap we with pride the harvest! it was sown / By our own toil. Rejoice! it is our own" (25-26). Their bodies are linked with the bodies of war: "This is the flesh we might have saved—our hands, / *Our* hands prepared these blood-drenched, dreadful lands" (27-28). When the maternal is linked to the battlefield, the soldier's sacrifice is the mother's sacrifice. Within patriotic motherhood, this signifies honor, pride, and redemption through suffering. Within pacifism, it is a wasteful sacrifice that demands too much and contaminates the home front. The speaker asserts there are no excuses, and instead of offering consolation or redemption, the speaker concludes: "What shall we plead? That we were deaf and blind? / We mothers and we murderers of man-

kind” (29-30). Taking up Schreiner’s maternal arguments about war, Sackville argues that because of this special maternal knowledge of the costs of war, women/mothers are complicit if they do nothing to stop it. Their maternal knowledge imbues them with a special responsibility to stand up against the men of war, not to send them there.

In order to further reinforce her point that mothers are complicit in the patriarchal system of war, Sackville challenges mothers to see the sacrifice of their children as a parasitic act. In “Ora Pro Nobis,” (translated “pray for us”) the speaker asks her audience to pray not for soldiers who “tread their chosen road of death,” but rather for those of the home front who live upon those sacrifices: “These million dead / Need not your tears: but let them flow / For us to whom is given our daily bread / And are content—as long as this is so” (6-9). The speaker locates a more authentic grief in mourning those who lives are sustained by the sacrifice of others; they are the ones in need of salvation—not a redemption that comes from the soldiers, but a salvation from the sin of yielding them to the war in the first place. Again, grief is shifted from the rhetoric of ennobling sacrifice to the shame of yielding the children to war. This untroubled sleep in safety is what requires prayer—the complicity in war.

While Sackville’s critique of mothers could appear misogynist—as is usually the critique of Sassoon’s “Glory of Women”—we must consider the cultural context for making such claims. Khan cautions that Sackville, like Sassoon, is scapegoating women and that Sackville does not consider “the conditioning processes from which these attitudes stem” (87); however, I would argue that Sackville’s desire is not to condemn mothers, but to awaken them from their support of war by illustrating how their silence and surrender of their sons does not redeem them or the nation. Sackville illustrates that

women are unwittingly participating in a patriarchal discourse which spells their own destruction. She seeks to awaken responsibility and a call to action. Maternal pacifism is not innate, but must be cultivated.

In “Nostra Culpa” and “Ora Pro Nobis,” Sackville critiques women’s silence as complicit with their sacrifice of their sons. She problematizes their grief and charges them as the “murderers of mankind” because they were unwilling to speak out regarding their special insight into the worth of a human life. In “The Challenge,” she constructs a call to action building on this accusation, reforming the maternal in the interests of peace. In this way, she returns to the imagery of “Pageant,” but this time, the army is not the dead, but the weak and downtrodden who rise up against War to proclaim peace: “We lead our tattered armies, the halt, the lame, the weak, / Under a ragged banner, scarce knowing what we seek” (1-2). The speaker questions how the powerful perpetuate war, those “who are free from birth.” This is in essence a question to patriarchy: “How is it that men slaughter men even here upon the earth? / Guardians and lords and kings who hold unblamed the seas and lands, / How is there terror in your souls and blood upon your hands?” (16-18). Those in power—men—use their power to destroy, and the result is that “half the world is drenched in blood” (21). The speaker calls upon the silent ones—the mothers: “They are murdering our children—rise for our children’s sake!” (22). The speaker rejects a patriarchal world wherein dominance only begets more war. She calls upon the silent mothers to see a reality in which their children are being destroyed. From a feminist maternal politics, all those who die are children, born of women, and this knowledge shapes a perspective against war with an explicitly international focus. The speaker locates the mothers’ power not in the patriarchal use of force, of “more blood,

with lies, with lust, / or the sword's swing," but with sheer numbers (23-24). They will "silently and without noise on quiet feet" meet the powerful "in the street" with the mothers' "innumerable armies" (25-26). Though the speaker's army is full of the weak and oppressed, they will become strong—their silent protest will end the slaughter: "*your* reign is past. / The strong may overcome the strong, ye seek in vain / To silence those your hand might crush again and yet again" (32-34). She calls upon the mothers to stand up and overwhelm those in power for their children's sake, not through violence but through protest.

In "Pageant," the trampled bone road is made up of the casualties of war, those whose deaths are lost by focusing on the soldier and the battlefield. This theme of revealing the forgotten voices and lives destroyed by war continues in "Memory." This poem depicts a village ruined by war. The only sounds are "the low sobbing of women, / The creaking of a door, a lost dog—nothing else" (3-4). The resounding silence that pervades the town might indicate peace, but the speaker asserts this is a silence with "no pity ... Horrible, soft like blood, down all the blood-stained ways" (5-6). This is the silence of death and grief. Within the marketplace lies "two corpses ... unburied" and "a bayoneted woman" (7-8). These are the forgotten lives ruined by war: "Humble and ruined folk—for these no pride of conquest" (9). These are the people who did not wage or consent to war; they are the bystanders whose lives were trampled by national "conquest." The speaker contends that she is not "haunted" by "the battle fires" or the "shrapnel;" rather she asks, "Who shall deliver us from the memory of these dead?" (11-12). In Sackville's poems, she often shifts her gaze away from the battlefield to the aftermath of war and the destruction of the innocent. As Murdoch comments, "Sackville

... takes the notion of memory a stage further. Her pacifism ... leads her to a memorialization of all the dead, soldiers and non-combatants alike, especially refugees” (53). In “Women and War,” Sackville urges men to consider war from the home front, to consider “those who form the background of war,” who are “for the most part forgotten and inarticulate, whose pitiful tragedies and heroisms remain unacknowledged and whose shadows fall across the battlefield so lightly that few have sight to notice them” (451). In “Memory,” Sackville puts the background of war into the foreground. By solely focusing on the soldier and the pageant of war—which includes the mourning mothers—we risk losing sight of those whose lives have been touched and destroyed by war.

Sackville calls for a different maternal perspective, one that shifts the gaze away from the trenches to the home front. In “Who?” she examines those who have been made homeless by war: “The wreck and ruin of the city, / These myriad souls outcast, they know not why, / Torn, tortured, exiled, driven over-seas” (5-8). These are the victims of war, and the speaker asserts, “Theirs is the unforgotten sacrifice;—/ Their blood has watered the waste lands:—/ When God remembers, who shall pay the debt?” (13-16). In this poem, Sackville locates the rhetoric of sacrifice and loss within refugees rather than soldiers and grieving mothers. The war creates, not the means of salvation, but the conditions for spiritual debt and polluted lands. Continuing the imagery from “Sacrament,” the Great War has not led to redemption, but a wasteland. “Who?” concludes the collection, which begins with the battlefield and ends with images of war torn “waste lands.” Sackville consistently shifts the language and imagery of war to include not only the soldiers, and their sacrifices, but the suffering and loss of those who are affected by war beyond the battlefield. When Sackville shifts the gaze away from the

trenches to the home front, she also redefines the private sphere as a space of war. In fact, she insists that if we only focus on the battlefield and the ideals of war evinced by heroic soldiers and grieving mothers, we render invisible the suffering and sacrifice of those whose lives are trampled by war.

Sackville's poetry illustrates how motherhood and religious iconography have been put in the service of militarism; she wants to relocate this imagery to its rightful place within pacifism. She argues that maternal knowledge should lead to pacifism. When the maternal is used to consecrate war's sacrifices, it corrupts maternal sacrifice and the power of maternal voices. Maternal grief cannot redeem the sacrifices of war. Sackville, like Schreiner, demonstrates that the maternal opens up a special site of knowledge that leads to peace, but this knowledge must be cultivated and protected from the corruption of militarism. In this way, the maternal pacifist perspective is less about experience or essentialism than it is about an epistemological position.

A principal theme in war poetry and scholarship is reflected in Campbell's apt phrase "combat gnosticism." In poetry, combat gnosticism represents the belief that the truest voice of war emerges from the battlefield and that the soldier-poet furnishes the message of dissent through the horrors of the war. This equates experience with knowledge, a form of knowledge unavailable to those who do not share that experience. What Sackville demonstrates through the maternal is that experience does not necessarily yield knowledge; this knowledge must be cultivated. Sackville contends that the maternal has been corrupted by pro-war patriotism in which the soldiers' sacrifice is constructed as redemptive. The maternal must be configured for pacifism, and Sackville argues that this is authentic knowledge.

This distinction and way of reconfiguring experience and knowledge helps illuminate Sackville's soldier poems in *Pageant*. "Home Again" asserts the gap in knowledge and experience between the ideals and realities of war—essentially combat gnosticism. Utilizing a laddie speech and simple rhyme scheme, the speaker represents the soldiers responding to the treatment they receive when they return from the battlefield. Much like Sassoon's speaker in "Glory of Women," Sackville's speaker comments on how they are fawned over:

They give us sweets and picture-books
and cigarettes and things,
And they speaks to us respectful-like as
though we all was kings; (1-4)

The soldier appeases his audience with stories to "please" them, but he asserts the narrative of combat gnosticism in bolded letters: "**But, the things that we have done and / seen they 'aven't seen at all**" (11-12). Stanza two demonstrates the same juxtaposition Sassoon shows between the ideals and realities of war, when the speaker states:

There's lots o' people shouting, "Britannia
rules the waves,"
An' it's Britons this an' Britons that an'
Britons won't be slaves;
The music 'alls are gay with flags and
girls and noise and light;
We used to think that *this* was war—before

we went to fight.

But not the folk who crowd about and

seize us by the ‘and

We just don’t answer what they says:

they wouldn’t understand. (13-24)

The speaker explains that the pomp and rhetoric of nationalism was his conception of war before the actualities of war. Because of that gap in understanding (combat gnosticism), he cannot convey the disconnect between the ideals and experiences of war. In fact, in stanza three, he asserts,

The’re things that don’t bear thinking of

and things you never tell;

It’s waste of breath to talk to folk who

‘aven’t *been* in ‘Ell” (25-28)

He cannot express what he has been through; there is too big of a gap in understanding.

The speaker further states that those who haven’t experienced the horrors of war are “like kiddies at their play—but / we, we’ve felt and seen” (37-38).

The soldier argues there is no way to bridge the gap in part because the people at home are unable to imagine the realities of war:

there ain’t no

words, not human, to express—

But we often wish they’d think a bit and

chatter rather less (41-44)

The poem concludes that in order to do that, civilians would need “a deal o’ pluck” and

“a lot o’ brain,” but because “they haven’t got them, well— / we simply *can’t* explain” (45-48). On the surface, this poem falls in line with combat gnosticism similar to Owen and Sassoon; civilians continue to perpetuate the ideals of war that trench experiences refute. Yet, when we consider that Sackville is a woman with no battlefield experience, the conflation of experience, knowledge, and dissent shifts. Sackville demonstrates that the perspective of the battlefield reveals a special knowledge about the horrors of war, but this is not entirely based on experience. It is a form of knowledge that can be adopted; the “truth” that all war is a waste is not limited to battlefield experiences. In other words, Sackville contends that one does not need to be on the battlefield to know war is hell; the pacifist already knows this.

Typically combat gnosticism is conflated with the soldier’s voice of dissent and pacifism, but Sackville extends her soldier poems to show that experience does not necessarily lead to a certain kind of knowledge. Like the maternal, it must be cultivated. In the opening poem “Flanders—1915,” Sackville’s speaker depicts the movement of soldiers to and from the battlefield in order to demonstrate the gap between the ideals of war and the experiences of war. The men “go out to Flanders / As to the promised land,” but their return marks a shift in knowledge, as they come back “With eyes that understand” (1-2, 4). Within war ideology, going to war is portrayed as both an adventure and a sacred sacrifice; it is depicted as “the promised land.” The soldiers register the combat gnosticism Sassoon and Owen reflect, yet despite their experience, they continue to return to the front as if propelled by forces beyond their control: “They’ve drunk their fill of blood and wrath, / Of sleeplessness and pain; / Yet silently to Flanders / They hasten back again” (5-8). The horrors of war lead to a shift in understanding, opening up

the ironic gap between the ideals of war and the horrors of war. However, Sackville illustrates that their epistemic shift does not result in pacifist knowledge—they still return to war.

The cyclical return to the battlefield illustrates a gap in combat gnosticism; battlefield experience does not equate dissenting knowledge. In “Quo Vaditis?” Sackville’s observant speaker questions: “Where do ye go / Pale line of broken men?” (1-2). The experience of war leads to brokenness, yet the men reply, “We only know / To die. Could we die twice, we’d die / again” (3-5). While the battlefield experience yields the gap between national rhetoric and the horrors of war, this does not lead to dissent, because the rhetoric of war reinforces sacrifice as something sacred. The men further clarify:

“And to what end?”—

We ask not, but we see

The self-same light which kindles in our

Friend

Shine from the faces of our enemy. (9-12)

The battlefield yields the knowledge of a common humanity as there is no distinction between friend and enemy; yet, they are not able to ask “to what end?” The horrors of war and the common humanity of friend/foe does not automatically lead to dissent, because they are not able to ask “to what purpose?”—yet the men not only see the face of the other, they share the same fate, a return to the maternal:

Same light, same doom!

.... Deep

We lie in the same womb,
The slain, the slain together in the one
sleep. (13-16)

The slain are united in the “the same womb.” Sackville seeks to unsettle the rhetoric of redemptive sacrifice from the battlefield, continuing to link the soldiers’ body back to the mother’s. Because they uphold the rhetoric of heroic self-sacrifice, Sackville contends, they continue to return to the front.

When Sackville interrogates the mother and the soldier, she argues they are both used to justify war ideology. Rather than reject them, she argues they must be reformed to their authentic site of knowledge: pacifism. The slain soldiers are returned to the maternal womb; their lives are connected to hers. The common humanity of both friend and enemy, the maternal knowledge of cost all lead Sackville to pacifism. For her, this is the truth of war. But while this knowledge can emerge from specific experiences—birth and the battlefield—Sackville demonstrates that experience does not result in dissenting knowledge, because both the elevation of bodily sacrifices—both maternal and military—result in the perpetuation of war, not peace. The fact that Sackville was neither a mother nor a soldier only amplifies her contention that dissent emerges out of a cultivated perspective rather than essentialist experience.

Sackville seeks to displace the rhetoric of redemption by shifting the perspective from the battlefield to the home front. She challenges mothers to reclaim their pacifist knowledge and challenge the patriarchal system of war on behalf of the world’s children. In particular, she shows that by focusing on the “pageant of war,” spectators lose sight of the casualties of war: the innocent and forgotten slain, the trampled bone road. In doing

so, Sackville relocates the experience of war beyond the trenches to a home front that is tainted by war and to those who become homeless as a result of war. Sackville depicts the soldiers' experiences sympathetically, often reinforcing the ideology of combat gnosticism, but she also seeks to unsettle that the only key players in war are heroic soldiers and grieving mothers. By focusing only the battlefield as the domain of war, Sackville contends we lose sight of other sacrifices and other victims of war. Sackville's poetry engages in the poetic traditions of her time; she uses sentimentality and Georgian imagery, and this sentimental poetics has resulted in a serious neglect of her book of poems, as well as of women's war poetry in general. But neglecting her work accepts a separate spheres division between a feminine home front and a masculine battlefield. Sackville not only blurs this division by showing how the war includes the home front, but she contends this division is implicated in the perpetuation of war.

**Chapter 4: “My not being in has allowed me to see”: The Ethical Heresies of
Vernon Lee’s *Satan the Waster***

I think music and dancing and laughter and work lead to decent living; a fig for your stool of repentance!

—George Egerton, “The Regeneration of Two” (152)

But we have not laid that picture before you in order to excite once more the sterile emotion of hate. On the contrary it is in order to release other emotions such as the human figure . . . arouses in us who are human beings. For it suggests a connection and for us a very important connection. It suggests that the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected. . . . It suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure but are ourselves that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure. A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life.

—Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (168)

A popular motif in trench writing is depicting a binary opposition between civilians and soldiers. As Fussell explains: “even if those at home had wanted to know the realities of the war, they couldn’t have without experiencing them: its conditions were too novel, its industrialized ghastliness too unprecedented. The war would have been simply unbelievable. From the very beginning a fissure was opening between the Army and civilians” (87). This epistemological fissure is what Fussell calls adversarial thinking: a series of binaries configuring war experience. In this project, I argue that an ideological underpinning of this fissure and its consequent theme of combat gnosticism is the separate spheres ideology. Thus far, I have argued that the separate spheres ideology was drawn on and reconfigured during the Great War in order to propel men to the front to defend their country and for women to relinquish them and offer consolation or mourning when they returned—dead or alive. The separate spheres ideology establishes soldiers as

those who can speak about war as man's domain; whereas women are constructed as part of the home front, which cannot possibly understand war. Feminist writers—both pro- and anti-war—wrote against this assertion, constructing their consent and dissent as integral parts of the experience of war.

A central part of understanding Great War literature, as I have been discussing it in this project, is to examine how writers respond to or reconfigure the separate spheres ideology in order to protest World War I. Margaret Sackville positions her pacifist protest to World War I from a maternal perspective, and in doing so, she argues that war is women's domain. She argues women must make their voices heard in the public sphere in order to end the masculine discourse of war. The authority to speak about war, and more specifically to protest war, is often associated with the battlefield, but writers such as Sackville open up the experience of war to include the home front. When Sackville locates the truth of war within the maternal, she makes it an experience of war—the voice of the (obscured) insider. But what happens to our understanding of war and the discourse of combat gnosticism when a writer positions herself explicitly as an outsider? How does an outside vantage point offer a different site of knowledge? Vernon Lee's *Satan the Waster* (1920), a pacifist allegorical closet drama, situates itself specifically from an outside perspective in order to protest the Great War. Yet, as Gillian Beer contends, “When satire comes from the trenches it sickens and convinces, as in the work of Sassoon. Soldiers writing have a blood-bolstered authority. But a non-combatant woman, a writer on aesthetics, what does she here?” (108).

In this chapter I argue that *Satan the Waster* furnishes an alternate reconfiguration of the separate spheres ideology by mapping the public discourse of war onto the private

self, thereby redefining the experience of war as a spiritual participation. When she does this, she draws on gender politics in order to critique how the separate spheres ideology has been adopted by the (gendered) discourse of war. She argues it is her critical distance—her spiritual detachment—from the war which enables her to see and speak about war more clearly.

In order to articulate her dissent, Lee calls attention to the discourse of war, which she sees as synthesizing religious iconography and gender politics. In doing so, she lays bare what I call the *sacred narratives* of the Great War. Lee argues that war puts certain narratives of religious righteousness and gendered self-sacrifice into the service of perpetuating itself. Lee calls her critique an “ethical heresy,” as she questions and ultimately rejects the sacred virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice within the discourse of war. In this chapter, I examine Lee’s critical analysis of the Great War in *Satan the Waster*, focusing on her examination of sacred narratives that rely on the elevation of patriotism and sacrifice, and I utilize Judith Butler’s discussion of interpretive frameworks in *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* in order to clarify her ideas. Lee’s analysis demonstrates that women are neither passive victims nor innocent mourners, but that women’s spiritual participation—their moral beauty—helps perpetuate war.

Lee’s Gender Politics

Vernon Lee (Violet Paget, 1856-1935) straddles the Victorian and modern periods, never fully at home in either.¹ Vineta Colby concludes, “In the end Vernon Lee

¹ This has led to a scholarly debate about where to situate her—is she Victorian, modernist, both, or neither? While several critics identify her with modernism, Kristin Mahoney convincingly argues she was intentionally a late Victorian in a modernist culture: “Lee purposefully occupies the margins of the

fits into no single category. She was too late to be a Victorian, too early to be a Modernist. She was a nonmilitant feminist, a sexually repressive lesbian, an aesthete, a cautious socialist, a secular humanist. In short, she was protean” (xii). A prolific writer, Lee was known for her work in eighteenth-century studies and psychological aesthetics, and she constructed herself within late Victorian culture as a public intellectual.² From a contemporary standpoint, Lee seems a bit queer. Not only did she lead an unconventional life as a masculine woman in woman-identified relationships, but she resisted identity categories in ways that anticipate queer theory. As Sondeep Kandola points out, “Lee continued to use her masculine pen-name in public *and* private” (2), building a more androgynous and queer persona.³ This androgynous persona reflected Lee’s resistance to being seen as a woman writer: “Like other women who wrote theoretical texts ... Lee avoided drawing attention to her gender, well aware that women were not judged by the same standards as men” (Zorn xxii-xxiii). As Lee herself explains in a letter, “I don’t care that Vernon Lee should be known to be myself or any other young woman, as I am sure that no one reads a woman’s writing on art, history, or aesthetics with anything but unmitigated contempt” (qtd. in Gunn 66). Lee desired her work to be treated with serious

twentieth century, remaining detached so that she can more effectively engage with and critique the modern moment. She insists upon her separateness from the present, and she draws on a highly anachronistic set of aesthetic strategies while responding to contemporary political problems. Attending to Lee’s performance of marginality, detachment, and anachronism in her pacifist writings allows us to periodize aestheticism differently and to consider its modes of political engagement in a new light” (314). On Lee’s relationship to modernism, see Harris, who argues Lee’s aesthetics anticipate T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and also Gill Plain, who argues Lee’s drama “anticipates a Brechtian notion of theatrical alienation” (8).

² Zorn explains: “Trained by a free-spirited mother for a writing career as other women were for motherhood and domesticity, Vernon Lee introduced herself to the British audience in 1878 with an intellectual history of eighteenth-century Italy that received rave reviews, especially impressive for an author so young” (xvii).

³ Lee adopted not just a masculine penname but a “masculine career, impressing literary colleagues with her erudition and independent thought and challenging them with her sharpness and lack of tact. In nineteenth-century terms, Lee was leading a man’s life in a woman’s body” (Zorn 7).

consideration, and thus, she distances herself from being marked as a woman writer and from the feminist movement.⁴

Lee evinces a gender politics that resonates with feminism, but she resists being identified as a feminist, and furthermore, a woman writer. As Toril Moi explains, “when a woman finds that she has to say ‘I am not a woman writer’... it is never a general claim, never a philosophical maxim.... It is always in *response* to a provocation, usually to someone who has tried to use her sex or gender against her. Such statements, in short, are a specific kind of *defensive* speech act: when we hear such words, therefore, we should look for the provocation” (266). Lee’s resistance to being considered a woman writer can be interpreted as a defensive speech act as she occupied a traditionally masculine position as an art critic and public intellectual. As Beer contends, Lee was a “[threat] to the literary elite” who might “turn out to be the cleverest *man* in Europe” (110). But we can also further contextualize Lee’s resistance to being marked as a woman writer as a reaction to the separate spheres ideology.

In “The Economic Parasitism of Women” (1902), Lee explains her opposition to the women’s movement as a resistance to being identified as “the Sex”: “Indeed, when I seek in the depths of my consciousness, I think the real mischief lay in that word, ‘Woman’” (265). As Kent explains, “women were so exclusively identified by their sexual functions that nineteenth-century society came to regard them as ‘the Sex’” (*Sex and Suffrage* 31-32). Lee clarifies that while she supports the goals of the women’s movement “to break down the barriers—legal, professional, educational and social—

⁴ Additionally, Lee did not consider herself a New Woman, despite being depicted as a masculine New Woman stereotype. For more on Vernon Lee’s relationship to the New Woman, see Sondeep Kandola’s “Vernon Lee: New Woman?” and also Christa Zorn.

which still exist between the sexes,” she dislikes “the inevitable pitting of one of these sexes against the other” (“Economic” 265).⁵ According to Lee, this emphasis on women as a category results in being reduced to “the Sex.” Lee calls this being “over-sexed” : “while men are a great many things besides being males—soldiers and sailors, tinkers and tailors, and all the rest of the nursery rhyme—women are, first and foremost, *females*, and then again females, and then—still more females” (281). She contends that the movement for reform places women within the realm of public debate and scrutiny, which reinforces sexual difference and obscures a common humanity: “the other fact of *human nature*, the universal, chaste fact represented by the word *Homo* as distinguished from mere *Vir* and *Femina*, seemed for the moment lost sight of” (266). When caught in “the sexist dilemma” between “having to choose between her gender and her humanity” (Moi 267), Lee chooses humanity, adopting a strategy of indifference to the sex war, arguing that focusing on sexual difference reproduces sexual difference.

The difference between the sexes, she argues, is not a “physiological” one, but a “sociological” difference (269). Echoing Egerton, Lee makes a distinction between “Women ... as a natural product” and “women as the creation of men” (294). But whereas Egerton focuses on uncovering “women as a natural product,” Lee turns to androgyny or a common humanity in order to deemphasize sexual difference: “The man makes the woman, and the woman ... in her turn makes the man; woman in the image of man, man in the image of woman” (296). The terms “man” and “woman” are interchangeable, each sex shaping the other and in fact melding into an androgynous

⁵ As Colby explains, Lee “subordinated” women’s suffrage “to what she considered higher causes of social justice” (274).

image of one another. She emphasizes individual qualities over sex categories: “it is just the most aesthetic, but also the most athletic and the most intellectual, people of the past which has left us those statues of gods and goddesses in the presence of whose marvellous vigour and loveliness we are often in doubt whether to give the name of Apollo, or that of Athena” (296-97). Sex is simply not something Lee wants to be a defining marker of value. Because feminists put sex into the forefront of their movement, Lee remains detached from them.⁶

Like Egerton, Lee’s resistance to feminist identification suggests an alternate form of gender politics. Zorn asks whether we can categorize Lee as a feminist writer: “[I]s her reluctance to speak on the Woman Question a manifestation of a feminism on her own terms?” (88). Zorn argues that Lee should be studied “in a feminist context,” as her “arguments reflect and interact with feminist and liberal contemporary thought” (89). Yet *Satan the Waster* is absent from her analysis. Similarly, gender is remarkably absent from scholarly analyses of *Satan the Waster*. While Lee might not have identified with feminism, her work reflects strong critiques of gender politics, which I would like to draw out in *Satan the Waster*. Lee’s analysis of war does not rely on gender in order to establish her authority, but this lack puts forward a conspicuous absence, since many pacifist texts by women rely on expanding their moral influence as mothers, writing from the private sphere of home and hearth, in order to launch a dissent. In contrast to Sackville, Lee does not occupy an explicitly feminine subject position in order to protest the war, but rather she forms her dissent as a public intellectual and as an outsider to war.

⁶ In making this move, she anticipates the theoretical groundwork of Monique Wittig’s assertion that “woman” is an irredeemable category and therefore, that lesbians are not women. See particularly “The Straight Mind,” 32.

As I will argue, it is in part her resistance to being marked as “the sex” which enables her to see how gender forms part of a broader war discourse. Instead, her analysis of war in *Satan the Waster* demonstrates how the public sphere invades the private individual; she maps the separate spheres onto the self and illustrates how war ideology relies on gender in order to create individuals who are *in* the war.

Lee’s Outsider Position in Satan the Waster

In order to discuss Lee’s gender politics in *Satan the Waster*, I will need to first leave the topic of gender to lay out her broader pacifist dissent. *Satan the Waster* is a hybrid text that utilizes allegory, satire, drama, and short philosophical essays. It was originally published as a Christmastime allegory—what Gill Plain describes as “the world’s first ‘Coffee-table’ anti-war book” (6)—entitled *The Ballet of Nations* (1915) with elegant illustrations by Maxwell Armfield.⁷ It was not well received. Not taking the hint—or perhaps feeling even more committed to defending her critique of the war—Lee revised *Ballet* into a fuller play with a lengthy introduction, an extended allegory, and several short essays expanding on the ideas set out in the allegory. *Ballet* went from a nineteen page illustrated text to the three-hundred page un-illustrated *Satan the Waster*.⁸

The allegory is a performance within a performance, as the text follows Satan’s commission of a European War called “The Ballet of Nations,” conducted by Ballet Master Death and accompanied by an orchestra of Human Passions, also known as

⁷ Lee did not like Armfield’s aesthete illustrations: “The disharmony between author and artist resulted from their respective commitment to the politics of realism, and of art for art’s sake. Whereas Lee surrendered the privilege of aesthetic autonomy to the imperative need for propaganda against militarism, Armfield championed aestheticism as a form of pacifist resistance in its own right” (Brockington 146).

⁸ For more on *The Ballet of Nations*, see Grace Brockington, and also Patricia Pulham. For scholarship on the revision of *Ballet* into *Satan*, see Meghan Lau; Sondeep Kandola; and Gillian Beer.

Patriotism. The ballet is performed by Heroism—the blind soldier—and the Dancing Nations. The ballet, more symbolism than plot, is a grotesque and violent performance, as the various dancers' bodies are disfigured: "so every Nation can dance Death's Dance, however bled and maimed; dance upon stumps, or trail itself along, a living jelly of blood and trampled flesh, proving only its Head remains unhurt" (51-52). As long as the helmeted heads—the governments—are intact, the ballet continues. The allegory ends with Heroism's revelation that the death he so loved and clung to throughout the ballet was not the "true, pure, lovely Death" he thought it was, but rather "Skeleton Pollution" (109). Satan closes out the play by commenting that Heroism's blindness has been challenged and that should he recover his sight through some modern surgery, then this will be the last ballet, the last war. Lee hopes her text will enable her audience, like Heroism, to achieve honest sight. By making Satan the producer of the ballet—the war—Lee argues that war itself is the enemy, not Germany. Lee's personification of a long list of human virtues and vices enables her to show how the war draws on all facets of human behavior and culture; war draws on the best and the worst of humanity in order to waste it. Lee hopes to shift the wartime perspective away from the binary opposition of good/evil to a more comprehensive picture of war itself as inherently evil.

While the allegory has drawn significant attention in the scholarship on *Satan, I* am primarily interested in the essays that frame it, the material that Plain calls "an eminently Victorian swathe of footnotes" (9).⁹ In them, Lee theorizes how individuals

⁹ For a fairly accurate description of what it is like to read these notes, see Plain's depiction of Lee's "almost Dickensian excess": "The writings within *Satan's* massive section of notes is comprised of an endless stream of syntactical and philosophical openings. A seemingly infinite subclausal procession demands the concentration of close reading while persistently refusing the certainty of a fixed position. Trying to find a quotation that sums up her argument is almost impossible because her concerns flow one

come to put their faith in the war and what has led to her own spiritual detachment. In the introduction, Lee argues that her vantage point as an outsider enables her to see the truth that all war is a waste of present and future good, the message of her allegory. These are loaded words—outsider and truth of war—yet Lee shapes them in response to the discourse of World War I, in which boundaries were drawn within countries between civilian and soldier as well as among countries, between ally and enemy. Lee writes in her introduction, “Indeed, paradox though it sounds at first, I have come by these views of the war just because I have not been able to be, as the current phrase goes, in the war; although once I had come by such views, the holding of them implied that I should keep out” (xvi-xvii). This aloof position grants her a detached perspective from which to question the war as “a common catastrophe” on a global scale, rather than only from her national perspective, which would involve “seeing only [her] country’s danger at the enemy’s hands, and calling that a danger to civilization and the future” (xvii). Lee explains the roots of her aloof view, as a “[matter] of personal biography” and a result of having no allegiance to any one country, but both admiring and disliking parts of each country (xvii). As a cosmopolitan intellectual, Lee did not identify with any one country; her biographer Vineta Colby describes Lee as “English by nationality, French by accident of birth . . . [and] Italian by choice” (1).

To many war writers, it is their experience *in* the war that grants them the authority to speak of that knowledge—the truth of war—whether that experience is narrowly confined to the battlefield or is expanded to include the home front. Lee refuses

into another into another, creating a text that is as complexly interwoven with intersecting dynamics of cause and effect as was the war itself” (9).

this position and instead argues that being out of the war enables a more authentic knowledge. At first, this seems like a rather simple war binary, located within the discussion of gender—soldiers have the experiences of war; women are kept out. Writers such as Schreiner and Sackville reject the narrative that war is a masculine domain by reorienting their relationship to the war and the battlefield. Lee also defines *being in the war* in ways that challenge a simple division between battlefield and home front, defining war experience as a person who has “participated by belief, and more especially by suffering” (xviii). Accordingly, she does not define the war by proximity to the battlefield. Rather it is an ideological participation. This participation is more “psychological” than “political” and amounts to a “spiritual participation in the war” that “prevent[s] those who [do] participate from seeing the realities of the case” (xx). She positions herself as an agnostic to war, and this detachment, this lack of faith, enables her the critical distance to evaluate war in ways that being *in* obscures.¹⁰

Like Sackville, Lee contends that the cultural narrative of war has appropriated the discourses of religion and gender. This cultural narrative, what we might call a sacred narrative, creates a symbolic association between the individual and the nation-state. This sacred narrative relies upon the virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice, which Lee illustrates are shaped by gender roles iterated by the separate spheres. Within Lee’s analysis, the Great War relies upon a sacred narrative in which to question or critique the narrative of war is to critique the self. Any dissent is interpreted as a form of personal threat. As Patricia Pulham argues, “If during war, patriotism becomes a ‘faith’, then the

¹⁰ Here, I echo Zorn, who refers to Lee’s refusal to participate in the sex war as Lee’s “feminist ‘agnosticism’” (89).

pacifist, by implication, becomes a ‘heretic’” (56). Understanding this, Lee embraces her alienating status as outsider and labels her dissent ethical heresies, positioning herself, alongside her character Satan, as the anti-hero who illuminates the delusions of war.

All sacred narratives require scrutiny, according to Lee, because they shape—in Butlerian terms—the frame of what is visible. In *Precarious Life*, Butler analyzes the cultural narratives of US sovereignty that justified the Iraq War as a result of 9/11. Butler comments that dissent becomes difficult in a public discourse which adheres to an “us/them” narrative, shaped by the administration and the media: “In a strong sense, the binarism that Bush proposes in which only two positions are possible—‘Either you’re with us or you’re with the terrorists’—makes it untenable to hold a position in which one opposes both and queries the terms in which the opposition is framed” (2). Butler’s goal is to illuminate the frames that make the loss of some lives grievable and others invisible. Reading Butler alongside Lee reveals striking similarities of analysis and thought. Butler hopes to illuminate the “interpretive frames” that justified post-9/11 wars; similarly, Lee desires to unsettle the sacred narratives—the interpretive frames—that made England wholly righteous in its pursuit of an evil and morally corrupt Germany. While Butler calls for an integration of precarity into public discourse, Lee calls for a reframing of altruism. Both are calling into question the discursive narratives that perpetuate war.

While Butler uses a picture frame as a metaphor for understanding what can be seen and heard during wartime, Lee uses a variety of lens metaphors to articulate how individuals interpret reality and how that interpretation shapes *being in* the war. Lee asserts that identity is “largely an expression of a single standpoint, a single angle, focus or power of lens” (179). The individual narrows the vision to this singular lens and

“[omits] from its inventory all that does not come under that angle, focus, lens”; in other words, the lens omits the Other—other realities, possibilities, or perspectives. In order to grasp the complexity of reality, Lee contends we must call attention to these lenses “to change our own mode of seeing and moving” (179). Subsequently, Lee explains individuals need both a telescope and a microscope to understand reality, because what they perceive is only a “fragment and a phase of Reality” (xxxiv). This limitation and call to attend to the lenses of interpretation reflect both a Victorian impulse to see that world in all its organic and systematic complexity, and also a modernist skepticism that that totality can ever be achieved.

In wartime, Lee argues, this individual lens is pointed to a national identity, a partial perspective that excludes the other, by negating “the *multi-dimensional coexistence and continuance* beyond ourselves” (176). This negation leads her to declare that war is an “outrage on reality” because it foregrounds the self/nation while denying other possibilities, other lenses. In Lee’s terms, it is a form of “selfishness” because it results in subordinating anything that falls outside the lens: “we think of persons and things as subsidiary to our preferences and our intentions; we deny their rights; we blot out their independent existence” (176). She contends that the subject’s default is set to his/her own lens, which is inherently self-focused; in wartime, this self-focus becomes intensified and linked to a national identity.

In her discussion of the frame, Butler explains that “our moral responses—responses that first take the form as affect—are tacitly regulated by certain kinds of interpretive frameworks” (*Frames of War* 41). These interpretive frameworks illuminate “why it is we might feel horror in the face of certain losses but indifference or even

righteousness in light of others” (41-42). Lee makes a similar point in order to demonstrate the multiplicity of perspectives that are rendered invisible during war. During an air raid, a bomber is seen as a hero to his comrades, but as an enemy to those on the ground: “What from below is murder and devastation, becomes, from above, and in that flyer’s own intention, nothing but gallant defence of self and country. Both sides of that reality exist; both views, so far as they go, are true. Only both sides cannot be viewed, cannot be felt, at once; and, for that reason, are faulty and misleading. Let me emphasize that they cannot be seen *because they cannot be felt*” (xxxv-vi). Lee asserts both viewpoints—the self as both the hero and the enemy—exist at once together; both are true, yet the framework of war makes us choose only one. Moreover, Lee connects the lens to the language of affect. Butler claims that “[war] sustains its practices through acting on the senses, crafting them to apprehend the world selectively,” which results in “disposing us to feel shock and outrage in the face of one expression of violence and righteous coldness in the face of the another” (51-52). The framework of war connects us to a narrative of safeguarding our own interests while destroying those we perceive to be a threat to ours.

War ideology creates a bias in which people *in* the war, regardless of their relative position to the battlefield, see the war divided between opposing forces. Lee argues that both sides share the same belief: that they are right and justified and the other side is wrong—more than that: evil. The wartime binary in which self/other is transformed to hero/enemy becomes linked symbolically with the nation and cultural narratives of superiority:

the Kaiser or Sir Edward Grey may prove to have deliberately plotted this war; but when an Englishman accepts the first, and a German accepts the second, of these views, for gospel truth, these two conflicting and reciprocally destructive opinions have got one fact in common, namely: that the Englishman and the German are both trying to put the responsibility on the enemy. (xxx)

While the argument that war is an evil waste that obscures the humanity of the enemy is fairly common in pacifist literature, I would like to highlight Lee's phrasing here: both the Englishman and the German see the other as the enemy as a form of "gospel truth." Throughout *Satan the Waster*, Lee utilizes such religious imagery and language in order to demonstrate that the war not only relied on religious justification, but created a form of faith, linking individual identity to nationalism.

This "gospel truth" transforms the binary between hero/enemy to a religiously inflected moral binary between good/evil, but Lee argues both sides of the conflict construct a figure in the form of God or Christ and a figure in the form of Satan or evil. As a reflection of this point, Lee depicts Satan as a character orchestrating the war but with no national allegiance; furthermore, she refused to depict God or Christ in her play, because she was "sick of hearing this war discussed from the point of view of God, as if the speaker or writer, English, French, German, American, or what not, held a brief from on high to 'justify the ways of God to man' or rather to identify the ways of his own particular nation with the ways of God" (115). Lee asserts that war has nothing to do with God: "I do not know who or what God is; but in these five years he has been called upon to back so many abominations and imbecilities, that it seems more decent not to take his

name once more in vain, but rather speak of Evil in that of him who had the gentlemanly frankness to say to it ‘Be thou my Good’” (115). To Lee, the Great War was not a holy crusade or a just war, and she defines evil not in supernatural or ontological terms, but in ethical terms between individuals.

She does, however, portray Satan as a way to deconstruct the binary between hero/enemy, and she extends the allegory through her analysis in the note “Satan is the Adversary.” When Lee writes “Satan is the adversary,” Satan—the architect of war—is the enemy, an enemy all nations share. Lee’s Satan is “the *Power that wastes*,” and as such, “he is the Adversary against whom we must all and always, struggle with all our will and all our wits” (116). Satan represents the condition of human ethical evil, but Lee argues, when citizens say, “the adversary is Satan,” they identify their particular enemy as an evil to be destroyed: “*their* meaning is that we must in these particular present years of Grace, or Disgrace, lavish all our energy, wealth, strength, health, wit, and our virtues and all the best of our life and lives, in trying to take by the scruff of the neck ... and smite withal, a particular nation or group of nations, who, being at war with us for the first time in history, is at present our Adversary” (117). The real enemy is within each individual, not in the face of the German: “Satan, as all religions have taught, is, actually and potentially, in all and every one of us alike. Hence our chief dealings and wrestlings with that Old Enemy must be in *ourselves*” (117). In identifying Satan as a capacity for evil within each individual, Lee shifts the grounds of warfare from the physical battlefield to the individual: “Each collectivity or group being (like each individual only much more so) a battlefield between the Powers of Good and the Powers of Evil” (118). In doing

this, Lee maps public discourse onto the individual, shifting attention from the projected Other to the private self.

Because of this rigidly demarcated boundary between us and them, Lee explains that one's nation takes on a sacred status in wartime, and any critique of that nation is seen as both treacherous and blasphemous, because the nation is being read as an extension of the self. Lee argues that outside of wartime, an individual might disparage his government, but during wartime, to offer anything but full support of that government is out of the question. Lee's analysis reveals that this defensive gesture can be traced back to a sacred narrative sanctified by suffering and sacrifice:

once a country *is in*, its fighting youths, its mourning parents and widows, consecrate its cause with their risks and agonies. From the very first, and in each belligerent camp equally, this war was raised to the status of a crusade, and became dear and sacred to the hearts which it braced or tortured.... They glory in their cross, cling to it with all their love; and any mistaken person suggesting that it might be laid down is felt to be profaning and robbing their treasure. Their martyrdom has grown to be their life; hands off it! (xxvi)

Lee critiques the boundaries of war by asserting that both soldiers and grieving families *consecrate* war as something sacred. Being *in* the war is a spiritual participation which reconfigures the individual's relationship to the nation by mapping nationalism onto the self. This process is continually renewed through the rhetoric of suffering and sacrifice. Such spiritual participation elevates the experience of war to a religious status. Critiquing the nation becomes a critique of the sacred self: "Thus in the war-religious, as in other

religions, certain beliefs begin by being the spontaneous outcome of passion, tradition, circumstances and mutual imitation, until by dint of propaganda and persecution, delusions and superstitions come to be established and endowed as obligatory dogmas” (xxxviii). This participation does not emerge from rational thought, but from emotions deeply tied to an individual’s sense of self. Lee identifies an acceptance of this sacred narrative as war participation or experience.

War is often depicted in religious terms—as a holy crusade— but in Lee’s text, she flips the religious iconography and tells her war story through the perspective of Satan rather than God and Christ. In identifying herself with Satan, Lee solidifies her argument that to critique war during war is to commit sacrilege and to be positioned in opposition to society. Lee explains, “I found myself writing the prologue as an explanation, put into the mouth of Satan himself, of whatever philosophy of life my own life and my studies of professional philosophers had left me with to face the cataclysm of this war” (ix). The character of Satan becomes a mouthpiece for Lee’s critique of war, as he lays bare the production of war. By identifying with Satan, Lee acknowledges that to question the norms is to risk ostracism.

Lee’s analysis of the sacred self leads her to critique two predominant parts of the sacred narrative in wartime thinking: patriotism and sacrifice. Lee analyzes both civic virtues in order to demonstrate that while they appear self-sacrificial, they are in fact part of a sacred narrative that reinforces the self and denies the waste of war. She calls these dissenting arguments “ethical heresies” (200). A feminist analysis demonstrates how both parts of the sacred narrative rely upon religious discourse and its intersection with gender ideology. By establishing sacrifice as a primary form of participation in war, Lee shows

how soldiers and civilians consecrate their faith in war. Furthermore, Lee claims that women's faith in the redemptive nature of sacrifice—their moral beauty—perpetuates the war.

Lee's first ethical heresy is her critique of patriotism. While she admits that she is not "altogether comfortable" without a "little Patriotism" (242), she contends she has no one allegiance to any country. In the note "Orchestra of Passions," Lee explains that patriotism is often thought of as love of one's country or birthplace, but she defines patriotism as a "love due to possession," and she posits that fear and hatred emerge from the possessiveness about one's country. Focusing on the possessive pronoun "my," Lee contends that patriotism perpetuates an us/them distinction:

Its presence, the bare fact of our thinking, at any moment, in terms of possession, possession positively by self, negatively by others, instead of thinking in terms of existence (of things being so and so), means that we are no longer or not yet in the realm of contemplation and appreciation, of reason, analysis and causality; but in that of passion and action ... not of seeing but of taking, grabbing, clinging to, keeping, defending; and, in the course of such taking or keeping, frequently destroying. (239)

While patriotism is often portrayed as a unifying and ennobling quality, Lee argues it is based on possessive characteristics that lead to defense and destruction. This possessiveness makes any critique of the nation a threat to the self:

"A country right or wrong." Whoever said such an absurdity? But substitute the one word *my* and the saying becomes not only legitimate but meritorious and beyond the reach of criticism. Neither, of course, must

anyone dare to criticize *my* country: for right or wrong, reasonably or unreasonably criticized it is *mine*; and when I say *mine* I say *hands off!*
For round that little word *mine* there watch the most valiant guards, the most vigilant sentinels of the most wretched but most august of Entities: the Human Self. (239)

Whenever an issue is above critique, Lee urges us to search for the sacred narrative: “every criticism of whatever I call *mine* is a diminution of my sacred self” (239). The possessive indicates an extension of the self. War takes on a sacred status in part because patriotism justifies one’s country and more particularly one’s self as in the right. If a country is wrong in its action, this implicates the individual who consecrated it with his or her faith in that country’s righteousness. As such, she rejects patriotism as a virtue and declares herself a citizen of no one country.

Lee argues that patriotism is a symbolic movement in which the individual is connected with the nation, but this leads to an elevation of the self, not an authentic connection with the other: “Being at war makes all nations turn inwards, towards their own members and partisans, those sides which are admirable, pathetic or at least sympathetic; while facing the enemy countries with only brutality” (xxxv). Not only does patriotism rely on a distorted dichotomy, but it relies on those deepest felt social feelings that elevate the sacred self: “It is the nature of all Love—love of persons, country, stocks and stones, aims and creeds—to enclose its objects into the outer, but equally sensitive, self which every living soul spins round its private core” (154). The self casts a circle enclosing the outer world within the private self; anything within that circle is made part of the self. For those participating in war, this circle encloses the nation-state. This

enclosed circle means that it becomes deeply painful to critique what the self loves, but moreover, this critique risks unsettling an individual's identity—here his/her faith in the nation: “More intolerable than our own sense of diminution, is the feeling that what we love is weighed and found wanting” (154). Lee explains that this identification with one's possessive love during the heightened emotions of wartime thinking results in accepting no critique of the nation because to do so would be to critique the self: “His country is in him; he is part of it; and that emotional participation makes him far more sensitive in its honour than in his own” (155). The individual approaches the nation with faith in its rightness, because to admit anything otherwise would reflect on the self. Lee argues that this leads to an “amazing blindness to the symmetrical irony of war's realities” (155). Admitting that a country might be in the wrong means that the individuals might be wrong and, more than that, might be complicit in the nation's actions. The precarious emotional foundation of *being in the war* threatens to unravel an individual's wartime identity. The public sphere—the nation—has moved inward and become an embattled psychological terrain.

Within the discourse on gender, Sackville demonstrates that the soldiers' sacrifice is the mothers', and therefore, mothers need to refuse this sacrifice in order to establish peace. Similarly, Lee brings gender politics into her discussion of patriotism and sacrifice as virtues. She moves the landscape of war inward, enveloping the public within the private sphere of the self and illustrates how individuals are blind to inherent contradictions within war ideology. For example, she explains that outside of wartime, women are known for their revulsion of violence, but in war, they surrender their sons and lovers to the front as part of their patriotic duty:

if especially so many of our women, to whom slaughter of other women's children is almost physiologically odious, have come to look without a shudder, rather with pride in their eyes, at the armless, legless creatures sent back from France; and have learned to read with complacency accounts of such doings as should have turned a butcher sick, this has been due originally to the love which each of those women has borne to a husband, nay even more to a son or a brother; due to the delusion that what *he* did could not be otherwise than innocent, nay holy; the delusion wherewith their love has protected itself against desecration. (156)

Lee questions how women, who would ordinarily abhor violence, condone—let alone take pride in—sending those closest to them to the front. The answer for Lee lies in the way gender has been co-opted into war ideology, in which the soldiers' sacrifice is interpreted as a sacred civic act that is reinforced by women's faith in it as such. Lee calls this interpretive framework into question. Women's participation in war has been to interpret this civic act as a holy one, which Lee argues only protects them from admitting that the object of their love could be anything other than innocent or holy or, more importantly, that they themselves, in their consecration of this act, are innocent and holy and thereby kept from the violence. This connects women's experiences to the battlefield by association, by their complicity in war ideology. This is a disruption of the separate spheres. Within the separate spheres, women are to be kept from violence, yet Lee argues they are part of the cycle of violence. She argues that this is a false narrative of war, disconnecting violence and complicity from sacrifice. In this way, Lee illustrates

women's intimate participation in war, not only from their physical acts of supporting war, but their very faith in their own spiritual consecration of sacrifice:

Thus love, the love of self-effacing noble mothers, of tender and reserved sisters, that wonderful passion where sex is sublimated into sexlessness, has, like indignation and pity, kept Satan's ballet going with its steady, subdued voice, so exquisitely in tune, of such unearthly purity of timbre. Oh, more than by nursing the wounded, manufacturing surgical appliances and turning out and filling shells which scatter entrails and whole villages, have the women of all belligerent countries participated by their love, their love delusion, in the slaughter and ruin and hatred of these war-years!

(156)

Their spiritual participation—their love delusion—is defined by their elevation of sacrifice, their surrender of men to defend them. It is their purity and their moral beauty that has kept the war going; it is, in part, by being the angel as well as the war worker that they have perpetuated war.

Lee rejects patriotism as a virtue and she further criticizes self-sacrifice as redemptive; this is her second ethical heresy. As we saw in chapter three, the sacredness of the war exchange includes soldiers laying down their lives in order to redeem the motherland. While Sackville aligns redemption with the maternal pacifist, Lee interrogates whether self-sacrifice can have any redemptive function within the domain of war. She argues that self-sacrifice for the nation is framed within a religious discourse, so that questioning the function or aims of that sacrifice is on par with sacrilege: "There is, more potent still, that strange human instinct of meeting any inexorable demand for

sacrifice—sacrifice of self, of beloved ones, sacrifice no less of all civilized man’s repugnances—with a conviction of that sacrifice being not necessary only, but meritorious; not merely legitimate, but holy; loss, sorrow, and self-defilement being compensated by religious exaltation” (xxv). The role of sacrifice during war shifts from the language of utility to the language of religion. Self-sacrifice is a central part of the sacred narrative of wartime.

Traditionally, sacrifice is considered to be a renunciation of self—an act of selflessness. By contrast, Lee asserts that self-sacrifice is, in fact, an act of self-interest within the self-nation construction. In order to explain this blasphemous assertion, Lee returns to her discussion of the construction of the self. She explains that the ego contains an inner world and an external shell that encloses everything people consider theirs. Lee imagines this as “concentric circles of interests and possessions” that are always shifting with the self (193). Rather than interpreting a great distinction between selfishness and selflessness, she argues that “it is impossible to say where love of self ends and love of others begins” (195). She identifies the maternal as the starting point of ethics and altruism, yet she contends that rather than an integration of others, it is an expansion of the self: “moralists have always told us ... that altruism begins with maternal instincts and proceeds, leaving the self ever further behind, to the family, tribe, country, and finally to mankind at large. It would be more correct to say that love of child, family, tribe, country, and mankind at large, are successive expansions of Egoism” (195). Whereas the maternal is often identified as a moral center, Lee argues it is precisely because the child is the mother’s that the mother cares for the child; she contends this possessive love—so like patriotism—is an expansion of the self, not a renunciation of it.

To further explain how self-sacrifice can be motivated by the self, Lee argues the self expands outward to envelope that which it desires or loves possessively, and that all sacrifice is motivated by this form of love:

Thus our individual self of feeling becomes our centre of all things, from which we measure all distance and direction.... From it, and it alone, guided but not impelled by reason, go forth our strivings and actions; and in this wider self, emanating from our small feeling ego, resides whatever creature or cause or standard we love or hate sufficiently for us to sacrifice to it other portions of our wishes and habits; all the things for which men have laid down their life and women given up their men. (153)

Here, Lee explains that sacrifice is split within the self, as one part of the self sacrifices for another part of the self. She frames this discussion of sacrifice within gender ideology and war: men defend their country and women relinquish their protection to the state.

Even though individuals appear to elect self-sacrifice as a personal choice, Lee argues that their choices are always narrowed within the scope of ideology. Additionally, acts of self-sacrifice are often impulsive and incur future debts: “The cruelest sacrifices take a few minutes for their decision, and a lifetime for their endurance” (196). In order to illustrate this point, Lee links the sacrifices demanded by the discourses of war and marriage. She compares the decisions of a soldier and wife, arguing that both decisions are not given freely from the self, but are often contextualized by the ideological pressures of gender:

When a man enlists or a woman marries “in compliance with her parents’ wish,” the convenience and security, the orderly functioning of society,

exact that promises should be carried out, decisions abided by, quite irrespective of the promise having been given, the decision taken, in ignorant or passionate haste, and carried out in years of disillusion and regret. (197)

Lee situates self-sacrifices within the society that demands those sacrifices. Private choices are shaped by public discourses: “Before it can be made, self-sacrifice has always, and in direct or subtler manner, been suggested, asked for, claimed” (198). In this way, agency is not freely given of the self, but conditioned by a discourse that frames the subject in relation to the private sphere of the family and the public sphere of the state. Lee indicates that what motivates both behaviors is a form of possessive love that is reinforced by society and that, I would argue, is guided by the gender roles of the separate spheres.

Lee posits that in order to make that social and ideological context visible, individuals must question the motivation and function of sacrifice. A primary question for Lee is what if the sacrifice is based on a faulty premise? She provides an example from a nun who daily makes her “Reparation” through pain in order to practice what Lee calls “Redemption through Perpetual Adoration” (197-98):

suppose all this nun’s sacrifice is founded upon a misconception, on stupid rites of primitive magic misinterpreted by later though scarcely less ignorant ages; suppose there is no eternal punishment whence to release souls, no original or mortal sin calling for vicarious redemption, no life save the earthly one which this woman might have spent bringing up

children, doing useful work, or merely moving freely and happily, erect, warm, clean, and without sores? (198)

Lee urges her audience to question the ideology that propels that act. The sacrifice occurs within a social context that demands that sacrifice; as such, these are not freely given, but responding to a call: “And they exist there because they have been *put there* by tradition, education, example, in short by other men” (199).

By examining the call for sacrifice rather than the answer, Lee illustrates that sacrifice tends to be demanded by others, synthesizing the rhetoric of gender and religion. Under the constraints of war, the soldier believes he makes a sacrifice for his country out of his own volition, but Lee argues this is not freedom of choice, but rather a narrowing of options. When a soldier is raised to elevate duty or else be called a “coward and a shirker,” Lee asks, is he “a free agent” and “is sacrifice of self not suspiciously like sacrifice by others...?” (199). In utilizing a rhetoric of masculinity, Lee highlights how gender shapes agency within the sacred narrative of war; furthermore, the contrast between “sacrifice of self” and “sacrifice by others” gets at the root of Lee’s critique. There are always others who demand the sacrifice and Lee finds this ethically troubling: “*a sacrifice made is a sacrifice accepted, and nine times out of ten demanded, exacted, by other persons. Hence not a matter of unsullied generosity. A person who accepts self-sacrifice from others is, as we all admit, a poor creature, a pauper, a parasite; and one exacting it, is a tyrant*” (200). Sacrifices emerge from cultural norms related to gender that demand them on behalf of the nation-state. Lee radically suggests that those who rely on the sacrifice of others—who accept or demand those sacrifices—are parasitic or tyrannical.

Lee depicts an inherent link between the patriotic possession of one's country and the demand of self-sacrifice in order to protect that nation. She explains that self-sacrifice is linked to religious and political traditions in which the innocent few are sacrificed in order to compensate for the errors of the many. The narrative of redemption by sacrifice results from collective sins: "A debt has been incurred to other men ... it is paid by someone else, an unwilling or willing victim, often an innocent one, occasionally a hero or a martyr.... Jesus must expiate upon the cross" (205). While Christ is an image of redemption, Lee argues he is also an image of collective sin, and she focuses on the impetus for his crucifixion: "the vicarious sacrifice of a Son of God ... belongs to the same system of utilities as the High Priest's council that a man should die for the people. Indeed it is but another form of the loading of the community's sins on to a he-goat and driving the creature into the wilderness" (202).¹¹ By shifting the gaze away from Christ to the masses, Lee depicts the sacrificial relationship as a parasitical one, since the "willingness to be sacrificed" is more fundamentally "an abundant reserve ... against all emergencies": "If you wish to escape scot free yourselves, see to having a sufficiency of sacrificial victims to offer up in your stead, rams-in-the-thicket, scape-goats ... but best of all, plenty of heroic and saintly men and women fattened with praise for martyrdom" (203). Lee characterizes the call for redemption by the masses as parasitical and those who answer that call as "fattened with the praise for martyrdom." But she goes further

¹¹ Pulham argues that the Christ imagery is transferred from the soldier to the pacifist in Lee's critique: "While seemingly representing the fragmentation of nations and the agony of their troops, *The Ballet* also quietly draws attention to the figuratively sacrificial body of the pacifist who, in wartime, inhabits the role of the martyred Christ. In doing so, it suggests that the pacifist, outcast and disowned, is an abject figure" (57-58). I would argue, however, that Lee rejects Christ imagery as a source of peace because she is subverting self-sacrifice as a desirable civic virtue.

and declares that their sacrifices are neither virtuous nor redemptive; they are wasted: “What! All those youths mown down to no purpose? All those widows’ and mothers’ souls bled to no profit? *Why not?*” (190-91). In other words, it is the faith in sacrifice’s redemptive quality—the framework of war—that perpetuates the system of war and the continual call for sacrifice.

If heroic sacrifice can be redeemed, then war might not be a waste, but Lee contends that this is a form of denial, and she rejects self-sacrifice as a corrupt social virtue. Lee analyzes the rhetorical devices people use in order to keep their faith in war stable:

All the Belligerents are saying (August, 1918), or what is more important, *feeling*, that *we must see to it that these men shall not have died in vain*.

The attitude is masked and tricked out with all manner of catchwords (“last war! last shilling! last man! lasting peace!”) but what really matters is the attitude itself, which is that of *refusing to accept the fact of loss and waste*. And so the last remaining sons, brothers, husbands, are sent into the gulf to overtake the other ones.... (190)

This sacred narrative is, she contends, “a *vital lie* or life-preserving *mirage*” (190), because it frames the sacrifices of war within a narrative of redemption. But it functions as a refusal “to accept the fact of loss and waste” and she argues this refusal keeps the cycle of war going:

For the instinctive aversion, the almost bodily recoil, felt by most persons against admitting to themselves that this war’s monstrous mass of suffering can be useless, leads both to the war’s justification by all manner

of aims and ideals, and also to the war's actual prolonging by the determination not to end it without such victory as will bring permanent future security. (189-90)

The denial of loss and waste creates a visceral reaction that reinforces the need to prove one's faith in the war as valuable. As throughout her discussion, this self-deception has an emotional and psychological function in which the "hope that suffering brings forth good is the consolation, the corroboration of the sufferer, keeping him from despair, enabling him to put out fresh doses of endurance" (190). This reinforcement of faith through continued suffering is an "[exploitation of] emotional belief" in order to "[check] rebellion against an otherwise distressing order of the Universe, or constitution of Society" (190). The sacred narrative operates on the assumption that present suffering—of lives, sons, and mothers—leads to future reward, but Lee argues this is a form of self-deception; this is something not admitted to the self, for to admit that the war is a waste and a loss would be to stop participating in war. This would require a different kind of grief, a grief that admits waste, loss, and complicity.

While Lee admits that "[independent] thought is silenced" during war, she urges her audience to engage in critical questioning (xxxviii). She charges those who would sacrifice themselves to examine if their virtue could be put to better use: "But having seen this war, I would turn to those strong and generous enough for voluntary sacrifice, exhorting them not to waste their virtue, their sorely-needed generosity and endurance, from any such shyness or humility as shrinks from scrutinizing a duty before answering its call, which is often the call of other persons who happen not to be called upon themselves" (207). If people stopped and questioned the demands of war—killing and

dying—there might not be any more use for it, and it might not be considered “the most honourable of all trades” (208). If there does arise a need for “exacting self-sacrifice,” it should be a source of shame as an “ugly necessity” and a result of “our individual or collective ... shortcomings” (208-9). She balks at the incongruity between British rules of decorum and the complete acceptance of sacrifice as honorable: “We apologize for upsetting a cup of coffee on our host’s carpet; but we do not feel humiliated ... that the blood of martyrdom should be poured out for our advantage and at our bidding. Instead of diminution in our own esteem, we feel that this sacrifice brought by others has added a cubit to our stature” (209). Thus, Lee sees sacrifice as a shameful act, ransoming a few in order to compensate for the many.

What makes Lee’s discussion of self-sacrifice a point of comparison and contrast to the previous writers of this study is that for many war writers, self-sacrifice remains a given virtue. For Schreiner, it is a painful necessity on behalf of the progress of civilization and emancipation. For the war poets, self-sacrifice of soldiers is noble, but misplaced. But there is really no question that self-sacrifice is still a personal and civic virtue, supported by the Christian assertion that there is nothing greater than laying down one’s life for a friend. In contrast, Lee argues that sacrificing the self for the nation-state is a wasteful act; moreover, she argues that war will continue as long as society continues to uphold the rhetoric of redemptive sacrifice.

Lee’s Reconfiguration of Altruism

In her critique of the sacred narrative of war, Lee offers an alternative definition of altruism, intervening in the discourse of redemptive self-sacrifice. Lee insists that the

self needs the balance of the Other. The Other not only includes those deemed “the enemy,” but also alternate interpretations and an openness to the complexity of reality, an acceptance of even that which we cannot comprehend. This, she argues, is the road to peace. Her reconfiguration of altruism can be compared in nascent form to Butler’s call for precarity in her discussion of sovereignty and vulnerability. In *Frames of War*, Butler advocates for an acceptance that “our very survival depends not on the policing of a boundary—the strategy of a certain sovereign in relation to its territory—but on recognizing how we are bound up with others” (52). Butler argues that the post-9/11 frame of war relies on denying interdependency through self-protection at all costs. She argues for precariousness, the admittance of interdependency. Similarly, Lee argues that the narratives of patriotism and self-sacrifice police the boundary of the nation as a representation of the self. In order to counter this, she argues for a reconfiguration of altruism which admits both self and other. Rather than an altruism “expressed in self-sacrifice,” Lee advocates for “a different kind of altruism which is recognition of the other (for *alter* is Latin for *other*), sides, aspects, possibilities and requirements of things and people” (xlvii). As Lee argues, “we must re-admit that which our war-actions and war-passions have excluded” (xlvi). War discourse creates a hyper-egoism which extends identity to *my* nation; this then projects violence onto the other, excluding the good qualities of my “enemies” and our common humanity. As Colby explains, “Rather than denying the centrality of the ego, [Lee] urges an extension of one’s self into the selves of others, an act of empathy similar to the experiences of art in her aesthetics” (302).¹² Lee

¹² Lee is known for her work on psychological aesthetics and for introducing the term “empathy” into English aesthetic discourse in 1912 (Burdett, “Is Empathy the End of Sentimentality?” 260). For more on Lee’s aesthetic approach to empathy, see Zorn; Harris; Plain; Beer; and especially Burdett.

argues that while self-sacrifice may appear to be an unselfish act on behalf of the other, it is an extension of the self-interests and possessions (in war, an extension of patriotism). This new altruism is a “respect for the other rather than renunciation of the self” (xlix).

A more traditional version interprets altruism as a sacrifice of self for the other, as Olive Schreiner advocates. Lee argues that this construct of self-sacrifice appears as an unselfish elective choice made by the individual for the other: his/her nation. Within the war discourse, self-sacrifice emerges from the self to satisfy an internalized and ideological sense of duty to nation, which she argues is a larger sense of self (*my nation*). This excludes other perspectives, other questions, other duties; it is this excluded other that Lee hopes to reclaim in her redefinition of altruism, to include “*other people, other places, other moments, other qualities, other relations, other everything and anything*” (211). Lee calls for a redefinition of altruism that moves away from the definition of “the sacrifice of our own wishes (which oftenest sacrifice our less dominant to our more dominant one among themselves) for the alleged benefit of an *alter*” to a definition “which takes into consideration the nature, apparent or conceivable, of that *alter*, and the feelings he is likely to have as well as, and perhaps in opposition to, the feelings we have about him” (300). To sacrifice the self is to project an assumed need onto an other, but Lee argues that this is an imposition. Lee explains that this recognition considers the Other “in its own terms” and “[thinks] of others as equally real with ourselves” (212). This call envisions the other as its own subject, and it would be, in Butler’s terms, to interrogate what has been excluded from the frame of war.

Lee contends that the renunciation of self is an impossibility because “Egoism, whatever we may say to the contrary, is the first rule in life” (240). According to Lee,

authentic altruism acts as a “corrective” to the egoism of patriotism, nationalism, and the demands for self-sacrifice. The corrective to “the sacred sense of self” is acknowledging the Other. The only way to see the other is to “interrupt” one’s own self-interests and possessions in order to “[take] an interest in *otherness* for its own sake; contemplating it, appreciating it, and even, as we *love* countries which are not ours because we recognize their lovable qualities, taking to *love* where there can be no question of *mine* or *thine*, but merely of the suitability of its loveableness to our capacity for love” (241). This is a recognition of otherness separate from possessive self-identification. Lee constructs an ethics that is neither selfishness nor self-abnegation, but rather a balance between self and other.

Lee constructs war experience as a spiritual participation that relies on nationalism, religious imagery, and gender ideology. In defining war experience this way, she disrupts the separate spheres division between home front and battlefield, but she also demonstrates how the separate spheres gender ideology was appropriated into war ideology, as gender delineated different forms of sacrifice. Lee calls these gender roles into question, and I have worked to demonstrate how Lee’s analysis resonates with feminist politics. But unlike other writers in this project thus far, Lee does not identify explicitly as a feminist, nor does she draw on maternal politics in order to argue for peace. Rather, she is critical of the maternal as an essentialist image of altruism. However, Lee’s text offers a radical critique of gender roles for two central reasons. First, she illustrates how gender ideology is complicit in the sacred narrative of war. Second, she does not occupy traditionally feminine gender roles in order to make her dissent. In fact, Lee’s dissent refuses to rely on gender in order to make her case rhetorically—as

Sackville does from the position of the mother or as Vera Brittain will as a VAD in *Testament of Youth*. This granted Lee less authority to be heard in a discourse that defined women's roles as wives and mothers. Within the framework of war, she refuses the feminine subject position. She also refuses to offer consolation or redeem soldiers' sacrifices. In fact, she declares with radical heretical language that the soldiers' sacrifices were wasted, that the society that demands them are parasites and tyrants, and that self-sacrifice is a selfish virtue.

And yet, why would she write this deeply blasphemous text? Furthermore, after receiving negative reviews, why would she continue to work on it, revise it, and expand it? In the introduction to *Satan the Waster*, Lee discusses the purpose of her text by using a garden metaphor, referring to her pacifist dissent as a bitter medicinal herb. She agrees that her text is "thoroughly unattractive": "this crop of thoughts for which war's ravages have made room, and which war's abominations have so richly manured, is rank and harsh, sometimes nettle-stinging to the touch.... But such thoughts root deep in the *bona fide* soil, mud or shale, of life. The very bitterness of them suggests their possessing medicinal virtues" (xi). This bitter, ugly text emerges because the garden has been "devastated" by war (298). This "unexpected crop of plants" is "unlovely, harsh to the touch ... stinging, and nearly always rank and bitter" (298). It is not meant to please or console: "Like such medicinal herbs, my war-thoughts are not intended for pot-pourri pots or lavender-bags. And the decoction thereof once made, it was more useful and also seemlier not to disguise their quality with sugary moralities still less dilute it with one's tears" (298). She cannot offer the feminine virtues of moral beauty or mourning. Even to herself, she finds them ugly and distasteful: "This refusal may cause both play and notes

to be treated as immoral, cynical, heartless, and what is more to the point, depressing. There is no doubt it makes them, even to my own taste, extraordinarily unattractive” (298). Lee uses the language and imagery of moral beauty, a garden, and healing to depict her writing; put together, these images bear a striking resemblance to traditional femininity. As Ruskin asserts of women:

[I]t is you only who can feel the depths of pain, and conceive the way of its healing. Instead of trying to do this, you turn away from it; you shut yourselves within your park walls and garden gates; and you are content to know that there is beyond them a whole world in wilderness—a world of secrets which you dare not penetrate; and of suffering which you dare not conceive. (171)

The world is no longer a walled-in garden park, but is devastated and war-torn. The only plant she can offer is a bitter medicinal herb. While Lee is not manifesting a traditionally feminine gender role in her dissent, she does reconfigure the gendered role of healer, not through consolation, but through a necessary and painful tonic.

Her dissent attempts to unsettle the sacred narratives—the vital lies—which she depicts as being more beautiful than her own ugly truths about war; but she is compelled to keep offering them, because the current war only enables future wars by continuing to maintain faith in patriotic and redemptive sacrifice. Lee explains that *Satan* “[displays] and [analyzes] the mental and moral habits resulting from being in” the war, which, she argues, “[prevent] our being out of war” (xliii). Lee contends that the League of Nations is merely “an arsenal, a headquarters, for future wars” (xliv), because “the passions and

delusions of war” go “half unnoticed, and wholly unchecked,” and thus, Lee predicts the spirit of war will be victorious:

[T]he failure to recognize that the settlement we have just been celebrating makes peace a mockery in the present and an impossibility in the future, is, no less than the actual terms enforced on the vanquished, a proof of the continuance of war’s passions and delusions, an unheeded sign that the real victory achieved has been of the spirit of war over the spirit of peace.
(xliii)

By offering her dissent, she hopes to initiate restoration in the garden: “Such war-thoughts may perhaps teach us to keep our peace-gardens sweet with less waste for self and others. They may, I cannot but hope, provide us with hardier stocks whereon to graft the over-costly, the artificial and unstable, flowers and fruits of such happiness and hope as we have hitherto enjoyed” (xii).

A feminist analysis of Lee’s dissent yields a site of gender ambiguity. On the one hand, she radically refuses traditional gender roles and feminine self-sacrifice, which consecrate the mother and the soldier as holy. But on the other hand, Lee’s text is a repeated intervention to initiate authentic healing during and after war. Society, she argues, is in denial of the realities of war. This denial does not enable true healing to take place. The garden has been wrecked by war, yet society clings to the ruins as holy and redeeming. Ultimately, Lee’s radical dissent lays bare the sacred narrative of the Great War, which elevates redemptive sacrifice by both sexes on behalf of the nation-state.

Satan the Waster initiated Lee’s loss of influence and ultimate obscurity. As Pulham asserts: “As the war progressed, many of the journals to which she had regularly

contributed refused to publish her work: in England, only three periodicals continued to run her political articles” (55). As Lee wrote in her preface to the 1930 edition of *Satan the Waster*, “So with the generous exception of Mr. Bernard Shaw, *Satan the Waster* was boycotted by reviewers; my own friends turned away from it in silence; and I myself felt rather ashamed of having written it.” Surely, this is not difficult to understand; she completely dismantles the long-cherished virtues of society. And while Beer argues that *Satan* as a project is “chilling and admirable” (124), she ultimately finds it to be a failed experiment: “The desolate aloofness of its insight makes it almost unreadable. So too does its length: the way each sentence unfurls in an effort to track the processes of the thought with which it was written, the traps its syntax lays for the writer” (128).¹³

While *Satan* is a difficult text, I would argue it offers valuable insights into the discourse of World War I. Lee offers an alternate view of war rhetoric, as she explicitly constructs her authority to speak on the experience of not being in the war. This offers an interesting contrast and challenge to our current scholarship, which tends to privilege insider voices. Additionally, in contrast to pacifists like Schreiner and Sackville, Lee refuses explicit feminine subject positions. She refuses to mourn, memorialize, or redeem their sacrifices. At every level, she repudiates the gendered civic duties in wartime and advocates an outsider’s position. This echoes some of the strategies of Egerton, who similarly attacks and rejects the heart of Victorian moral values.

¹³ Colby also discusses the difficulty of Lee’s antiwar text: “To the modern-day reader removed by nearly a century from the events of which Vernon Lee was writing, and toughened by decades of new revolutions, wars, and futile peacemaking, *Satan the Waster* is a pompous, bombastic exercise in futility. It displays her every fault—wordiness, shrillness, illogical thinking. Even the high-mindedness of her appeal for altruism, her idealistic vision of a democratic socialist society and world peace, is undermined by the demands she makes on her reader’s patience and concentration. Yet one must admire the passion, conviction, and imagination she brought to the work” (305).

But Lee also signals an important departure in this project that will shape my reading of Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf in the coming chapters. When she rejects patriotism and sacrifice as the sacred virtues of war, she complicates self-sacrifice as an ethical virtue. Not only does this have heretical implications for war ideology, but it is also suggestive for gender ideology and feminists' negotiations with them both. Self-sacrifice—a denial of self—has long been a feminine obligation and virtue best imagined in the mother. Feminists like Schreiner and Sackville appropriate this gender discourse in service to their political aims of gender equality and pacifism. While the separate spheres supposedly protected mothers from the sullyng influence of politics, Schreiner would urge them to extend their maternal altruism globally. Additionally, her writing is teeming with self-sacrificial imagery, suffering and sacrificing in the present in order to secure the progress and liberation of the future. The future redeems those sacrifices. Lee stands in contrast to this—complicating the elevation of self-sacrifice as a virtue, illustrating that it more closely resembles a projection of the self onto the other. One of the implications here is that a politics or ethics that elevates self-sacrifice is complicit in the very structures it seeks to redeem. As we will see in chapter five, Brittain carries Schreiner and Sackville forward by constructing a feminist pacifism that redeems the soldiers' sacrifices from waste through the work of the survivors in the postwar period.

This line of questioning altruism begins in this project with Egerton, who utilizes the maternal as her anchoring imagery in order to encourage women to find themselves. The maternal is less suggestive of self-sacrifice—though Egerton does elevate the unselfish nature of the maternal as something divine—than it is a form of coming to self in opposition to patriarchal culture. Lee, also working as an outsider, questions the

maternal. She emphasizes an altruism that challenges the rhetoric of redemptive self-sacrifice—a rhetoric associated with both gender roles—and reconfigures altruism to allow for a balance between self and other. This will eventually lead to Woolf, who critiques self-sacrifice as a patriarchal construct and offers a similar alternate ethics in her assertion that women need “a mind and will of their own.” Furthermore, Lee’s explicit valuing of the outsider’s position, her rejection of patriotism and commitment to internationalism, anticipates Woolf’s feminist pacifism in *Three Guineas*. Echoes of Lee emerge when Woolf writes, “For,’ the outsider will say, ‘in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” (129). Woolf’s pacifist arguments find their nascent form in Lee’s *Satan the Waster*.¹⁴ In a sense, *Satan the Waster* functions as a valuable failure, enabling Woolf to succeed where Lee fails.

¹⁴ For other studies connecting Lee and Woolf, see Harris; Beer 128; Plain 11-13; Pulham 54-55; Zorn 75; and Dennis Denisoff.

Chapter 5: Vera Brittain's *Honourable Estate*: Reconsidering the Legacies of Feminism and War

“Have you seen the locusts how they cross a stream? First one comes down to the water-edge, and it is swept away, and then another comes and then another, and then another, and at last with their bodies piled up a bridge is built and the rest pass over.”

She said, “And, of those that come first, some are swept away, and are heard of no more; their bodies do not even build a bridge?”

“And are swept away, and are heard of no more—and what of that?” he said.

“And what of that—” she said.

“They make a track to the water’s edge.”

—Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* (20)

And if we went further and admitted an equal expression of women’s point of view fully and ungrudgingly into public affairs, it is possible that the last shred of militarism would disappear altogether. The instinct of the State would then be against it.

—Margaret Sackville, “Women and War” (453)

The vantage point of the postwar period offered the opportunity to reflect on the experiences of war, the politics of international conflict, and for many writers, the changes in gender attitudes. The discourse of war relied upon the separate spheres in a variety of ways, but the boundaries between the public and the private were ultimately insufficient to delineate stable gender roles, as women moved into work roles typically held by men. As Austin Harrison wrote in an article on anti-feminism in 1924, “The war was certainly a man’s affair, made by man, fought by man, and won by man. But if women had not made munitions we should have lost the war” (81). When women were granted the right to vote in 1918, it was seen as a reward for their sacrifices during the war. In Vera Brittain’s postwar novel *Honourable Estate* (1936), the main character Ruth reflects on the gender changes in postwar London: “For women especially, the world had moved swiftly after half a century of defeated endeavour. No longer voteless and

politically powerless, they were already at Westminster, pushing measures through the House of Commons which would have provoked mirth and derision in pre-war Parliaments” (450). Postwar culture reflected changes in education, politics, and a general loosening of decorum around sex and gender. Within the women’s movement, debates arose over why these changes in gender occurred—would women have won the vote without the war?

Ruth listens to a debate on this very question. One perspective is that the war more fully enabled changes in gender: “The suffragists were too narrow—especially the militants. They only saw the women’s movement as a political revolution, whereas it was even more social and moral—to say nothing of economic, which it’s hardly become even yet. The War showed what women could do and it also set them free” (451). From this perspective, the war was an opportunity for women to break gender barriers and prove themselves. But another perspective represents the argument that those changes were inevitable because of the work of the suffrage movement: “I know the War hastened things; these changes might have taken another twenty or thirty years without it. But you must admit that the War wouldn’t have caused them by itself if the suffrage movement hadn’t prepared the ground first” (451). Ruth herself reflects: “As Olive Schreiner had once prophesied, there was no closed door which they did not intend to force open, and no fruit in the garden of knowledge which it was not their determination to eat” (450). Brittain references Schreiner’s appeal to the women’s movement in *Woman and Labour* to claim equality in all the professions. She identifies this prophecy within a longer trajectory and argues that the war acted as a hastening catalyst for such progress. In both *Honourable Estate* and her famous war memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933), Brittain

responds to this debate by charting how the suffrage movement and the war made a break with the past and established new possibilities for women. But she also argues that the legacies of feminism and war are bound together.

While Brittain is a diverse writer, she is best known for *Testament of Youth*, which contributed to a popular genre of war memoirs that emerged in the 1920s and 30s. Brittain offered, by way of contrast to many soldier memoirs, the war from a woman's perspective: "As an acute feminist observer, Brittain realized that she could produce a war book that would be substantially different from those that were receiving attention in the late 1920s, because even the best of them omitted any account of the experience of women" (Gorham 224). *Testament of Youth* explores Brittain's work as a VAD during the war and the loss of the four men closest to her, including her fiancé Roland Leighton and her brother Edward. She describes her postwar grief and eventual renewal through her work and marriage.

A pressing question in postwar writing is how to remember the war. While many war memorials reinforced the traditional rhetoric of war—patriotism, sacrifice, and honor—many of the war novels and memoirs of the late 1920s and early 1930s challenged this view, replacing it with the disillusionment more commonly associated with modernism: "The new war books helped radically reshape the public's concept of war as a futile slaughter and a monstrous injustice.... The authors, many of whom had served as soldiers and nurses, contradicted patriotic propaganda and exposed the public to the gruesome details of trench warfare and the mortal consequences of military blunders" (Robb 220). Much of this disillusioned writing challenges the Victorian commitment to

progress. Images of apocalypses, wastelands, and disorder characterized much postwar writing.

Brittain negotiates this genre in complex ways, as she creates a narrative of war that confirms disillusionment while at the same time maintaining a faith in progress. A crux within both *Testament of Youth* and *Honourable Estate* is how the men Brittain loved and lost could be honoured as the heroes she believed they were. Consistently her narrators and characters ask, “What did they die for?” and Brittain goes to great lengths to show the waste of war and the hollowness of victory in the postwar period; however, it is unacceptable to her that those she loved died in vain. Both books voice her dissent and disillusionment in the war, but she remains committed to finding some form of redemption for the soldiers’ sacrifices, a redemption linked to the narratives of Victorian progress.

To some critics, Brittain’s negotiation of disillusionment and progress appears to reinforce traditional gender roles and patriotism. Claire M. Tylee argues that Brittain’s appropriation of the Lost Generation trope undercuts her feminist pacifist argument, because “[a]lthough war is wasteful of youth and happiness, men die in war to save their womenfolk. The myth of the Lost Generation re-asserts those gender values, binding masculinity to heroism in battle, and femininity to dependent helplessness” (222). Similarly, Maroula Joannou argues that “Brittain clung to an essentially romantic concept of war as the locus of heroic acts” (61), which Joannou associates with the middle and upper classes. Furthermore, echoing third-wave feminist critiques, Joannou argues that Brittain’s lack of class consciousness and her willingness to define her war experience as

representative for all women leads her to conclude that *Testament of Youth* “can no longer be accepted as a feminist text” (48).¹

While Tylee and Joannou are fair in asserting that Brittain reinforces “the rhetoric of heroism,” and I do agree that Brittain’s feminism glosses over class and other forms of difference, I would argue they neglect to interrogate Brittain’s purpose for appropriating the dominant discourse. As I will make clear in this chapter, Brittain invokes the ideals of war in order to reform them. Just as Sackville attempts to wrestle the maternal away from the service of war, Brittain attempts to reconfigure the rhetoric of heroism for pacifism. By constructing her authority to speak as an insider to both gendered sites of war—the home front and the battle field—Brittain disrupts the gender binary that Tylee argues she reinforces, as Brittain embodies a female heroism.² These scholars rightly point to Brittain’s appropriation, but they neglect to interrogate its purpose.

Brittain’s contradictory impulse can be further clarified by considering her relationship to Schreiner. While critics have commented on how Schreiner influenced Brittain’s ideas about feminism and pacifism, they have neglected the degree to which

¹ Joannou explains, “I shall also argue that *Testament of Youth* effaces other versions of war experience which may contest its own representations.... By illustrating how flawed *Testament of Youth* is in all respects I have outlined, I shall argue that it can no longer be accepted as a feminist text” (48). Bennett similarly critiques Brittain’s class obliviousness.

² I use the term “insider” here to mean that Brittain explicitly identifies her experiences in the war as war experiences, and she draws on the dominant discourse of war—patriotism, sacrifice, courage, and heroism—in order to make her argument for feminist pacifism. This will be contrasted with Woolf, who identifies herself as an outsider to war. Certainly, one might discuss Brittain as an outsider given her own feelings of alienation within postwar society—as she does when she returns to Oxford—and given that she was an outspoken pacifist in a politically hostile climate during the 1930s. See in particular, Rebecca Wisor, who argues Brittain and Woolf have a “dual marginalization ... as pacifist women” (142). While I agree with Wisor, I focus on how Brittain positions herself rhetorically as an insider, and I agree more with Albrinck’s analysis of Brittain (279).

Schreiner's imagery and thinking played a role in Brittain's interpretations of the war.³ Schreiner's imagery and language abound in Brittain's works, but it is Schreiner's longer view of political movements that particularly shapes how Brittain writes about war and gender. Like many other pacifist writers, including Lee, Brittain declares war a waste, and she draws explicitly on the Lost Generation myth that the best and brightest were led to the slaughter, thereby depleting British civilization and threatening it with degeneration. But rather than reject progress or redemptive sacrifice entirely like Lee, Brittain locates her feminism and pacifism within the framework of Schreiner's vision of political movements as a series of failures. She elevates sacrifice and failure as a valuable part of progress. In doing so, Brittain identifies the women's movement and the Great War as part of that vision—the first locusts that build the bridge to freedom and equality. Brittain envisions herself and her generation of war survivors as the first to cross that bridge. While Schreiner's writing looks forward to a time in which women are able to take their rightful place as equals to men in the public sphere, Brittain identifies that time as the present. In doing so, Brittain envisions herself as Schreiner's successor. In both *Testament of Youth* and *Honourable Estate*, Brittain identifies the sacrifices made by soldiers in war and feminists during the suffrage campaign. Both contribute to progress, but in order to make this case, Brittain must redeem the soldiers' sacrifices from the wastes of war. She utilizes Schreiner's valuable failure in order to do this.

By returning to Schreiner's idea of the valuable failure, we might illuminate an alternate reading in which the heroism of war is a failure, but not a waste. As I discuss in

³ For more on the relationship between Schreiner and Brittain, see Alan Bishop, who discusses the influence of *African Farm* on Brittain's relationship with Roland Leighton; Tylee, who makes a similar connection between Brittain and Lyndall; Parkins 106-7; and Gorham 85-95.

chapter one, Schreiner's concept of a *valuable failure* accounts for the trajectory of political movements toward freedom and equality, reinterpreting sacrifice and failure as a necessary part of future progress. In this way, a failing act might appear to be simply a loss or waste, but Schreiner claims it as necessary and valuable for future progress. In tracing Brittain's pacifism, scholars have discussed how her ideas evolve during World War I and II. In her survey of Brittain's feminism and pacifism, Muriel Mellown argues that during the 1920s, "Brittain brought feminism and pacifism together as different but related aspects of the same struggle against tyranny and oppression In her own writing, she supported both causes simultaneously" (2). Mellown argues that Brittain presents these as essentially separate albeit related political goals, but it is not until Brittain's later stages of feminism and pacifism during the 1940s that Mellown sees them as linked (5). I would argue that Brittain links feminism and pacifism earlier and more explicitly than Mellown grants. When we examine *Testament of Youth* and *Honourable Estate* through the lens of Schreiner's valuable failure, a different politics emerges: one in which the women's movement and the Great War are inherently linked as part of the movement toward progress. In both texts, Brittain links the sacrifices of war with the sacrifices of the women's movement and relocates redemption within the survivors of war. Only the survivor can redeem the soldiers' sacrifices through reconstructing a free and peaceful world. This reforming vision is initiated in *Testament of Youth* and further developed in *Honourable Estate*. While Brittain echoes Lee in arguing that all war is a waste, she views such waste in terms of Schreiner's valuable failure, adding an additional component of redemption so that those who follow—the survivors—are given the opportunity not just to see these sacrifices and failures as valuable, but as redemptive.

The Survivor's Role—Testament of Youth

Scholarship on *Testament of Youth* largely investigates the relationship between biography and memoir. While critics have persuasively shown that Brittain tweaked her biography to fit her message in *Testament of Youth*, they have not always returned to the message of *Testament of Youth* to interrogate why or to what effect.⁴ While the differences between how Brittain presents herself in different documents is compelling, I am more interested in how Brittain constructs her memoir as a feminist pacifist argument.⁵ *Testament of Youth* has a couple of complementary purposes. First, Brittain wanted her book to memorialize the lives that were lost—those of her brother, fiancé, and two friends. Second, this memorialization would in turn form the basis for her politics in *Testament of Youth*: feminism and pacifism.⁶ Brittain's memoir is meant to represent a larger narrative, linking her private life with broader national concerns. She gestures toward this goal when she writes in the foreword that her “endeavor” is “to put the life of an ordinary individual into its niche in contemporary history,” and “thus illustrate the influence of world-wide events and movements upon the personal destinies of men and women” (xxvi). By situating her private life within a broader national and political framework, Brittain writes against the separate spheres division.

Writing against the separate spheres in the postwar world was an important part of Brittain's autobiographical project. As Deborah Gorman writes, “Dominant Victorian and Edwardian assumptions about biography and autobiography sanctioned the telling of life

⁴ For scholarship on Brittain's life, see especially Deborah Gorham's *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*. Gorham discusses the differences between Brittain's diaries and her memoir, noting how Brittain tends to present her relationship to her mother as more critical than her diaries suggest (4). See also Amossy.

⁵ For more on Brittain's work with the memoir genre, see Peterson; Schwarz.

⁶ For an overview of the development of Brittain's feminism and pacifism, see especially Mellown's articles and also Gorham.

stories only in the case of individuals who were widely recognized as having contributed to public life. Brittain was not such a person, not an individual who ‘ought’ to have been writing an autobiography” (2). Writing her private experiences into public discourse reflects Brittain’s resistance to the separate spheres ideology, and while she depicts this ideology as having been broken by the war, the postwar culture was moving toward a significant reassertion of the separate spheres. Despite the gains made by women during the war, there was significant pressure within culture, supported by sexologists, to return to the order of the separate spheres. The sex war and the Great War were linked within cultural discourse so that feminists who continued to agitate for public equality were seen as instigating further returns to militancy, violence, and internal warfare. As Kent explains: “The intimate cultural associations of sex and war made it possible for sexologists to theorize and present to the public the notion that sexual relations between men and women resembled war, and to exploit this reification of warlike erotic ‘instincts’ to establish the power and legitimacy of their profession” (*Making Peace* 106). Much of this discourse reflects the cultural anxieties about gender and war in a politically unstable time. A return to traditional gender served a national and ideological function by recreating order in a time of social upheaval and cultural trauma from war: “The perceived blurring of gender lines occasioned by war’s upheaval led many in British society to see in a reestablishment of sexual difference the means to re-create a semblance of order” (*Making* 99). Within this cultural context and on the precipice of another European war, Brittain was writing a memoir that would not just excavate the recent past, but situate it within a longer trajectory of gender and war in order to speak to her present context.

Whereas Sackville and Jenkins locate their protest within the maternal, Brittain bases her authority to speak in *Testament of Youth* on her experience as a VAD nurse and the loss of those men closest to her. These experiences are united by grief. By bridging the gap between the home front and the battlefield, Brittain demonstrates the importance of her experience and her credibility. Rhetorically, she wishes to identify with her readers and trace how she moved from pro-war acceptance to anti-war pacifism in the hopes that they too will make that shift. Her approach is a striking contrast to Lee, who explicitly marks herself as an outsider to war and often uses alienating rhetorical tactics. While Lee and Brittain would agree that war is a waste, they differ in their arguments about heroism and sacrifice. Like the war poets, Brittain maintains a reverent depiction of soldiers, but this depiction forms the basis for her protest, and not, as some critics argue, her pro-war patriotism. The soldiers' lives are shown in all their magnificent potential, and as each of the four intimates dies, Brittain demonstrates the incredible loss, both personally and nationally, that makes war unthinkable in the future.

At the advent of war, Brittain, like the majority of her country, supported the war and accepted the propaganda and rhetoric of duty and service to country and allies. Early in the war, she writes in her diary: "The great fear is that our bungling Government will declare England's neutrality ... If we at this critical juncture refuse to help our friend France, we should be guilty of the grossest treachery" (77-78). Both Brittain and her male cohort affirm their support of the war ideals: honor, sacrifice, glory, and adventure. Brittain represents these ideals through the words of her fiancé Roland and her brother Edward. Roland says of his choice to leave Oxford for active duty:

I don't think in the circumstances I could easily bring myself to endure a secluded life of scholastic vegetation. It would seem a somewhat cowardly shirking of my obvious duty ... I feel that I am meant to take an active part in this War. It is to me a very fascinating thing—something, if often horrible, yet very ennobling and very beautiful. (84)

Roland explains that he goes to war for these ideals, for what he calls “heroism in the abstract” (108), since he “neither hated the Germans nor loved the Belgians” (108). War offered an opportunity to participate in something “ennobling” and “beautiful.” While both Brittain and her male cohort supported the war, their forms of support differed. While the men could enlist, Brittain felt the pain of being denied military service, expressing helplessness in the face of the men’s sacrifice in battle. As Brittain writes, “Obviously I was suffering, like so many women in 1914, from an inferiority complex” (84), which emerges from a sense of being denied participation in that abstract heroism.

As the war continues, Brittain and her male comrades begin to question both the war and their ideals. As Roland writes to her, “I used to talk of the Beauty of War; but it is only War in the abstract that is beautiful” (150). When Roland dies, Brittain examines the purpose of his death and the war itself. When they learn that Roland died on a routine inspection without contributing to any greater gain, these questions press her: “we were able to piece together the details of his end—so painful, so unnecessary, so grimly devoid of that heroic limelight which Roland had always regarded as ample compensation for those who were slain” (215). In spite of this horrifying reality, Brittain returns him to the abstract: “I know that, come what may, our love will henceforth always be the ruling factor in my life. He is to me the embodiment of that ideal of heroism—that ‘Heroism in

the Abstract’—for which he lived and died, and for which I will strive to live, and if need be, die also” (237). Brittain retains heroism—through the imagery of courage and self-sacrifice—as a virtuous ideal by returning his memory to the abstract of these ideals. She separates the soldiers’ heroism from the realities of warfare and the system of war overall. Brittain valorizes Roland as part of her lover’s grief, and in the memoir as a whole, his heroism becomes integral to her broader political arguments about war and pacifism.

Brittain preserves heroism for the soldiers at the same time that she critiques the broader injustice of war. This move stands in direct contrast to Lee, who argues that both the war and the soldiers’ sacrifice signify waste. Brittain contends that this pacifist argument neglects a truth about the conditions of war. Brittain reflects that the young are often drawn to war for its glory and adventure. While the “causes of war are always falsely represented; its honour is dishonest and its glory meretricious,” she argues war does produce “spiritual endurance” (264) and authentic heroism:

Since those years it has often been said by pacifists ... that war creates more criminals than heroes; that, far from developing noble qualities in those who take part in it, it brings out only the worst. If this were altogether true, the pacifist’s aim would be, I think, much nearer of attainment than it is. Looking back upon the psychological processes of us who were very young sixteen years ago, it seems to me that his task—our task—is infinitely complicated by the fact that war, while it lasts, does produce heroism to a far greater extent than it brutalizes. (336)

Brittain identifies that part of the difficulty for pacifists is that war does in fact “produce heroism,” so rather than reject heroism, she seeks to reform it for pacifism by arguing that war creates a kind of irony by bringing out the best only to waste it.

While Lee upholds that there is no redemption within war, Brittain maintains a commitment to heroism. In order to do so, she creates a distinction between the soldiers and war-workers such as herself, who evince heroism and the broader system of war that exploits that heroism. While Lee avows that the sacred narrative of sacrifice and honor perpetuates war, Brittain insists that the problem is with those in power who take advantage of the ideals of honor and sacrifice: “Between 1914 and 1919 young men and women, disastrously pure in heart and unsuspecting of elderly self-interest and cynical exploitation, were continually re-dedicating themselves . . . to an end that they believed, and went on trying to believe, lofty and ideal” (336). Brittain contends that it is the exploitation of their faith that is at issue, not the ideals themselves. This leads her to suggest a pacifist irony: the sacrifices made by courageous men and women are so good and pure that they should not be wasted in war. Her argument focuses on the waste of goodness itself rather than a critique of that goodness.

Much of this critique comes from Brittain’s portrayal of the absurdity of war, which writers such as Owen, Sackville, and Lee also address. As she tends to a wounded German soldier, Brittain reflects on the absurd juxtaposition of “holding this man’s hand in friendship” when her brother Edward during the battle of Ypres “had been doing his best to kill him” (343). This leads her to conclude: “The world was mad and we were all victims; that was the only way to look at it. These shattered, dying boys and I were paying alike for a situation that none of us had desired or done anything to bring about”

(343). Brittain aligns herself with the soldiers; they are heroic victims of a maddening war.

When her brother Edward is killed in action, Brittain's grief reaches its zenith and she loses all remaining faith in the war: "It seemed indeed the last irony that he should have been killed by the countrymen of Fritz Kreisler, the violinist whom of all others he had most greatly admired" (401). It is this additional irony—operating on a deeply personal level—that breaks Brittain's faith in the war and support for any future war. The loss of her brother is irrevocable, and this irrevocability becomes the basis for Brittain's pacifism. Of her grief, Brittain reflects, "It lasted so long, perhaps, because I decided in the first few weeks after his loss that nothing would ever really console me for Edward's death or make his memory less poignant; and in this I was quite correct, for nothing ever has" (407). Essentially, there is no healing for this kind of loss. No nationalism justifies its existence. This results in her bitter hatred of the war and the patriotism that propelled it. She portrays her anger as raw emotion that sets the stage for a more constructive and reflective argument against war, emerging out of this experience and grief. Echoing both Jenkins and Sackville, Brittain makes grief a platform for protest.

In the postwar section of *Testament of Youth*, Brittain consistently questions the purpose of the soldiers' deaths, as England stands victorious over Germany. Brittain interrogates the nature of this victory and peace. At the announcement of the war's end, she only feels betrayed, as grief becomes the foundation for victory (421-22). The trauma of war results in neither personal nor political peace, as "peace" is constructed through the language of imperial dominance: "the Big Four were making a desert and calling it peace" (430). As Brittain writes upon the publication of the Versailles Treaty, "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” (430). Brittain and the men she lost sacrificed for the ideals of heroism, patriotism, duty, and honor, but the realities of war do not align with the ideals they sacrificed for: “When I thought about these negotiations . . . they did not seem to me to represent at all the kind of ‘victory’ that the young men whom I had loved would have regarded as sufficient justification for their lost lives” (430). The “peace” that emerges from the aftermath of war perpetuates the very same nationalism that propelled society into war. To Brittain, this is an affront to the soldiers’ sacrifices, and there is no redemption down this path.

In order to make her case that “victory” is not an authentic peace or justification for the soldiers’ sacrifices, Brittain reveals what a victory over Germany looks like through her international work. After she graduates from Oxford, she and Winifred Holtby travel on behalf of the League of Nations to different parts of Europe, including Germany, to get a sense of the far-reaching consequences of war. As Brittain witnesses a German morning mass, she reflects, “As I stood in that pale crowd of Germans, all singing, it seemed incredible that the world could have been as it was ten years ago; whatever evil was here, I wondered, that Edward and Roland had died to destroy? What enemy could there have been whose annihilation justified the loss of even one soldier?” (583). Brittain questions the value of Edward and Roland’s sacrifices if the Germans were not in fact their enemy or evil. The modernist impulse would follow that irony through to one possible conclusion—their sacrifices were wasted, and Brittain seems to

head in that direction when she explains that the postwar landscape mocks their sacrifices:

It was best, after all, that our dead who were so much part of us, yet were debarred from our knowledge of the postwar world and never even realised that we “won”, could not come back and see, upon the scarred face of Europe, the final consequences of their young pursuit of “heroism in the abstract”. How futile it had all been, that superhuman gallantry!
(583-84)

Edward and Roland died as heroes, yet their sacrifices are wasted on “the scarred face of Europe.” The options before Britain seem to lead in two directions: either the soldiers’ sacrifices were wasted, or they were valuable in some way not immediately visible in the aftermath of war. The vantage point of the survivor offers Britain the opportunity to construct a meaning for their sacrifices other than victory.

While Lee would argue there is no redemption for the soldiers’ sacrifices, Britain refuses to accept that their lives and her work are irredeemable. In both elevating the ideals of war and rejecting the realities of war, Britain establishes a new irony: survivors can honor the sacrifices of war through the prevention of war. The survivor has knowledge that is unavailable to the soldiers in the midst of war. Britain locates this knowledge within the framework of the separate spheres. Britain explains that before the war, she believed she led a private life: “When I was a girl at St Monica’s and in Buxton, I remembered, I imagined that life was individual, one’s own affair; that the events happening in the world outside were important enough in their own way, but were

personally quite irrelevant” (431). Only in the postwar moment can she see clearly what was obscured to her as a private woman:

Now, like the rest of my generation, I have had to learn again and again the terrible truth of George Eliot’s words about the invasion of personal preoccupations by the larger destinies of mankind, and at last to recognise that no life is really private, or isolated, or self-sufficient.... We were bound up together like this before we realised it; if only the comfortable prosperity of the Victorian age hadn’t lulled us into a false conviction of individual security and made us believe that what was going on outside our homes didn’t matter to us, the Great War might never have happened. (431-32)

Brittain argues that the separation of the public and the private created “a false conviction of individual security”; the war has shattered this sense of domestic enclosure. Not only does Brittain disrupt the separate spheres as a postwar revelation, but she insists that if individuals perceived themselves within a broader social framework, they might be able to prevent war.

Brittain constructs this insight as a shattering awakening brought about by war, which, while unspeakably horrifying, is nevertheless valuable. Brittain explains that her generation is poised to make this insight clear, as “the first to understand that not a single man or woman can now live in disregarding isolation from his or her world” (432). The separate spheres that would keep women within the private sphere and out of the world of politics is no longer a viable option for Brittain, and she concludes: “If only I and a few other people succeed in this, it may be worth while [*sic*] that our lives have been lived; it

may even be worth while [*sic*] that the lives of the others have been laid down. Perhaps that's really why, when they died, I was left behind" (432). Brittain posits that the work of the survivors might do two things. First, it offers the possibility of redeeming the lives that were sacrificed; second, it also furnishes a context for justifying Brittain's own survival, for negotiating her own grief at not having died with the ones she loved. The Great War—the first horrifying event of modern warfare—furnished a new kind of knowledge about the relationship between the private individual and the public nation. If Brittain can use this knowledge to prevent war, then the sacrifices of war may be valuable. But more particularly, this active work of the survivor reveals something further: the purpose of the survivor is to redeem the sacrifices of war.

While Lee insists that all war is a waste, Brittain attempts to redeem the sacrifices that have already occurred. Recalling Schreiner, Brittain depicts war sacrifices as valuable failures. The soldiers make a track to the water's edge, but now it is the survivors who must follow and continue their work: "I had realised that it was not the courage of disaster, but the failure of courage and generosity on the part of the survivors. How terrible our responsibility is!" (593). The ideals of courage are not problematic to Brittain; rather she emphasizes the survivors' responsibility to redeem those ideals by practicing them. The survivors must take up the same ideals in order to reconstruct society toward authentic peace: "If, only, somehow, the nobility which in us had been turned towards destruction could be used in them for creation, if the courage which we had dedicated to war could be employed, by them, on behalf of peace, then this future might indeed see the redemption of man instead of his further descent into chaos" (593-94). Here, Brittain wrestles the ideals of heroism away from war in order to reform them

for the pacifist. In doing so, she also deconstructs the gender divide which locates heroism within masculinity. The feminist pacifist carries the project of heroism forward.

If the dying soldiers help the survivors recognize the waste of war, then the survivors have a crucial role in ensuring that war does not recur. Brittain further links herself with the heroism of the soldiers both in her language of camaraderie and in her depiction of the survivors', role which continues the language of warfare; only this time, it is a war against war:

To rescue mankind from that domination by the irrational which leads to war could surely be a more exultant fight than war itself, a fight capable of enlarging the souls of men and women with the same heightened consciousness of living, and uniting them in one dedicated community whose common purpose transcends the individual. Only the purpose itself would be different, for its achievement would mean, not death, but life.

(603-4)

This work subsumes the sacrifices of the soldiers and becomes a more important work, as the survivors will strive for the aims of peace with the same ideals encouraged by war. The fight for peace would be an even more difficult fight, but the outcome would not be the disaster of the Great War. The survivor's obligation is motivated by the soldiers' sacrifices—this work is “fidelity” to the dead: “To look forward, I concluded, and to have courage—the courage of adventure, of challenge, of initiation, as well as the courage of endurance—that was surely part of fidelity” (604). The ideals of war are now reformed as ideals of peace. Brittain continues to link herself as a fellow warrior in this work, building a trajectory from the soldiers' sacrifices to her own:

The lover, the brother, the friends whom I had lost, had all in their different ways possessed this courage, and *it would not be utterly wasted* if only, through those who were left, it could influence the generation, still to be, and convince them that, so long as the spirit of man remained undefeatable, life was worth having and worth giving. (604, emphasis added)

Brittain reforms the ideals of self-sacrifice in an attempt to redeem the wastes of war. It is a reinforcement and reformation of the ideals that will reconfigure them for a better purpose.

Brittain situates herself in a longer trajectory, echoing Schreiner's valuable failures and maternal pacifism. The survivor is connected to a longer progression from the soldiers and toward her children: "if perhaps, too, I could have children, and pass on to them the desire for this courage and the impulse to redeem the tragic mistakes of the generation which gave them birth, then Roland and Edward, and Victor and Geoffrey would not have died vainly after all" (604). Brittain—like Schreiner—appropriates the maternal as part of the survivor's work for peace.⁷ She frames the trajectory from the soldiers to the children as a progression of valuable failures, in which one generation seeks to redeem the mistakes the previous one. This work is built on the virtues of self-sacrifice, courage, and "the impulse to redeem." Brittain seeks to reform the very ideals brought out in war in order to deploy them on behalf of peace. While Brittain speaks to

⁷ Here, I take issue with Albrinck's argument that Brittain rejects the mother figure as an image of traditional femininity and war. She writes that Brittain rejected her own mother and motherhood in general, because "Although she later chooses to marry and have children, she recognizes the links between producing children and producing the materials of war" (286). Albrinck neglects the ways Brittain divides the maternal from militarism in the interests of pacifism.

her fellow survivors in the language of war, she does so to encourage in them the desire for peace that she links to the maternal survivor.

Rewriting Honor—Feminism and Pacifism in Honourable Estate

Above all, Brittain is considered a memoirist and an activist. Though she desired to be a novelist, it is her biographical writing that has attracted the most attention from the public and the academy. *Honourable Estate*, published a few years after *Testament of Youth*, is another text heavily informed by Brittain's own life.⁸ While *Honourable Estate* receives little attention from critics, I argue it should be read as a companion to *Testament of Youth*.⁹ In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain writes a tribute to the war workers—the fallen and the survivors—and through her memorialization of them, she establishes the responsibility of the survivors to carry the ideals of courage, heroism, and sacrifice forward. In *Honourable Estate*, Brittain extends her discussion of redeeming sacrifices by linking the valuable failures of war to the sacrifices of the women's movement. In her foreword to *Honourable Estate*, Brittain explains:

Just as *Testament of Youth* attempted to describe and assess the fate of a young generation ignorantly and involuntarily caught up into the greatest catastrophe with which diplomats and politicians have thus far favoured us, so *Honourable Estate* purports to show how the women's revolution—

⁸ Brittain declares that *Honourable Estate* "is not autobiographical. It makes no attempt at any self-portrait, and nowhere is the story, as related here, that of my own life" (*Honourable Estate* 1). But as anyone reading *Testament of Youth* much less doing biographical research on Brittain knows, this is inaccurate. The Allendeys are a loose parallel with her own family, herself being very much like Ruth, and the Rutherstons are like Brittain's husband George Catlin's family. The comparisons are clear, as Gorham notes in her biography: "It is obvious that Ruth Alleyndene ... represents Brittain's 'best self', and that Denis is an affectionate but impossibly perfect portrayal of [Catlin]" (244).

⁹ Currently, there is very little scholarship about *Honourable Estate*. See Gorham 241-46 and also Mellown.

one of the greatest in all history—united with the struggle for other democratic ideals and the cataclysm of the War to alter the private destinies of individuals. (1-2)

Both texts identify the valuable failures of the war and the women's movement that enable the survivors to take up the work of the postwar period. In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain identifies the work of the survivors as specifically pacifist, but in *Honourable Estate*, she weds feminism and pacifism together.

In *Honourable Estate*, Brittain tells a politically charged story of two families, the Rutherstons and the Allendeynes. The novel is broken into three sections and follows the narrative structure of a Victorian triple-decker: a lengthy romance plot that ends in marriage. The novel traces the development of gender and women's rights from the late Victorian period through the 1930s. This Victorian throwback might seem like an odd form for a writer hobnobbing in London during the height of the modernist movement, but I argue that Brittain intentionally constructs a relationship between the late Victorian period and the Great War. Brittain revises the quintessential Victorian narrative—the marriage plot—by envisioning a marriage of equals, who work together to pursue peace and equality, both personally and politically.

By creating a lengthy genealogical plot, Brittain consciously links herself to past generations in order to enable the political vision of Schreiner. Schreiner's politics emphasize a longer historical progression from one generation to the next. Each must carry the work forward and have faith in political progress. Brittain embodies this when she dedicates *Honourable Estate* to her mother-in-law: "in memory of E.K.C. who worked for a day that she never saw." Brittain's mother-in-law becomes the inspiration

for Janet Rutherford, a thwarted suffragette in a stifling, traditional marriage to a clergyman. In the novel, Janet and Ruth are linked generationally; where Janet fails, Ruth succeeds. In this way, Janet is akin to Lyndall and Schreiner's generation, while Ruth, largely representative of Brittain's life and politics, is her successor. Schreiner often emphasizes women's need to renounce love in order to pursue freedom and equality. Marriage and motherhood are future goals under the conditions of women's independence, freedom, and equality. Brittain declares her own generation and those coming after her as able to take up both love and work, and she depicts these possibilities through Ruth.

Within Brittain's overarching imagery, Janet represents the sacrifices made in the women's movement that often failed, but enabled others, such as Ruth, to follow and succeed. When we examine Schreiner's concept of the valuable failure alongside Brittain's reconceptualization of the survivor, we can see that Brittain links the women's movement of the late nineteenth century to the sacrifices of war—both furnished valuable failures that enabled progress in the postwar period. Because this is written within the context of a gender backlash and an emerging threat of another world war, Brittain is consciously constructing an appeal to progress envisioned through feminism and pacifism. She remains committed to a Victorian optimism about progress and the ideals of courage, heroism, and sacrifice in the face of impending war and a resurgence of the separate spheres. Her memoir and novel attempt to intervene in these discourses.

A central way Brittain links herself to Schreiner's concept of the valuable failure is to rewrite the concept of honourable estate. The term honourable estate conjures up the traditional marriage ceremony within the Victorian separate spheres. Brittain identifies a

new meaning for this term. In the foreword to the novel, she claims that “[Honourable Estate] stands also for that position of dignity and respect for which the world’s women and the world’s workers have striven since the end of the eighteenth century, and which, within my own lifetime, they have partly achieved” (4). Brittain’s goal is to rework what has traditionally dictated both a gender and class status within society—marriage—and reform it within the politics of feminism and, here, socialism.

Brittain critiques the gender-sexual discourse she inherited from the Victorians. This moral framework breaks down in the war, but through the lives of the children, Brittain reforms honourable estate, conceptualizing it as a political inheritance and a moral responsibility for the survivors to take up the work for human dignity, equality, and freedom in the postwar world. Like Schreiner, Brittain extends women’s work into the public sphere. She envisions an end to the sex war through women’s equality in both marriage and work, which she reflects in Denis and Ruth’s marriage.

Brittain critiques the separate spheres through the Victorian marriages of the Rutherstons and the Allendeynes, who reflect gender norms within the middle class. The Rutherstons are a clergy family on the lower end of the middle class, while the Allendeynes are landed gentry and owners of a pottery on the higher end. Both marriages are Victorian in nature and could have come out of an Elizabeth Gaskell or George Eliot novel. The separate spheres divide the sexes against one another, as men and women are to take their assigned roles without regard to desire or suitability. Rev. Thomas Rutherston marries young Janet through a transaction by Janet’s mother, primarily for financial security. Similar to the New Woman writers’ critiques of marriage, Brittain is critical of the economic nature of marriage in which women’s bodies are exchanged on

the marriage market. Thomas Rutherston represents everything unsympathetic about Victorian morality, sexuality, and the separate spheres. He exerts as much control as he can over his wife's body and mind, getting her pregnant without her full understanding or wish for children and perpetually reading her diary: "Never once did it occur to him that in thus reading through her diary, he was violating any confidence or perpetrating any deceit. What was hers was his; a wife had no right to shut her private thoughts away from her husband" (28). As a minister, he wields his control through a religious framework, asserting his dominance over his wife in an attempt to gain her submission and piety. He is continually disappointed by Janet's resistance to their marriage and her wifely duties to him.

Janet is similar to Eliot's Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch*, desiring to help her minister husband, but with all the feminist angst of a New Woman character who longs for agency and work. Janet does not naturally desire maternity or domesticity, yet she finds herself trapped in a life wherein she is expected to submit to both. Janet writes in her diary: "A motherhood which cannot be voluntarily accepted as a sacred joy as well as a duty must be wrong somewhere" (30). Janet questions the separate spheres to which she has no affinity, and instead longs for meaningful work: "what really interested her was political work and the suffrage movement and all the larger aspects of social reform" (40). Thomas chastises her wishes at every point, thwarting her attempts to find any involvement outside the home. As their marriage coincides with the emergence of the suffrage movement, Janet defies Thomas and participates in any way she can, although her attempts are never fully successful because of her responsibilities to Thomas and to

her son Denis, whom she loathes as a representation of her forced maternity and gender imprisonment.

Janet echoes the New Woman's frustrations with Victorian gender norms and her desires for autonomy. In many ways, she follows from Lyndall; but whereas Lyndall resides on the outskirts of "civilization" in South Africa, Janet gravitates toward the center, London and the suffrage movement. Yet her life is a series of disappointments and failures. The only satisfaction she finds is in her limited involvement with the suffrage movement and her romantic friendship with the playwright Ellison Campbell: "So completely did the militant movement absorb her, that except during Ellison Campbell's visits to London the milestones of her life were chiefly political" (110). Janet eventually leaves Thomas and takes up work in the East End. She dies there at the end of the war on the eve of the day women over thirty are given the vote. She dies, Moses-like, on the verge of the Promised Land.

While Janet's life appears disappointing and frustrating, accomplishing very little externally, Brittain reframes it as a valuable failure: Janet is Ellison's muse; she is Denis's mother; she is Ruth's locust. Her life contributes to the collective movement, but she also influences those around her. Her life and death result in Denis' commitment to feminism, and he becomes the New Man in Brittain's narrative. While her work comes to little fruition for herself, her life is not a waste; it contributes to a broader collective movement toward progress. As in the locust analogy, it is what the failure opens up for the future that makes it valuable.

Brittain critiques the separate spheres through Janet's miserable life as a wife and mother and her work for the suffrage movement. She also critiques the broader moral

discourse surrounding Victorian gender and sexuality through her interrogation of honor and its relationship to human dignity. This begins with the invocation of the marriage ceremony and the introduction of Agnes's story. Ruth overhears her father joking with a friend about a cook named Agnes they had when he was a child. When Agnes becomes pregnant out of wedlock, Ruth's grandmother expels her, and as a result of this treatment, Agnes loses the baby in a cab. Afterward, she becomes a prostitute, and a fallen woman. The groom involved is suspected but not questioned because he is too valuable to the household (253). Stephen relays this story as a joke about the severity of his mother and the amusing doubled standard of keeping the groom. Ruth is horrified by the treatment of Agnes, and it shapes her desire to become a suffragette. Brittain utilizes a classic Victorian fallen woman trope in order to reframe it as a symbol of the moral discourse which the war will break.

On the surface, this event reveals Victorian sexual double standards, well-charted by New Woman writers, but Brittain develops the Agnes narrative over the course of the novel to symbolize Victorian morality. Agnes, whose name and patron saint represent chastity and purity, is a symbolic marker of sexual martyrdom. But Brittain shows how this moral discourse represented by Agnes shaped not only the sacrifices demanded of women, but also the sacrifices demanded of men in the war. The same concept of honor which justified the unjust treatment of Agnes will be linked to the concepts justifying war. Brittain makes this association clear by pairing the Agnes story with Ruth's experience of the annual fox hunt. This traditionally aristocratic activity becomes intertwined for Ruth with the gender norms she struggles to understand and challenge, as she links "the penalised and ejected Agnes with the hunted fox that she had seen vainly

trying to escape from the pitiless hounds near Rough Close early in the year” (263). Both Agnes and the fox are put together within a patriarchal discourse which makes a sport of their victimization. But the narrator goes a step further, foreshadowing the sacrifices of war: “Ruth did not know that the same society which made a ceremony of the slaughter of a fox was later to make a sacrament of the slaughter of its sons” (264). A similar structure which demands Agnes’s expulsion and eventual downfall also demands the sacred sacrifice of its sons. As she did in *Testament of Youth*, Brittain focuses her critique on the moral discourse and the patriarchal system that unites domesticity and war.

The separate spheres ideology, with its dual emphasis on sexual purity and shame, is represented by Agnes, but the Agnes reference point also takes on a broader implication about the concept of honor as a moral framework, which establishes a rigid social code of gender and sexual behaviour. Prior to the war, neither Ruth nor her brother Richard embodies the prescribed gender norms. Ruth is a budding feminist with interests in leadership, and Richard is an artist and a homosexual. When Richard attends an all boy school, one of his friends is expelled for “immorality.” His mother Jessie tells Richard, “Your father and I would rather see you dead at our feet than have you guilty of anything so dreadful! We should feel it just as much a shame and a disgrace as if your sister became a wicked, fast woman and had a baby without being married!” (274-75). Jessie reflects a sexual-moral discourse which affects both Ruth and Richard, creating an alliance between their gender subject positions. But she also establishes a foreshadowing moment, as Richard internalizes this code of honor and commits suicide in battle rather than have his homosexuality revealed.

Brittain is building a narrative that links the moral code of honor embodied by Agnes to Ruth and Richard's experiences with that code during the war. Honor then signifies not only a discourse during war, but a broader gender and sexual discourse that Brittain critiques. She practices the role of the survivor by using her postwar insights to illustrate the way Victorian gender ideology is implicated in the Great War. Ruth and her brother Richard become the further embodiment of Agnes, as the concept of honor shapes their decisions in wartime. The old morality dictates rejection—fallenness—for those who do not adhere to the discourse of honor. When Richard dies an honorable death in battle, this concept is challenged for Ruth. She is approached by one of Richard's comrades, an American, Eugene Meury, who brings her a letter from Richard explaining his death. Richard's initial expectations of war as glorious correspond with Brittain's narrative in *Testament of Youth*: "When we first joined up I probably gave you the impression that everything was splendid. The battalion was encamped in lovely country, and I got quite fond of a lot of chaps who seemed so different from the ordinary Tommy. We were all going to be fine fellows and heroes, and see the world and have a glorious time" (335). This establishes the ideals of war as revolving around adventure and heroism; however, Richard further reveals the realities of war that echo the later disillusionment of Owen's "Dulce et Decorum est"; Richard writes: "If you had seen men with their faces blown in or their bowels running out and kids of seventeen gone stark staring mad and gibbering for their mothers, you would know it isn't" (335).

Richard's letter reads like an account by a dissenting soldier poet, but it also reflects his acceptance of Victorian codes of honor and sexuality. Richard's letter reveals his plans to die in battle—an honorable suicide. He explains that his company suspects he

and his closest boyhood friend are lovers, and that they will eventually be court martialled and expelled from the military with a dishonourable discharge.¹⁰ Richard defends his turn to Val for comfort in wartime: “We have never cared for getting drunk and going with prostitutes, so when life got really intolerable we decided that the only thing to do was to be everything we possibly could to one another . . . if it hadn’t been for Val I should never have stuck this dammed War as long as I have” (336). When threatened with expulsion and dishonor, both Richard and Val vow to end their lives in battle to preserve their honor:

We don’t feel we have done anything wrong or harmed anyone, but after the hell I have been through already I can’t face the hullabaloo and the public disgrace and the scenes there would be at home, especially as our beautiful respectable family would take good care I didn’t live it down and forget it, or make a success of any career even if I had the chance. Knowing so well what the Allendeynes are I can’t confront Father and Mother with the fact that their son is what they would call vicious and immoral instead of a virtuous patriotic hero. So we have decided to quit. Please try to forgive me and not think too badly of me. (337)

Richard’s self-sacrifice to preserve his family’s honor reveals the moral inheritance of Victorian gender ideology. The letter reveals the horrors of war, but, much more significantly, the horrors of Victorian expectations regarding honor as Richard extends the logic that his suicidal sacrifice is more valuable than his life as a man who loves

¹⁰ For biographical speculations that Richard’s homosexuality corresponds to Brittain’s brother Edward’s sexuality, see Gorham 245-46.

another man. The dissonance between the report of Richard's death and his letter reveal how this horror is carefully concealed by the rhetoric of honor; he has died an honourable death for this family and country. Only Ruth and Eugene know the truth of his sacrifice.

Richard's letter concludes by invoking the end of Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est," revealing that war is not sweet or glorious, and appealing to Ruth's maternity: "if ever you get married and have a son, don't, whatever you do, let them make him fight in a war. Don't let them cheat him into thinking it's all fine and glorious, but tell him the truth as I have tried to tell you" (337). In calling upon her maternity, Richard further echoes Schreiner, Jenkins, and Sackville, telling his sister that as a mother, she should not let her son go war. Brittain links the individual with the political, and it is from here, this work of the maternal citizen—both privately and publicly—that Brittain will advance her feminist pacifism.

The truth of Richard's honorable death separates Ruth from the pre-war morality she began questioning when she was traumatized by Agnes's story as a child: "Ruth lifted her stricken face from Richard's letter with a feeling that centuries had passed—centuries in which the entire structure of courage and reconciliation that she had built for herself since July 1915 had been relentlessly shattered" (337). This "structure of courage and reconciliation" fits within the World War I ideology of soldiers' sacrifices saving the nation, but in the revelation of Richard's homosexuality, Brittain ties this ideology to the pre-war discourses on gender and sexuality. Ruth questions these ideologies and ultimately rejects them: "What was the moral offence? she asked herself for the first time. Cruelty? Treachery? Exploitation? Oh, no; it was giving expression to your love for a person whom the law didn't permit you to feel about in that way" (340). The greater

injustice to Ruth is the loss of her brother for a moral code—both familial and legal—that now strikes her as incredibly immoral, unjust, and inhumane:

If I'm rough on anyone it's likely to be my family, for teaching us, as they always did, that so-called immorality was worse than death or any other horror.... Surely it's a worse crime to be a statesman and involve a whole nation in war, than just to go in for some sort of unorthodox relationship which however wrong it may be in itself doesn't hurt anyone else! (340)

Ruth emphasizes that her family and the law are at fault for this injustice, and this begins her struggle to reject the Victorian morality of her upbringing and cultivate a new morality based on what she later calls “human dignity.” After the letter, Ruth interprets Richard’s death in relation to Agnes: “Oh, to think that they’d got even Richard, and driven him to desperation as Granny had once driven Agnes with her baby—Richard who might have been a great artist!” (341). By linking Agnes to Richard, Brittain critiques the moral discourse surrounding honor, which dictates acceptable and unacceptable forms of behavior; when individuals do not comply, they are deemed fallen, immoral. In doing this, Brittain’s symbolic linking of Agnes and Richard reinforces a connection between the sex war and the Great War. Brittain connects the tragedy of war to its roots in the Victorian constructs of gender.

Brittain not only links Richard to Agnes, but to Ruth as well. While Ruth rejects the sexual-moral discourse which expelled both Agnes and Richard from the honorable estate, she finds herself similarly located in its structure. After Eugene gives Ruth Richard’s letter, they strike up a friendship, which turns into love. Though he is engaged to Dallas, an American woman, they find comfort in their shared war experience, since

Ruth is a VAD working abroad. When Eugene is recalled to the front, Ruth offers him her virginity: “No time. No future. Our moment must be now, or it may be never. She knew then what the resolution was which had been growing within her for weeks, the resolution that involved throwing down for ever from their sacred pinnacle the standards and conventions of her post-Victorian girlhood” (385). Though he resists her as a point of honor, she insists: “Won’t you let me give you that comfort, Eugene—let me be your love before you go back? We shall have created something between us like that—a relationship, a belonging to each other—and nothing that happens afterwards will ever be able to take it quite away” (386). The pressures of wartime enable Ruth to break with the sexual morality of her parents, as she views offering her virginity as a form of love and patriotism. But, offering her virginity is complex, as she feels vulnerable to pregnancy and to the discourse of fallenness, which framed both Agnes and Richard.

This potential motherhood further links her to Agnes and to the maternal connection to war. Brittain identifies Ruth with the traditional image of the *pieta* as a VAD nurse and potential mother, but Brittain adds a further dimension to this image within the discourse of sexual morality. Ruth considers a picture of the Madonna at a local church: “There was more than one way of being wounded by this War, thought Ruth, as she stopped to look into the serene wooden face of the Mother of Sorrows” (391). Ruth—as Brittain does in *Testament of Youth*—identifies herself as a corollary with the soldier; to be wounded in war is not bound by proximity to the battlefield. The pressures of war and the sexual-moral discourse complicate Ruth’s feelings about a possible pregnancy; she both worries about and longs for a child. She prays to the Madonna: “You too knew grief and loss and pain; did you know sin as well?... was it sin

to create the Son of Man who sought to become the Saviour of the world by sharing humanity's martyrdom—such martyrdom as it is going through now?" (392-93). Ruth links Mary's sacrifices with Christ and, in doing so, links the mother and the soldier, and she uses this imagery in order to justify her sexual behavior as a form of sacrifice within war. By drawing on the imagery of the Virgin Mary, Brittain seeks to undermine the sexual code of honor by framing Mary's sacrifices as sexual martyrdom.

When Ruth learns she is not pregnant, she interprets her behavior through the narrative of Agnes: "But for a mere physical expedient ... I should be the same as Agnes. I am the same as Agnes; an object, in their eyes, for social ostracism and degradation" (396). When Eugene is killed in battle, Ruth believes her use of birth control is an act of cowardice: "Thanks to the Allendeynes and their standards Richard threw his life away, and I've been no better, no braver! Because their hold on me was so strong in spite of everything, I sacrificed the existence of Eugene's child.... Now there's nothing—nothing—nothing!" (403). Ruth asserts that both she and Richard are motivated by the same fear of dishonor. They are further linked to the Agnes narrative of sexual shame and fallenness. The moral code of honor demands the sacrifice of life, rather than its preservation. Richard's suicide and Ruth's missed pregnancy form, what Ruth feels, are the private failures of the Allendeyne narrative. But Brittain puts these acts forward as valuable failures, as they offer insights into the Victorian legacies of gender.

If Brittain lays bare the failures of the Victorian moral code of honor, she reforms these as valuable failures in Ruth's marriage to Denis. Denis and Ruth meet for a second time in postwar Poland. Their relationship evolves from friendship to marriage, and it forms the symbolic basis of postwar reconstruction and Brittain's reform of honourable

estate. Denis and Ruth are the postwar New Man and New Woman, pacifist feminists, and together they are Brittain's regenerative vision of civilization and progress. Building on the New Woman writers before her, Brittain makes feminism essential to the reconstruction of society after war.

Denis's feminism is shaped by his mother Janet's influence and his parents' disastrous marriage. When his mother dies, Denis reads her diaries and vows, "If I survive this war, as I hope I shall not, and some day take a wife, I swear I will always subordinate my own desires rather than cause her powers to be frustrated, or the life she wants for herself denied her" (194). Denis enters the war at a late stage because of his poor health. While opposed to the war, he views it as a means of escape from his miserable life with his father: "He no longer views the Army as the mutilated instrument of human stupidity, but rather as the blessed means by which a man could seek death without incurring the stigma of suicide" (198). Drawing on the same code of honor as Richard, Denis hopes for death through an honorable sacrifice. But in an ironic reversal, he survives the war (201).

With Denis and Ruth, Brittain initiates her broader argument about the obligations of survivors to redeem the failing sacrifices of the past. In *Testament of Youth*, the sacrifices of war can be redeemed by the pacifist, and in *Honourable Estate* by the women's movement. Both sacrifices can be redeemed by the feminist pacifist. Having lived through the end of war, Denis dedicates himself to finding a new purpose: "some new creed, some philosophy of life, which looked forward and not back" (408). This new philosophy is pacifism and a career in politics. Denis reflects that it is both his experience of his parents' failed marriage and his experience during the war that drives this new

outlook: “My early life was a chaos created by conflict, a miniature reproduction of the world at war. If this experience of futile tragedy can urge me to work for peace and order as the only lasting bases of civilisation, then perhaps it was worth enduring” (409). In this passage, Denis imagines his parents’ marriage as a symbol for the war itself, blending the images of the sex war and the Great War. Denis reasons that if he can work for peace, his experiences might not be wasted. Denis’s life itself becomes an image of a valuable failure, and one that Brittain links symbolically to the nation. Echoing Brittain’s own insights, it is the work of preventing war that can ironically redeem the war and the failures of the Victorians.

Denis frames the failures of the war as resulting from the failure of the separate spheres. In doing so, Brittain sets up the war as central breaking point with the Victorian past. While Brittain depicts the postwar landscape as “bleak wilderness, stretching across the entire length of a continent, left in its wake by modern warfare” (408), she also envisions possible renewal through Denis and Ruth. After the war, Denis goes to Oxford to study social philosophy and becomes a lecturer. In 1921, he goes to Poland to investigate the effects of war, and while there, he reunites with Ruth, who continues her war work as a nurse for refugees. While it is a devastated landscape, Denis “could see how decisively the present was breaking with the past, how sharply the new values were repudiating the old” (413). This break from the old into the new specifically focuses on gender: “How archaic to-day appeared his father’s opposition to woman suffrage, how inconsistent the relationship between his parents with the spirit of the new epoch” (413). Brittain makes her characters symbolic of a broader shift within culture, as Denis finds his father’s old values no longer relevant.

While breaking with Victorian values, Brittain also insists that part of the survivors' obligation is to assess their inheritance—to ask what has been left in the wake of war? What kind of estate have they inherited? While Denis formulates his survivor's purpose in the reconstruction of society, Ruth, now twenty-seven, remains an alienated, grief-stricken casualty of war. Ruth's life remains in the war and she longs for death: "Her thoughts gathered round the dead woman whose stiff emaciated body—one of the hundred corpses daily contributed by the stricken town to the pile of frozen bodies in Buzuluk cemetery—would eventually be gathered like refuse from the snow by the municipal sleigh. Sometimes she felt that death was the only reality left in the world" (416). This landscape demonstrates Brittain's view that peace is not simply the cessation of war; this is still a Europe ravaged by war, through disease, poverty, and continued violence. Real peace is an active philosophical and political movement. Ruth feels at odds with the world, as the younger generation is not tortured by memories of war as she is: "There might after all, she was thinking, be no solution but self-destruction" (421). She is the passive survivor, who is broken by war, but Denis enables her to join him in a more active role.

Denis sees a world in need of renewal and Ruth becomes symbolic of that need. Denis tries to persuade Ruth to return to life in England and pursue politics, arguing that society needs people like her. Ruth argues that the postwar world does not honor the sacrifices made during the war by the people she loved: "I've never pretended to like the world that's come out of the War. It seems to me a greedy, revengeful, throat-cutting world—not at all the sort of place my brother and ... other people gave up their lives to make. That's why I'm keeping out of it and hoping I shall have the luck to follow them"

(430-31). Ruth introduces the concept of waste, and at this particular moment, she seems to embody Lee's argument that war only leads to destruction and loss. Denis makes a Schreiner-like statement about progress: "Some of us just have to carry on knowing our best work doesn't march with history. We have to face the fact that there'll be long periods, perhaps corresponding with the greater part of our lives, when it'll make no headway at all. Must you have quick returns?" (431). And with Lyndall-like ennui, Ruth responds, "I haven't found any contribution I can make" (431). Denis presses her to leave death and pursue life: "The War's over now. It's left wrack and ruin behind it, it's true, but that's all the more reason why builders are wanted instead of healers. Pestilence and famine ought to be left to professional menders like doctors and nurses, not to people with minds trained to think politically" (431). When Denis emphasizes that society needs "builders instead of healers," he not only makes a case for renewal, but he also reconstructs gender; he encourages Ruth to relinquish her role as a nurse and take up political work with him as an equal.

Brittain reconstructs women's roles in society along the same lines as Schreiner by situating women in the public sphere of work and politics. Only when women's voices can be heard will there be a true opportunity for peace. Denis argues that society needs a new politics with women at the forefront, women like Ruth. "But this is still a man-dominated world," Ruth replies. "Who's going to listen to a woman talking about anything but women's rights?" (442). Then Denis brings both pacifism and feminism together:

I don't believe there'll ever be a lasting peace until politically-minded women give their minds to getting it in the same way as they gave them to

the suffrage movement. For one thing, they're more biologically interested than men in eliminating war—and then, like the suffragettes, they've often got a capacity for dramatizing things that men can't equal. (442)

According to Denis, women's voices are all the more necessary in politics in order to establish peace. Ruth contemplates the possibility of political work: "Why had she permitted herself to live in exile ... when throughout the world were puzzled pathetic peoples listening in vain for voices crying resurrection?" (443). As she does in *Testament of Youth*, Brittain extends the language and imagery of Christ-like redemption beyond the soldier to the survivor. Ruth identifies social reconstruction as the regenerative work of the survivor.

Brittain initiates social reconstruction through Ruth's political work in the public sphere and also through the marriage of Denis and Ruth in the private sphere, thereby reforming the concept of honourable estate. The novel traces a genealogy not only through traditional family lines, but more insistently from Agnes and Janet to Richard, Ruth, and Denis. We see such reformation when Denis proposes to Ruth at his mother's grave. Denis says of his mother: "She was a suffragette.... All her mind and heart was in politics. She ought to have been a political organiser or a Member of Parliament, instead of being tied to a child and a household. She'd have given her soul for the kind of work you're doing now" (457). Rather than overtly reject marriage as a corrupt institution oppressing women, Brittain reforms it, attempting to show how women can have both family and work through a feminist marriage, one that dismantles the separate spheres. In this way, Brittain seems to respond to Schreiner's presentation of a longer historical progression. While Schreiner shows that women must temporarily renounce marriage and

motherhood in order to achieve independence and work, Brittain suggests that time for a new kind of marriage has emerged from the wreckage of war. Denis proposes a feminist marriage to Ruth: “You’ve got courage and great ability and work that’s worth while. If you’ll consent to marry me, I promise I’ll do everything in my power to further whatever part in life you choose to play” (458). Their marriage contrasts with that of their parents’ generation. Brittain envisions in this novel what Schreiner could not—the conditions for equality, which depend on women’s entrance into the public sphere. Denis’ proposal at Janet’s grave reinforces that their marriage can redeem the failures of the past.

Part of revising the concept of honourable estate requires changing the moral code surrounding honor. When Ruth confesses her sexual history to Denis, she does so in relation to the Agnes story that has threaded the text together: “I can’t see any difference between Agnes and myself except that I was luckier—if it was luckier not to have [Eugene’s] child” (462). This results in her reconceptualization of morality as a matter of human dignity: “Ever since then...I’ve believed that cruelty is the greatest of all immoralities.... I can’t help feeling that the really immoral people are the ones who punish and ostracise without understanding a thing about the persons they condemn” (463). Denis broadens her response from sexuality to warfare: “A war such as the last is infinitely more destructive of biological progress than the sex-aberrations of a few persons whose psychological make-up isn’t quite that of the herd” (463). This is the moral code they both believe has been disrupted and which they hope to reform into a moral code of peace. Brittain depicts their marriage as a site of social reform and a form of united work, abandoning the structure of the separate spheres. Denis reflects: “Life or death is the issue, civilisation itself the stake—and yet how little we can do as

individuals, she and I! We shall work more effectively if we work together” (463). If in Schreiner’s imagery individuals walk the path alone, Brittain asserts, they should walk as companions now, envisioning their marriage through Schreiner’s language of labor in both the public and the private spheres.

While Denis is the catalyst for Ruth’s renewal, Brittain shifts the focus from Denis to Ruth as Janet’s successor, the one who redeems her failures. This generational fulfillment adds extra weight to the obligations of later generations to honor the work of the previous ones—the true meaning of honourable estate. Denis explains that Ruth is everything Janet wanted to be, but was not. Denis further situates Ruth as a symbol of progress: “your very existence in relation to hers gives me a new sense of hope. It’s made me believe that people’s ideals are sometimes fulfilled in the end, only not necessarily in one life or one generation” (464). Through the transition of Janet to Ruth, Brittain charts a valuable failure to its future success. It is the survivors who must carry on the work of those who came before them. Ruth asks, “I wonder what she’d have thought of the world we’re making—the world she worked for and never saw?” (467). Brittain makes it clear that, while there are opportunities for Ruth that Janet never had, there is still work to be done: “Even now, I’m not entitled to vote—I shan’t be thirty till next year—but I suppose I’ve really got the freedom and independence she sought for” (467). This is the work Ruth continues for the next generation. Brittain redefines the term honourable estate, which can be understood as the positive fulfillment of Schreiner’s concept of the valuable failure.

Ruth accepts Denis’s proposal, but rather than end the novel with the marriage, Brittain follows them beyond the wedding ceremony (476). Ruth’s work as a politician

and a mother best represents the role of the feminist pacifist survivor. Ruth becomes symbolic of a broader political and personal problem for women: “She had set herself to solve one of the most urgent of modern problems—how were women to maintain and improve the position they had won without sacrificing the biological fulfillment which public obligations had never denied to men?” (503). Ruth reconstructs feminine identity around balancing the private and the public, shifting away from self-sacrifice: “the cruellest thing society can do to children is to insist on their mothers sacrificing everything for them. An intelligent and talented person simply gets to dislike the creature for whom she is expected to do that!” (505). Ruth dismantles the separate spheres by moving women into the public sphere of work, and she argues, alongside Schreiner, that women must participate in politics in order to prevent war. But Brittain also continues to make the case that the separate spheres ideology is further implicated in the war happening at all:

If our own mothers had been encouraged to learn what was going on in the world, instead of being told that their place was in the home, the War might never have happened and they could have kept their sons, instead of passively “giving” them to die before their time like Richard and Eugene. They were not allowed the knowledge or the chance to influence international relations, but I believe that we could prevent another war if we really put our backs into it. (506)

In contrast to Ruskin, Brittain argues that it is women’s knowledge and political influence that can prevent war; in doing so, Ruth echoes the maternal feminism of both Schreiner and Sackville. Maternal sacrifice of sons can be reoriented into an active pacifism, but

only if women are free to work for a better society. Brittain continues to utilize the language of labor in relation to maternal politics in order to underscore Schreiner's ideals in *Woman and Labour*.

Brittain voices her own maternal pacifism through Ruth's speeches for the peace society. These resonate with the didactic style of Schreiner. Ruth interrogates a definition of authentic peace and further links this to the concept of honor. If societies are going to change, she argues that they must begin with individuals and challenge the narrative of sacrificial death: "The idea that you can do nothing finer for your country than lay down your life is one of these beguiling prejudices. The possibilities of life are infinite, but death in war, however noble, is no more than a confession of defeat by the resources of the human mind" (526). Like Lee, Brittain calls the sacred narrative of sacrifice into question, but in contrast to Lee, Brittain appropriates sacrifice in the interests of pacifism. This is a reframing of self-sacrifice as a valuable failure, as the failures of self-sacrifice open up insights that future generations can use; Ruth argues: "Perhaps, as part of that inscrutable design which according to our beliefs we call the logic of history or the dispensation of Providence, it was expedient that one generation should die for the people in order to demonstrate, once and for all, the waste and futility of war" (526). Only through the vantage point of the survivor can one declare the sacrifices of war as the ultimate evidence against war. But as she reveals in *Testament of Youth*, this claim does not reject of the ideals put in service of war, but reconfigures them in service of peace; Ruth further reasons: "But if the courage which the youth of America and England once gave to war can be used by their successors on behalf of peace, if we who are still young have learnt that to live for one's country is a finer type of patriotism than to die for it,

then the martyrdom of the nations ten years ago may lead at last to their redemption” (526-27). In other words, the only way the war’s sacrifices can be redeemed from its wastes is if the survivors work for peace; this is a “finer type of patriotism.” While soldiers are often depicted as Christ-like figures whose sacrifices redeem the nation, Brittain claims this is true only if the survivors redeem these sacrifices by working for peace.

In reconfiguring redemption this way, Brittain also reworks the function of grief and memorialization. Ruth prays to Eugene: “My task is to reconcile with all that I am and do, the fact that you lived and died” (544). His sacrifice defines her identity as a redeemer. This transforms mourning and memory into a political discourse, as Eugene’s death obliges Ruth to honor his life and death by working so that no one ever need make that sacrifice again. In a political speech, she compels her audience to work on behalf of maternal peace:

If women hadn’t been consistently taught that meekness and patience and endurance are always virtues, many of our worst evils would have been done away with long ago. It’s time we learnt to be aggressive in our own interest and our children’s. We ought to be impatient and indignant about atrocious living conditions, about the indifference of public authorities to our health and comfort, about the perpetual, unnecessary waste of our time on ill-planned houses and fourth-rate domestic tools. And above all, we ought to refuse to tolerate war. (552)

Brittain extends her argument here that the separate spheres directly contributed to war and that the only solution is that women work on behalf of peace in the public sphere,

which includes improving working and living conditions for women and children as well as ending war. She further argues that ending war would also enable better freedom and economic equality: “if only we could get rid of war, we should have all the money we need to transform the lives of women throughout this country” (552). Through politics—extending women’s private interests into the public sphere—women can prevent war, and here Ruth invokes Schreiner:

A great South African author, Olive Schreiner, once wrote that because women bore children in anguish, they would never allow them to be sacrificed to the passions and hatreds of war if once they had political power. To-day women have that power, for the vote is the greatest of political weapons. Yet we still bear children not only in anguish but in avoidable peril; and the world is still an armed camp. (553)

Ruth argues the maternal must be reconfigured in order to end war and that the way they can do this is through politics—the vote. Now that they have that power, they must use it on behalf of the world’s children, because, as she says, “the world is still an armed camp.” This lends urgency to Ruth’s argument and Brittain’s broader narrative as she writes in that armed camp during a gender backlash. Brittain constructs an explicit connection between Ruth and Schreiner, as Ruth carries Schreiner’s argument and legacy forward.

The ending reinforces Brittain’s overarching themes of revising the honourable estate, as Denis and Ruth work together in the face of a coming war. Honourable estate becomes a site of transformation: “Some of us, perhaps, can never reach our honourable estate—the state of maturity, of true understanding—until we have wrested strength and

dignity out of humiliation and dishonour” (585). Continuing the imagery of the valuable failure, honourable estate becomes a site of knowledge that emerges from “humiliation and dishonour.” This is longer view of progress, as a series of failings and insights; Ruth reflects, “let the cynics say what they will, we have gone forward. Human nature does change in the values to which it subscribes, the cruelties and wrongs it’s prepared to tolerate.... No age ... will ever see the whole of salvation, but every age sees a part of it.... There are others to come which I shall not see” (586). Echoing Schreiner’s appeal to future generations in *Woman and Labour*, Ruth positions herself within this longer trajectory—the honourable estate of the women’s movement and the Great War. Hope resides in the future generations who take up the work of the previous generation; salvation is not confined to an individual act, but a longer process of civic redemption, recalling Schreiner’s “The Hunter” allegory. Schreiner’s concept of valuable failure finds its culmination in Brittain’s honorable estate.

Honourable Estate was published in 1936 amidst international conflict, the same year as the Spanish Civil War, and it anticipates the next global war. Brittain voices fears about what the next war would do to civilization, lending urgency to the movement for peace: “if another such doom were to come upon the world, mankind would live no more. Surely, then, we cannot permit it; surely the instinct of self-preservation must override humanity’s diabolical capacity for self-destruction!” (487). Invoking Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach,” Denis asserts his faith in their relationship amidst the threats of a coming war: “How long before we too follow them into the darkness? At least we still have one another; let us work together while there is light” (587). Brittain concludes her novel asserting faith in collective politics, clinging to the ideals of courage, heroism, and

sacrifice in the face of a gender backlash and a coming war. Looking back on the Great War was also a way of looking forward.

While Brittain reinforces the rhetoric of heroism, as Tylee argues, she does so with a purpose. First, she reconfigures it as pacifist rhetoric. By retaining the heroism of war, Brittain constructs a more palatable rhetoric than Lee. Brittain agrees with Lee that this heroism was wasted—or failed—in war, but she contends that it must be redeemed by the survivors. While Brittain echoes the dissent of the soldier poets—identifying herself as a comrade and war worker—she situates the knowledge of war as something only the survivors can truly grapple with. This contributes an interesting facet to the discussion of combat gnosticism by displacing the experience of war and the knowledge that ensues onto the survivor. Furthermore, both of Brittain’s texts offer a significant intervention into the trench narrative. As Liane Schwarz explains, “For Fussell and many others, it is this general disillusionment, together with the sense of alienation and the final rejection of traditional values, that determines the formal aspects of the trench autobiography” (239). Brittain’s disillusionment and alienation lead her to reconfigure “traditional values” rather than reject them. Second, Brittain’s use of the rhetoric of heroism does not simply reinforce the gender norms of the separate spheres; rather, she extends this heroism to women. She undermines the separate spheres delineation of gender roles and argues that viewing woman as passive mourner and man as active defender contributed to the advent of war itself.

By situating her in a longer trajectory with Schreiner, we can see that Brittain illuminates not only the changes in gender during the war, but how the separate spheres itself can be implicated in the war. In doing this, Brittain makes a specific argument that

feminism should not be deployed on behalf of war, but rather in the interests of pacifism. While Mellown argues that Brittain's pacifism is largely separate from her feminism until World War II, I argue they are intertwined in *Honourable Estate*. The sacrifices of both the Great War and the women's movement are valuable failures which must be taken up by the next generation.

While many critics discuss Brittain's relationship to Schreiner, I have argued that they have not analyzed how deeply Schreiner influenced Brittain's thinking about gender and war, nor have they adequately examined how Brittain positions herself as Schreiner's successor. Both Schreiner and Brittain utilize a feminist method of reform, in which the dominant values are reconfigured on behalf of feminism and pacifism. On the one hand, this reinforces these as dominant values—as critics point out—but this is not all they do. Their reconfigurations also undermine from within by displacing those values from the dominant discourse of war onto a discourse of peace. They also focus on connecting the private individual to public discourses, arguing for women's public roles in politics as a labor of peace. Their critiques focus on institutional reform, extending women's roles in the public sphere. This offers a contrast to Egerton and Lee, who emphasize resistance to institutions and focus more on the work of the outsider who rejects dominant values. These arguments and tactics come together in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*.

Chapter 6: Virginia Woolf's Late Victorian Inheritance in *Three Guineas*

[N]o woman of the crowd of reformers had courage enough to cut the father if she knew him to be amongst her acquaintance.

—George Egerton, “The Regeneration of Two” (147)

Indeed, paradox though it sounds at first, I have come by these views of the war just because I have not been able to be, as the current phrase goes, in the war; although once I had come by such views, the holding of them implied that I should keep out. It was my initial aloofness which made me see the war as a common catastrophe, in which this country's real danger was its danger as a portion of the whole war-imperiled world, instead of seeing only my country's danger at the enemy's hands, and calling that a danger to civilization and the future.”

—Vernon Lee, *Satan the Waster* (xvi-xvii)

Like Vera Brittain in *Testament of Youth* and *Honourable Estate*, Virginia Woolf returns to the Victorians and the separate spheres ideology in *Three Guineas* to argue against war as a feminist pacifist.¹ In a series of letters, Woolf's persona responds to the question: how can women prevent war? In answering this question, she turns to women's status in society, her access to education, and the professions which will enable her to exert influence over wars. But at a deeper level, Woolf's answer to the question of how to prevent war lays bare the violence embedded in both the private and public spheres, and she advances pacifism by returning to Victorian feminism and reworking women's identities as outsiders. When Ruskin asks women to think of their creation of home as an extension of their moral duty to the nation—thinking of England as one garden—he sets up a way of reading the home as symbolic for the homeland. While Brittain envisions feminist pacifism as a movement into the public sphere of politics, Woolf envisions

¹ For studies comparing Brittain and Woolf, see Wisor and also Tidwell.

feminist pacifism as a movement by women—a community of outsiders—to resist war through the private sphere. This move is more reflective of writers like George Egerton and Vernon Lee than Olive Schreiner and Margaret Sackville. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf finds the tools to resist patriarchy and war within a Victorian feminist reconfiguration of the private house traditions.

Many scholars have considered Woolf's use of the past, but her relation to the Victorians is often seen as oppositional, in part, because Woolf herself emphasized these breaks. But more recently, critics have analyzed this rich literary and cultural relationship between Woolf and the Victorian past.² As Gillian Beer writes, "The Victorians are not simply represented ... in her novels ... the Victorians are also *in* Virginia Woolf. They are internalized, inseparable, as well as held at arm's length. They are mimicked with an art of parody so indebted to its materials that it sometimes ... seems at a loss to measure the extent of its own subversion or acquiescence" ("The Victorians in Virginia Woolf" 93). While much of this attention has been on Woolf's relationship to mid-Victorianism, I interrogate her relationship to the late Victorian literary feminism of the New Woman. While Laura Marcus contends that Woolf "subverted representations and discussions of 'The New Woman'" (147), I argue there is a more complex continuity when we examine Woolf through the lenses of Schreiner and Egerton.³

For much of the twentieth century, Woolf had the reputation of being an elitist writer dedicated to her modernist aesthetic, which valued innovation in expressed contrast to the Victorian moral-aesthetic of didacticism. This led to interpretations of

² See specifically Beer; Steve Ellis; and Kate Flint.

³ Ali Gunes examines the New Woman character in Woolf's *Night and Day*. I would like to argue for a more specific reading between New Woman writing and thinking and Woolf's own feminist pacifism.

Woolf as apolitical, but more recent criticism corrects this view, showing that she was deeply engaged with the social and political world around her, particularly war.⁴ As Mark Hussey argues in his introduction: “*all* Woolf’s work is deeply concerned with war” (3).⁵ This emphasis on war has not led to a uniformly warm reception of Woolf’s pacifist treatise *Three Guineas*. Initially, the book was displaced from Woolf’s canon as too political and, in some cases, too angry. As Showalter argues, “*Three Guineas* ... was the book nobody liked—not even Leonard. Not only did it advocate an almost total withdrawal from male society, on the lines of *Lysistrata*, but it also refused steadfastly to be charming” (*Literature* 294). Furthermore, Showalter explains that “[many] people were infuriated by the class assumptions of the book, as well as by its political naiveté” (294). In more recent decades, critics such as Karen L. Levenback and Naomi Black reappraise *Three Guineas* as an important book for the intellectual history of war and feminism. For Levenback, it is Woolf’s political book on war; for Naomi Black, it is “the best, clearest presentation of Woolf’s feminism” (1).⁶ Because *Three Guineas* is an overtly political text, it requires us to rethink Woolf’s relationship to aesthetics, feminism, and pacifism.

While Woolf often contrasted herself to the Victorians, her thinking reflects a Victorian inheritance not dissimilar from Britain’s. In this chapter I argue that Woolf rejects the separate spheres and continues a Victorian feminism that echoes both

⁴ David Bradshaw explains “as we read Woolf’s novels, we are prompted to question how and why we read fiction and to acknowledge the limitations of our answers—it is only relatively recently that the degree to which her novels seem designed to extend out ethical and political ‘sympathies’ has begun to be recognized” (124).

⁵ For Woolf’s relationship to war, see the essays collected by Hussey and also by Jane M Wood; see also, Nancy Topping Bazin and Jane Hamovit Lauter.

⁶ For more on Woolf’s relationship to feminism, see also: Zwerdling; Black; Rachel Bowlby; Sowon S. Park; and Levenback’s “Introduction: ‘A Chapter on the Future’” in Wood.

Schreiner and Egerton. While carrying forward Schreiner's call for equality, Woolf remains skeptical of institutional reform and locates feminist resistance within private sphere reconfigurations, as Egerton does. Woolf turns away from the images of maternal sacrifice in order to advocate for moral integrity and self-development over self-renunciation.⁷ In short, she reconfigures the private sphere as an outsider's space of resistance to tyranny while at the same time emphasizing the political and public implications of this reconfiguration. Furthermore, Woolf's reinvestment of marginalization as a site of defiance extends the work of Lee, and when this outsider vantage point is combined with Egerton's emphasis on a reconfigured identity within the private sphere, Woolf constructs a feminist pacifism in which the private individual is reconfigured in order to defy both patriarchy and war. This way of making the private speak to the public is illustrated by Woolf's use of Antigone in *Three Guineas*.

Alex Zwerdling insists that "[reading] the whole career through the lenses of *Three Guineas*" mistakenly reduces Woolf to a singular viewpoint, and that *Three Guineas* "does not represent her earlier attitudes" (33), but I echo Eveline Kilian's assertion that "we can perceive in Woolf's thought and a clear link between her political concerns and her aesthetic project" (160). While *Three Guineas* was published late in Woolf's career, I argue that her feminist pacifism and reworking of Victorian feminism can illuminate earlier novels, such as *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). *To the Lighthouse* links the violence of the separate spheres to the violence of war, but when viewed through the lens of *Three Guineas*, Woolf more clearly shows how maternal self-sacrifice is an active participant in the cycle of violence; while Woolf

⁷ For more on the relationship of privacy, publicity, and audience, see Snaith.

mourns the loss of the Victorian mother, she reconfigures her legacy through Lily Briscoe, who evinces outsider strategies discussed in *Three Guineas*. While the Great War is reflected in the background of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf places it in the foreground in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Critics have long debated the relationship between the socialite wife Clarissa Dalloway and the returning soldier Septimus Smith, and I argue their connection is clarified by Woolf's discussion of Antigone in *Three Guineas*. Clarissa is able to interpret Septimus's suicide as an act of defiance and thus properly mourn his body. While this takes place in the private sphere—and in the privacy of her thoughts—I argue Clarissa's act of interpretation defies the state, which has rejected Septimus's body. This analysis reflects that the language of warfare is not only part of the gender discourse, but that gender ideology—as I have shown in this dissertation—is also an intimate part of the discourse of the World War I. This analysis locates a late Victorian inheritance in Woolf by rereading her through the politics of Schreiner and Egerton.⁸

Rereading Three Guineas

Nowhere is Woolf's interrogation of her Victorian inheritance clearer than in *Three Guineas*. Woolf's authorial persona responds to a request for her subscription to and membership in an anti-war society, but in order to entertain this request, Woolf locates her argument in Victorian—and especially late Victorian—feminist concerns regarding education, the professions, and citizenship. By returning to the Victorian ideology of the separate spheres, Woolf—like Britain—traces a genealogical link

⁸ In this way, I agree with Ellis that Woolf's work shows both "affiliation with and dissent from her Victorian past" (2).

between the tyrannies of gender and the tyrannies of war. While Brittain makes sure to highlight that she is telling the narrative of the war from a woman's perspective, her thinking is more in line with equality feminism, and she consistently presents herself as a comrade to her soldier cohort. Woolf by contrast makes explicit use of sexual difference in her discussion of war in *Three Guineas*: "though many instincts are held more or less in common by both sexes, to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's" (9). Woolf describes this difference as a gap between herself and her male correspondent: "And the result is that though we look at the same things, we see them differently" (7). This sets off Woolf's discussion of how she can prevent war as a woman.

Woolf's analysis focuses on women's equality and a disruption of the separate spheres ideology. She argues this is the only approach for the daughters of educated men, because they are the "weakest of all the classes in the state" and they "have no weapon with which to enforce [their] will" (16). In the first section, Woolf argues that the daughters of educated men require entrance to university education in order to prevent war. Education will lead to the professions, with their economic resources, privileges, and influence over political affairs. This echoes traditional feminist calls for equality through access to institutions and resources. But Woolf becomes suspicious that admission to the universities will necessarily lead to war-prevention, because, she argues, education does not "[teach] the educated generosity and magnanimity," but rather teaches students the value of "force and possessiveness": "And are not force and possessiveness very closely connected with war?" (38). This line of questioning leads to an internal dialogue within *Three Guineas* about the terms for asserting and accepting women's equality in the public sphere. If equality grants access to institutions, this, she argues, does not necessarily

prevent war, as the institutions themselves are implicated in the dominant values that justify war. Like Lee, Woolf argues that force and possessiveness are values implicated in war ideology. Woolf's suspicions lead to a series of questions about how best to seek access to education while challenging the system of war. Responding to a women's college secretary also seeking funds and support, Woolf asks: "If I send [the guinea], what shall I ask them to do with it? Shall I ask them to rebuild the college on the old lines? Or shall I ask them to rebuild it, but differently? Or shall I ask them to buy rags and petrol and Bryant & May's matches and burn the college to the ground?" (42). In other words, should the college continue the dominant traditions, reform with new values, or simply be declared corrupt and subsequently destroyed?

On the surface, this looks like a discussion between Woolf and the secretary, but I would argue that at a deeper level these three options reflect a recurring debate within feminism over methods of engagement. To rebuild it on the "old lines" represents an equality based on masculine culture; to rebuild it differently represents reform; and to destroy the college represents a radical rejection of the institution as inherently corrupt. These methods reflect the divide between Schreiner and Egerton's political strategies, and while those strategies are not limited to Schreiner and Egerton, they represent broader divisions in feminist thinking. Schreiner argues that women's equality in education, work, and government is essential to war prevention; women must extend their influence into the public sphere, working from within to challenge the institutions that lead to war. In Schreiner's thinking is a tension between gaining access to masculine institutions and reforming those institutions from within. She reflects the first two options in Woolf's questions about access and reform—to inherit on the old lines or rebuild

differently. Egerton—by contrast—remains skeptical of social reform, arguing instead for an oppositional stance to patriarchal institutions and a different kind of liberation based on redefining women’s identities. This radical suspicion and rejection of patriarchal institutions is reflective of Woolf’s option of rejecting the college and burning it to the ground. Woolf’s line of questioning is a consideration of inheritance: what are the legacies of patriarchy within the education system and how might women enter that system while still pursuing both equality and peace? How might they enter it as feminists and pacifists? This is an attempt to define feminism on pacifist terms—access is not enough to intervene in war.

Woolf favors either rebuilding the college differently or burning it to the ground.⁹ She recognizes, however, that fundamentally changing the directives of the education system will be impractical, and thus, she considers burning it to the ground: “let the daughters of educated men dance round the fire and heap armful upon armful of dead leaves upon the flames. And let the mothers lean from the upper windows and cry, ‘Let it blaze! Let it blaze! For we have done with this ‘education’!’” (45). If an institution cannot be rebuilt on new lines and must continue perpetuating the ideals of war, then Woolf advocates for its radical destruction. Her options reflect a fundamental tension within feminist thinking—does social reform come from the individual or the institution? This tension is reflected in the different perspectives of Schreiner and Egerton, as Schreiner argues for institutional reform and Egerton emphasizes reconfiguring the individual in opposition to patriarchal structures.

⁹ She envisions a new college that would be affordable, open to all, and centered on how to pursue a good life holistically (43). It would counter the nationalist ideologies of dominance, rejecting all forms of competition, including the support of empire and war.

Ultimately, Woolf concedes that neither feminist strategy is practical. In order to achieve equality, the daughters must have access to education though, “they must follow the old road to the old end” (46). Woolf feels compelled to commit her first guinea, even on the troubled terms of the college, because it signifies the possibility of opening women’s professions, away from the singular confines of the private house: “we must help to rebuild the college which, imperfect as it may be, is the only alternative to the education of the private house. We must hope that in time that education may be altered” (49). Woolf reveals the limitations of social reform, because within masculine-dominated institutions, the most practical course is simply to inherit the old system on the old lines. This inheritance may eventually lead to equality that can prevent war, but it is troubled by its connection to the systems of war.

While World War I challenged the division of the separate spheres, Woolf contends the psychology of the separate spheres continues to wield control over women’s lives. Woolf asserts that educated society is still divided between “the sons of educated men” who “work as civil servants, judges, soldiers and are paid for that work” and “the daughters of educated men” who “work as wives, mothers, and daughters” (66). Woolf quotes a writer in the press: “Homes are the real places of the women who are now compelling men to be idle. It is time the Government insisted upon employers giving work to more men, thus enabling them to marry the women they cannot now approach” (63). Postwar society is reinvesting in the separate spheres at the same time that Woolf is being asked how women can prevent war. As she does throughout *Three Guineas*, Woolf connects the problems of the women’s movement to the problems of rising fascism and war, arguing that that the reinforcement of the separate spheres reveals “in embryo the

creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German, who believes that he has the right, whether given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do” (65). In order to challenge the tyranny of the separate spheres, Woolf synthesizes the public equality of Schreiner with the woman-defined identities of Egerton, arguing that gaining access to education and the professions will help establish “that weapon of independent opinion which is still their most powerful weapon. It is to help them to have *a mind of their own and a will of their own* with which to help you to prevent war” (71, emphasis added). It is not simply that the dictator determines women’s equality under the law, but that they are not granted the individual freedom and will to determine their own lives and identities. Woolf—like Brittain—asserts that the sex war is an “embryo” of the tyranny that exists on an international scale. But Woolf more insistently utilizes the language of individualism and freedom; the problem with the dictator is his power to define the identity of the other.

Recalling Egerton’s skepticism about institutional reform, Woolf questions—as she did with her consideration of education—how entering the professions reflects both access to an institution and an inheritance of ideals. As she surveys a procession of the sons of educated men, Woolf asks, “do we wish to join the procession or don’t we?” (76). Like Brittain, Woolf examines how feminism might be deployed for pacifism, how her guinea “shall be spent in the cause of peace” (72), but in contrast to Brittain, Woolf is skeptical that these ideals can be reformed. What do the daughters inherit from their brothers by joining the procession? Woolf describes this masculine inheritance as an induction into patriarchal ideology wedded to nationalism and imperial dominance: “You will have to perform some duties that are very arduous, others that are very barbarous.

You will have to wear certain uniforms and profess certain loyalties” (85). This subordination and obedience to “God and Empire” is like “a dog-collar, round your neck” (85). This means that by entering the procession, women “will have to lead the same lives and profess the same loyalties that professional men have professed for many centuries” (85). Woolf argues that the professions not only demand obedience, but that this obedience harms professional men spiritually. The work day “leaves very little time for fathers to know their children,” nor does it allow for other important relationships, such as “friendship, travel or art” (85). The world of masculine work emphasizes competition at the cost of moral and spiritual wellbeing. Woolf concludes that joining the procession is dehumanizing, as success in the professions results in a loss of “senses” from pursuing wealth in a competitive climate: “What then remains of a human being who has lost sight, and sound, and sense of proportion? Only a cripple in a cave” (87-88).

Because this inheritance is corrupting, Woolf asserts a tension—a feminist pacifist dilemma—between gaining access to the public sphere (Schreiner) and condemning that access as complicit with patriarchy and war (Egerton). She describes this dilemma as being “between the devil and the deep sea”: “Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed” (90). Woolf emphasizes that this choice between the patriarchal private house and the patriarchal public sphere is a “choice of evils,” because both spheres perpetuate sexism and war through forms of subordination and oppression. Presented with this choice of evils, she asks, “Had we not better plunge off the bridge into the river; give up the game; declare that the whole of human life is a mistake and so

end it?” (90). This radical form of agency attempts to opt out of the feminist dilemma entirely by refusing the inheritance of both spheres. But rather than end there, Woolf theorizes an alternative to suicide, a way women might enter the professions “and yet remain civilized human beings ... who wish to prevent war” (91). She does so by reworking gender marginalization as a politics of resistance.

While critics tend to emphasize Woolf’s split from the Victorians, Woolf herself demonstrates a continued interest in examining Victorian legacies. Like Brittain, she is highly critical of the separate spheres: “The intensive childbirth of the unpaid wife, the intensive money-making of the paid husband in the Victorian age had terrible results, we cannot doubt, upon the mind and body of the present age” (95). In order to find an alternative to the feminist pacifist dilemma, Woolf turns to the professional woman of the nineteenth century, and in doing so, she establishes a feminist Victorian inheritance. Woolf turns the experiences of exclusion into forms of resistance to patriarchal ideology. Early professional women had an “unpaid-for education” by the teachers of “poverty, chastity, derision ... [and a] ‘lack of rights and privileges’” (94). She contrasts the uniforms and loyalties of masculine privilege with the feminine “freedom from unreal loyalties” (94). The unpaid education and unpaid professions have their own *unwritten* “laws, traditions, and labours” (95), which have furnished their own “great virtues” (96) learned through exclusion from the institutions of privilege. This exclusion—while a site of inequality—becomes a valuable resource for engaging the public and private spheres differently.

Rather than reform dominant ideals as Schreiner and Brittain do, Woolf locates resistance in reconfiguring experiences of exclusion and oppression, a move that she

shares with Egerton and Lee. The virtues of exclusion are the four great teachers of poverty, chastity, derision, and freedom from loyalties. Each of these was a tool of patriarchy, but Woolf looks to the Victorian professional woman to reconfigure these tools as valuable for entering the professions differently than her brothers—and thereby disrupting war. She revises poverty to emphasize just “enough money to live upon” in order to be independent, so as to avoid greed and competition (97). Chastity is transformed away from the body to the mind by “[refusing] to sell your brain for the sake of money” (97). Derision becomes a refusal of fame and praise, a denial of egotism, which Woolf links to war: “Directly badges, orders, or degrees are offered to you, fling them back in the giver’s face” (97). And finally, because women were not equal or included in institutions of power, they are “free” from group loyalties—what Woolf calls “unreal loyalties”: professional women must “rid [themselves] of pride of nationality” and any other group memberships. The four great teachers are a result of women’s unequal treatment under the law: “The law of England sees to it that we do not inherit great possessions; the law of England denies us, and let us hope will long continue to deny us, the full stigma of nationality” (99). This final statement echoes Lee, who similarly argues that patriotism and nationalism contribute to war ideology. Rather than simply extend women’s roles into the public sphere, Woolf reconfigures the traditions of the Victorian feminist and the private house to become an asset, prioritizing moral integrity as a way of entering the public sphere of education and the professions.

Woolf’s argument that women must have equality in education and the professions in order to prevent war is set alongside her assertion that inequality has provided an outsider’s advantage when entering education and the professions. Again,

this might appear contradictory, because she seems to argue that equality is both desirable and undesirable. This reflects two sides of a debate within feminism between public reform and private liberty. When she make the case that women must enter the professions, but must do so differently than men, she brings both Schreiner and Egerton together. Now “the daughters of uneducated women” do not burn down the house, but dwell in a new house and sing: ““We have done with war! We have done with tyranny!’ And their mothers will laugh from their graves, ‘It was for this that we suffered obloquy and contempt. Light up the windows of the new house, daughters! Let them blaze!’” (100).¹⁰ Defiance against the tyranny of the separate spheres is envisioned through the construction of a new house in which mothers and daughter dwell; Woolf reconfigures the female-embodied home as a way of engaging the public sphere on feminist pacifist terms.

Woolf argues that the movement into the public sphere is a violent transformation into masculine culture, as public membership changes the “private brother” into “a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially” (125). Membership in this culture—within social discourse more broadly—fosters that which is “most selfish and violent, least rational and humane in the individuals themselves” (125). In “Now Spring has Come,” Egerton writes that society leads to a form of slavery: “It seems as if all the religions, all the advancement, all the culture of the past, has only been a forging of chains to cripple

¹⁰ Woolf links herself to the previous generation when she writes that the mothers laugh from their graves, knowing their suffering yielded this moment of rebellion and declaration against all forms of tyranny. This generational imagery recalls Schreiner’s vision of progress, but the mother’s laughter is further reflective of Egerton, who utilizes laughter in her writing as a form of rebellion.

posterity, a laborious building up of moral and legal prisons based on false conceptions of sin and shame, to cramps men's mind and hearts and souls, not to speak of women's" (16). Woolf extends Egerton's depiction of culture, writing that society in the largest sense is "an ill-fitting form that distorts the truth; deforms the mind; fetters the will" (*Three Guineas* 125). Woolf contends in *Three Guineas* that women are caught between a private house and public sphere that are both defined through patriarchy, but it is the move from the private to the public that she finds most troubling. In order to move from the private to the public, women will have to cultivate "a mind and will of their own" in order to not simply replicate the masculine values which also support war. They will need to construct a female-embodied home of their own design, transforming the experiences of exclusion into a form of resistance to the tyrannies of gender and war.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf is clearly making a feminist argument for women's equality and freedom from patriarchal tyranny, and she links this argument to pacifism. But, also like Egerton, Woolf resists feminist identity. As Zwerdling argues, "No other element in Woolf's work has created so much confusion and disagreement among her serious readers as her relation to the women's movement. She was a feminist, though she did not like the term" (210).¹¹ Woolf defines a feminist as "one who champions the rights of women," but "[s]ince women can work, the word is obsolete" (121). This definition reflects the mainstream goals of the women's movement—social and political equality in the public sphere—which writers like Schreiner, Sackville, and Brittain advocate. While

¹¹ Zwerdling ultimately argues that Woolf was a feminist, who supported the women's movement but remained detached. Black, by contrast, argues, "Woolf presents a deeply radical sort of feminism. Her feminism was original, yet firmly rooted in the women's movement of her time" (7). Park argues that a more appropriate reading of Woolf is not to pinpoint "Woolf in suffrage" but "suffrage in Woolf" (122), explaining how Woolf had internalized the "culture of suffrage" in her writing (125).

Woolf advances this kind of feminism, she recommends burning the word feminist: “Let us invent a new ceremony for this new occasion. What is more fitting than to destroy an old word, a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its day and is now obsolete?” (120). Feminism is associated with the sex war, which relies upon imagery of women militating against sexism, and in the postwar period, these images were further associated with warfare, pitting men and women against one another. As Kent explains, feminists were depicted as “abnormal, sexually maladjusted women who hated men” (*Making Peace* 112). Furthermore, in the postwar period, “Feminism soon became linked in the public mind not merely with sex war ... but with armed conflict, death, and destruction” (112). Woolf reflects a postwar discourse in which feminism is associated not only with women’s rights, but with militancy, and she separates herself from it.

When Woolf clears away the word feminist, a vision of harmony emerges: “Observe, Sir, what has happened as the result of our celebration. The word ‘feminist’ is destroyed; the air is cleared; and in that clearer air what do we see? Men and women working together for the same cause” (121). The sex war puts men and women at odds with one another, yet Woolf argues that when the word feminism is destroyed, they can work toward the same goals. In order to describe these goals, Woolf returns to the Victorians: “What were they working for in the nineteenth century—those queer dead women in their poke bonnets and shawls? The very same cause for which we are working now” (121). Woolf is shifting the terms away from the sex war to focus on a common enemy of both men and women: “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. Thus we are merely carrying on the

same fight that our mothers and grandmothers fought; their words prove it; your words prove it” (121). Beneath the imagery of the sex war lies a deeper, more fundamental conflict between freedom and the tyranny of the dictator, who is “interfering now with your liberty; he is dictating how you shall live; he is making distinctions not merely between the sexes, but between the races” (122). The sons and daughters of educated men are united in their fight against tyranny, and Woolf calls for this unity, to see their goals as connected.

But in order to protect women’s freedom and their abilities to self-define, she argues they must ultimately work separately. Woolf’s feminist pacifist strategies emerge from the vantage point of exclusion; she is unwilling to relinquish that difference:

Different we are, as facts have proved, both in sex and in education. And it is from that difference, as we have already said, that our help can come, if help we can, to protect liberty, to prevent war. But if we sign this form which implies a promise to become active members of your society, it would seem that we must lose that difference and therefore sacrifice that help. (123)

To join her male correspondent’s anti-war society would be to forfeit the advantages of her outsider position, and therefore, she proposes her own society: “we believe that we can help you most effectively by refusing to join your society; by working for our common ends—justice and equality and liberty for all men and women—outside your society, not within” (125). Woolf constructs the outsiders’ society by building on the work of nineteenth-century women who fought for a mind and will of their own, and

whose inequality established unpaid and unwritten traditions of the private house, turning the experiences of exclusion and oppression into a site of resistance and strength.

When Woolf's narrator refuses to join her correspondent's society and reconfigures herself as an outsider, she brings the work of Egerton and Lee together to form a feminist pacifist politics based on connecting the tyranny of patriarchy to the tyranny of war. But the difference between men and women results in alternate methods of resisting tyranny: "we, remaining outside, will experiment not with public means in public but with private means in private" (134). Woolf argues the outsiders must adopt private sphere tactics based on indifference or "experiments in passivity" (141), mundane but radical refusals to engage in the ideologies of war and patriarchy: "to be passive is to be active; those also serve who remain outside. By making their absence felt their presence becomes desirable" (141). Lee argues that to be "in" the war, one must participate by their faith in the sacred narrative of war—namely through patriotism and the elevation of self-sacrifice—and that in order to be "out" of war, one must refuse this faith. Woolf, similarly, advocates a politics of indifference in order to challenge the system of war.

Woolf reconfigures the private sphere as a space of defiance to war, furnishing three examples of outsider tactics. First, outsiders will refuse military service; since women are already excluded, Woolf argues that this is a simple advantage (126). This stands in contrast to Schreiner, who argued that women could end war through their participation within the military and government. Second, outsiders will refuse to participate in any war work, including munitions or nursing. This diverges from writers like Brittain, who believed strongly in her war work as integral to her cultivation of

pacifism. Finally, outsiders will adopt complete indifference to their brothers' fighting and to patriotism more generally; outsiders "should give their brothers neither the white feather of cowardice nor the red feather of courage, but no feather at all" (129). As such, Woolf advocates refusing the very war work that was reinforced by the separate spheres and feminists who supported the war. This rejection of patriotism culminates in Woolf's famous statement: "the outsider will say, 'in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world'" (129). Like Lee, Woolf rejects nationalism and patriotism as central to the war discourse: "the desire to impose 'our' civilization or 'our' dominion upon other people" (129).¹² Woolf extends Lee's arguments by illustrating how nationalism and imperialism enforce an ethic of imposition, dictating how other people shall live. Though patriarchy has excluded women from the full rights of citizenship, Woolf embraces this status as a form of broader dissent. While these three examples are private and mundane, they reflect a rejection of public values and ultimately national citizenship.

Rejecting public values leads Woolf to analyze the tyrannies of the private sphere. Woolf contextualizes war and pacifism within a longer trajectory of the Victorian separate spheres, mapping her discussion of war onto both the private sphere and the individual. One of these tyrannies involves the daughters' duty to the father. In her analysis of Victorian fathers, Woolf highlights this duty through an example of Sophia Jex-Blake, who wished to work for pay. Her father refused because it would degrade her, but Woolf contends it is more than that: "If she took money from him she remained in his

¹² Park argues that Woolf's radical claim about not having a country is not new, but "was familiar rhetoric to suffragists years before Woolf presented it in *Three Guineas*" (124). I would agree and further add that this rhetoric is also operating in literature as well as political writing, namely Lee's *Satan the Waster*.

power; if she took it from another man not only was she becoming independent of Mr. Jex-Blake, she was becoming dependent upon another man” (157). In this instance, the daughter’s wish to work is interpreted by the father as an affront to his masculinity, which is defined through competition between men. In order to resist this patriarchal control, Woolf contends that Sophia would not only need to resist her class as a lady, but her sex as a woman: “when the lady was killed the woman still remained” (159). The separate spheres ideology relies upon making women *the Sex*: “It was the woman, the human being whose sex made it her sacred duty to sacrifice herself to the father, whom Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Barrett had to kill. If it was difficult to kill the lady, it was even more difficult to kill the woman” (159). In this passage, Woolf strikes at the root of the separate spheres: the daughter’s identity as a “woman” is defined by the patriarchal value of feminine self-sacrifice.

It might seem contradictory to argue for “killing the woman” and establishing the society of outsiders on the basis of sexual difference, but this can be clarified by returning to Egerton’s distinction between an artificial patriarchal construction of “woman” and an authentic female-defined identity. In “The Regeneration of Two,” Fruen declares that women are “always battling with some bottom layer of real womanhood that we may not reveal,” as they wrestle with “the outside husk of our artificial selves” (148). This distinction between authentic and artificial womanhood is reflected in Woolf’s argument both for and against the category “woman,” as she argues for killing the “woman,” but also locating a more authentic womanhood beneath the trappings of patriarchy.

The conflict between the patriarchal construction of womanhood and a woman-identified “mind and will of her own” can be further clarified by examining Woolf’s

essay “Professions for Women,” the lecture that prompted the writing of both *Three Guineas* and *The Years*, and an extension of her work in *A Room of One’s Own*. Like Egerton, Woolf continues the language of warfare in order to describe the battle of the separate spheres within the individual. In “Professions,” Woolf contends that in order to review books as well as write them, she had “to do battle with a certain phantom,” whom she identifies as the “Angel in the House” (278). Woolf argues she had to kill her, because “you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex.” But women who embody the Angel in the House “must charm, they must conciliate, they must—to put it bluntly—tell lies if they are to succeed” (279). Woolf contrasts the self-determination needed in order to tell the truth with the flattery and lies of the Angel. But now that the angel has been killed, “what remained”? Woolf asserts: “now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is ‘herself? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe you know. I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill” (280). In reframing the category “woman,” Woolf opens up a site of multiplicity; while she advances a line of essentialism similar to Egerton, this is not a predetermined identity, but an open and ambiguous space, a word that has yet to be determined.

While Egerton advocates an authentic womanhood, Woolf uses the language of independent thought: a mind and will of her own. This shifts the terms of feminist pacifism from institutional reform to a battle within. Like Egerton and Lee, Woolf contends that the fight for peace and freedom emerges from the individual and from an

ethic of non-imposition. It comes from the individual's moral integrity to oppose violence through acts of passivity and indifference. In "A Psychological Moment in Three Periods," Egerton's protagonist declares: "No power on earth, no social law, written or unwritten, is strong enough to make me tread a path on which I do not willingly set my own foot" (92), and Woolf identifies this kind of moral integrity as the feminist pacifist position. She turns to Victorian feminists and Sophocles' heroine Antigone to clarify how a reconfigured private sphere—a woman-embodied home—might intervene in the public discourses of war and gender.

Woolf argues that within the separate spheres the daughter's duty is defined by her sacrifice to the father, but Antigone offers a contrasting example of "the duties of the individual to society" (98). In the aftermath of a civil war, Antigone elects to bury her brother—an enemy of the state—in defiance of King Creon's decree that he shall remain unburied. Antigone is motivated by a strong sense of moral integrity, arguing that she must honor her conscience and the gods, rather than the King.¹³ Woolf shifts the emphasis from the daughter's duty to the father to her ethical obligation to moral law and the community. Woolf contends that Antigone's claim, which is translated "Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving" (202), is "a far more profound statement of the duties of the individual to society than any our sociologists can offer us. Lame as the English rendering is, Antigone's five words are worth all the sermons of all the archbishops" (98). Antigone's love for her brother and her commitment to her own moral integrity transcends the dividing lines between the public and the private, between ally and enemy. But Antigone's choice to bury her brother not only defies Creon's decree, but

¹³ For an alternate interpretation of Antigone's role in *Three Guineas* and *The Years*, see Swanson.

his patriarchal dominance. Creon makes this clear when he interprets her defiance as a gender rebellion. Sentencing her to death, Creon declares: “Pass, then, to the world of the dead, and, if thou must needs love, love them. While I live, no woman shall rule me” (*Three Guineas* 202). Antigone performs a deeply private ethical act that has extensive public implications.

Antigone’s private act to bury her brother intervenes in the public discourse of war and gender, and Woolf connects this intervention to the goals of Victorian feminists. But she struggles to articulate exactly what those goals were:

They all wanted—but what one word can sum up the variety of the things that they wanted, and had wanted, consciously or subconsciously, for so long? Josephine Butler’s label—Justice, Equality, Liberty—is a fine one; but it is only a label, and in our age of innumerable labels, of multicolored labels, we have become suspicious of labels; they kill and constrict. Nor does the old word “freedom” serve, for it was not freedom in the sense of license that they wanted; they wanted, like Antigone, not to break the laws, but to find the law. (163)

From a feminist perspective, Antigone reinforces gender norms when she does her duty to her brother at the same time that she defies gender norms when she honors the moral law over the patriarchal state; yet, from Antigone’s point of view, she is simply adhering to her own moral integrity and agency as a woman. In obeying her conscience to join in love rather than hate, she defies Creon’s public decree with her private ethical act.

In seeking to find the law—the moral law—Antigone stands in contrast to Creon, who embodies the father and the state. Woolf calls Antigone’s claim “the unwritten

laws,” which she argues the daughters of educated men have sought through “endeavours of an experimental kind” (218). These unwritten laws emerge from the relationship between women’s identities and the private sphere. They are “the private laws that should regulate certain instincts, passions, mental and physical desires. That such laws exist, and are observed by civilized people, is fairly generally allowed ... but [they] have to be discovered afresh by successive generations, largely by their own efforts of reason and imagination” (218). And while Woolf does not set this articulation of feminism in opposition to equal rights, she does put more emphasis on freedom and self-determination. Woolf connects *Antigone* and nineteenth-century feminists to her modern moment, poised between the Great War and the growing sense of a second world war.

When she discusses *Antigone*, Woolf asserts that Creon becomes an ancient representative of the modern dictator: “And [Creon] shut [Antigone] not in Holloway or in a concentration camp, but in a tomb. And Creon we read brought ruin on his house, and scattered the land with the bodies of the dead” (167). Woolf claims that the dictator who divorces the public from the private destroys his own house and country. Woolf turns to Creon as a way of understanding the present, represented by the photograph she returns to throughout *Three Guineas*: “It seems, Sir, as we listen to the voices of the past, as if we were looking at the photograph again, at the picture of dead bodies and ruined houses that the Spanish Government sends us almost weekly” (167). Woolf then uses this picture, which she argues can “arouse hatred,” to establish two central points that result from *Antigone*’s ethics and Woolf’s outsider arguments.

These two insights reflect Woolf’s feminism, which focuses the individual as a more important site of liberation than legislative reform. The first point is that “the public

and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (168). Following the feminists before her, Woolf argues the private is not separate from the public; the desire to impose and dictate the identity and life of another person operates at an individual and national level. Woolf dismantles the separate spheres, but she contextualizes this argument within the discourse of war. The Great War is now part of that legacy, and Woolf situates feminism with pacifism.

The second insight is the private and the public are inseparable within the individual, and therefore, the dictator cannot be separated out as the Other. For while she associates tyranny and dominance with patriarchy and often with men, she illustrates that this will to dominate, to possess, is within all humanity, and it is that common humanity—the will to join in love or hatred—that must be recognized and wrestled with in each generation. The picture “suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure but are ourselves that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure. A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life” (168). In order to change the tyrant, Woolf asserts, we must begin with the self. This echoes Lee, who writes in *Satan the Waster*: “Satan, as all religions have taught, is, actually and potentially, in all and every one of us alike. Hence our chief dealings and wrestlings with that Old Enemy must be in *ourselves*” (117). To ignore or to hate that figure is to deny a common humanity and the relationship between the public and the private within the individual: “For such will be our ruin if you, in the immensity of your public abstractions forget the private figure, or if we in the intensity of our private emotions forget the public world. Both houses will

be ruined, the public and the private, the material and the spiritual, for they are inseparably connected” (*Three Guineas* 168-69). If the separate spheres continue to divide the public from the private—as Creon attempted to do by neglecting the moral law of the gods—then civilization will continue to be at war.

Woolf contends that reform begins within individuals before broader social change can occur. North Pargiter says in *The Years*, a novel that originally was written with *Three Guineas*, “What do they mean by Justice and Liberty? He asked, all these nice young men with two or three hundred a year. Something’s wrong, he thought; there’s a gap, a dislocation, between the word and the reality. If they want to reform the world, he thought, why not begin there, at the centre, with themselves?” (384). Without individual reform, “Justice and Liberty” are simply empty words. Antigone illustrates this point by honoring her brother not just with words, but with deeds. In doing so, her actions ripple out into the public sphere.

Three Guineas establishes a feminist pacifist politics based on reworking the private house traditions of nineteenth-century feminists and the ethical engagement of Antigone. Woolf establishes an outsiders’ society whose goal is to “[find] new words and [create] new methods” based on the different experiences of women (170). While she considers the words “Justice, Equality, and Liberty,” they do not quite articulate what she desires. There is a deeper, more fundamental desire for moral integrity and self-determination. The outsiders’ society shares the pacifist goal “to assert ‘the right of all—all men and women—to the respect in their persons of the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty’” (170). Woolf links the separate spheres ideology to the discourse

of war, not only as a mode of critique, but also more forcefully to argue that feminism should be pacifist as well.

Three Guineas in Fiction

While *Three Guineas* comes late in Woolf's career, I argue we can see her feminist pacifist critique of gender and war in her earlier fiction, particularly in *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. But how does an author facilitate a feminist pacifist politics in her audience while advocating a position and aesthetics of non-imposition? Unlike Brittain, Woolf does not create characters who proclaim their views in didactic political speeches. Rather, she continues to reconfigure the private sphere as connected to the public sphere. Like Antigone, Woolf's private ethics ripple out to the public sphere through her characters' moral integrity and struggle for self-determination. When her characters do battle, it is an inward struggle with the separate spheres, and her characters offer acts of defiance, utilizing the virtues of the private sphere and experiments in passivity in order to intervene in the discourses of gender and war. In what follows, I utilize Woolf's feminist pacifist aesthetics as a way of reinterpreting *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. In both novels, Woolf interrogates the legacies of the separate spheres and the Great War. Both Lily Briscoe and Clarissa Dalloway depict the value of reconfiguring the private sphere as a site to defy the tyrannies of patriarchy and war. Both novels demonstrate the discursive move between the way warfare is part of the separate spheres ideology, particularly in *To the Lighthouse*, and how gender is an integral part of the discourse of war, as I show in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Woolf's writing reflects the feminist move of both critiquing the private sphere as a space of patriarchal tyranny and reconfiguring it a site of feminist liberation and defiance. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf explains her aesthetic philosophy as searching "behind the cotton wool [of daily life]" for "a hidden pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art" (13). This writing philosophy takes the ordinary and mundane experiences of the individual and works to establish a pattern of artistic connection. Woolf establishes a symbolic relationship between the individual and the social, reading the private outward into the public. Bazin and Lauter explain that Woolf's fiction "exposes, analyzes, and subtly condemns patriarchal attitudes.... by using seemingly trivial but highly significant details of daily life" (26). As a result, Woolf shows that "the problems of the state are rooted in the family" (Bazin and Lauter 26). Woolf's feminist pacifism encourages us to not only look for the pattern within the mundane and domestic, but to link this pattern to her critiques of the separate spheres and war.

Woolf's fiction consistently stages the private as an embattled site, reflecting the way the language of warfare is built into the ideology of the separate spheres. When Woolf sets up the private sphere, it is suggestive of the public sphere, and this extends her feminist pacifist politics into her aesthetic goals. This way of reading the public in the private is further clarified by considering Woolf's comments regarding her mother in "A Sketch of the Past." Woolf explains that her mother was an "invisible presence" in her life, and she connects this haunting to other cultural ghosts:

She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life. This influence, by which I mean the consciousness of

other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that. (14)

Her mother's ghostly presence becomes symbolic of the way discourse itself haunts the individual. This discursive haunting operates at a psychological level within the privacy of the individual, yet because it is discursive, it also connects the individual to public discourse. By moving the battle for peace within the individual, Woolf sets up a political aesthetic which situates the private sphere as a way of interpreting broader cultural forces operating in the public sphere.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf rejects the Angel in the House at the same time that she reclaims virtues from the domestic sphere. The private house by the sea becomes the site of the separate spheres and is subsequently reconfigured as the birthplace of Lily's art. The Ramsays become symbolic of the separate spheres and its breakdown during the war; the structure of the narrative follows this trajectory as part one represents an "idyllic" pre-war house and Victorian marriage, followed by the dark center of the war and the empty house, and the final section of the broken family's return. In the middle section, "Time Passes," Mrs. Ramsay's death is connected to two other deaths—her daughter Prue dies in childbirth, and her son Andrew dies as a soldier in the war. In the context of war writing, the mother's body is linked to the battlefield itself, and by layering these three deaths together, Woolf establishes a way of reading the death of the Angel in the House as connected to both the vulnerabilities of motherhood and war. Woolf's rupture of the Victorian household both mourns and resists that mourning

through Lily Briscoe. Lily offers the viewpoint of the outsider, and she embodies an act of defiance that resonates with Woolf's feminist pacifist experiments in passivity.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf analyzes the "psychology of tyranny," and much of this tyranny revolves around the feminine embodiment of sympathy. Mr. Ramsay depends on his wife to create a maternal shelter for his ego; through her sympathy and self-sacrifice, she must continually reinforce her faith in him in order that he might continue his work. New Woman writers challenge this Victorian gender ideology, but sympathy remains an important mode of connection for Schreiner and Egerton. For Schreiner, sympathy becomes a core virtue of her maternal feminist ethics, which are extended outward to a world in need; for Egerton, sympathy is cultivated between women (mostly) in order to solidify a female community. Like these writers, Woolf is invested in sympathy as a mode of connection and understanding, especially between women, but because it is the quintessential feminine virtue within patriarchy, she illustrates how the demand for sympathy becomes tyrannical when linked with an imposition for self-sacrifice. Mrs. Ramsay is the Angel in the House. In "Professions for Women," Woolf describes the angel as being "intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily.... she was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others" (278). This language contrasts with Woolf's desire that women should have "minds and wills of their own" in order to write, but also in order to live free of private tyranny, which Woolf links with patriarchal imposition.

One example of patriarchal imposition is the psychological battle between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, in which he demands sympathy of her. Woolf displays the highly sexualized nature of this subordination, in which Mrs. Ramsay gives and Mr. Ramsay takes for his ego: “It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life” (1263-74). Focusing her psychological energy on his ego drains her of her own vitality and restores him within the shelter of the female-embodied home. Her restoration of his ego comes at great cost to herself: “So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent” (1282). She makes a home for him, but it hollows her out. He is “like a child who drops off satisfied,” and Mrs. Ramsay collapses in on herself, as “one petal closed in another, and the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon itself, so that she had only strength enough to move her finger, in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion, across the page of Grimm’s fairy story” (1282-91). While Mrs. Ramsay derives pleasure and meaning from this maternal restoration of her husband, Woolf shows that the emptying of herself comes at great cost. But Woolf also shows how Mrs. Ramsay’s faith in her husband is part of the cycle of patriarchal imposition, a faith and violence Woolf links to the perpetuation of war.

In *To the Lighthouse*, tyrannical imposition not only characterizes Mr. Ramsay, but some of Mrs. Ramsay’s behaviour as well. As the Angel in the House, Mrs. Ramsay helps maintain the patriarchal order with her sacrificial femininity. She consistently tries to impose her will on Lily in her belief that all women must marry (1120), and she

struggles with Mr. Carmichael's presence because he does not need her and resists her attempts to give him something (1388). In this way, her identity is defined by this concept of herself as a maternal and sacrificial woman: "For her own self-satisfaction was it that she wished so instinctively to help, to give, that people might say of her, O Mrs. Ramsay! dear Mrs. Ramsay ... Mrs. Ramsay, of course!" and need her and send for her and admire her?" (1329). Like Lee, Woolf illustrates that self-sacrifice is less a renunciation of self than an imposition upon the other.

Mrs. Ramsay declares to Lily that "they all must marry" because "an unmarried woman ... has missed the best of life" (1432). Mrs. Ramsay has one gendered vision of the world and attempts to impose it upon others. She discounts Lily's work as an artist and places her value within the separate sphere of marriage. Lily must expend energy resisting this confining definition of her identity: "she would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself" (1432). Here, Woolf shows how this sacrificial nature is also wielded in service of the self and that sacrifice is no more altruistic than receiving that sacrifice. Mrs. Ramsay imposes the separate spheres on Lily by asserting that her singleness misses the "best of life," in other words, motherhood.

In the final section of *Three Guineas*, Woolf asserts that her readers must not make a villain of the dictator and hate him, because they share a common humanity. As such, men—the patriarchs—are not the only ones who are culpable of tyranny, but also women, and more specifically, mothers. In *The Years*, North Pargiter reflects on the links between motherhood and tyranny when he considers both Maggie and his Aunt Milly. Looking at Maggie's hands, he thinks: "They were strong hands; fine hands; but if it were

a question, he thought, watching the fingers curl slightly, of ‘my’ children, of ‘my’ possessions, it would be one rip down the belly; or teeth in the soft fur of the throat. We cannot help each other, he thought, we are all deformed” (*The Years* 360-61). While the maternal is associated with sacrifice and sympathy, North reflects that there is also possession, defence, and ultimately the possibility of violence. This echoes Lee’s assertion that familial relationships are not inherently altruistic, but operate within the circles of possession: my family, my nation. Woolf shows the separate spheres is not simply about men, but an entire ideological system which establishes a cycle of violence, reinforced by masculine dominance and kept in place by feminine self-sacrifice.

This patriarchal system of masculine dominance and feminine self-sacrifice is symbolized by the Ramsay household and in the home Mrs. Ramsay creates. When she dies, the faith that upholds Mr. Ramsay’s sense of self and unifies the house fails. This maternal shelter is broken both literally and symbolically in the novel. While first section of *To the Lighthouse* blends an idyllic longing for the past with a critical appraisal of the separate spheres, the second section shows the breakdown of the Victorian home, as Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew die during the war. Their deaths are layered together in the second section to form a symbolic connection between the Angel in the House and the vulnerabilities of motherhood and war.

The decline of the house marks the progression of the war, but it also tells another story about the breakdown of the Victorian family. At first, the war is depicted as an engulfment: “Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias”

(2422). While the language of deluge is common to wartime writing, Woolf redirects this language within domestic imagery, illustrating that the war was not simply happening “over there” but had no boundaries. As a representation of the war, nature is a force of destruction upon the house, and the narrator questions whether it can ever be made whole again (2449-57). At this point, we learn of Mrs. Ramsay’s death: “Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty” (2458). The empty arms, the broken treasures, and the engulfment of the house by the sea create an image of war’s destruction and a rupture with the past.

While “Time Passes” registers death and destruction, the house is empty but still standing, and Woolf continually seems to ask in her writing, after a destruction or death, what remains? At first, a modernist impulse might be to create images of alienation, fragmentation, and barren wastelands. Woolf’s imagery in *To the Lighthouse* demonstrates a sifting through the fragments, so that the question of “what remains” asks both what has been broken and what is left. While Bazin and Lauter contend that “nature takes over in the absence of civilized life to illustrate the threat World War I posed to the social order” (38), I would suggest that the nature imagery not only functions as an agent of destruction, but also regrowth. The empty house is a haunted house, but a fertile one: “What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?” (2588). The abandonment of the house has yielded a new formation, one in which nature occupies the house and establishes its own order within the domestic: “Nothing now withstood them; nothing said no to them. Let the wind blow; let the poppy seed itself and the carnation mate with the cabbage. Let the swallow build in the drawing-room, and the thistle thrust

aside the tiles, and the butterfly sun itself on the faded chintz of the arm-chairs” (2588). This imagery symbolizes the disruption of the Victorian separate spheres by registering the war through domestic imagery, telling the war through its changes to the family and the private house. This imagery reflects both the losses in the middle section, but also the possibility of something new to emerge. Lily becomes part of that new order, as she sifts through the fragments of Mrs. Ramsay’s legacy in section three.

In the third section, the family, Lily, and Mr. Carmichael return to the lighthouse, but it is not the same. Mrs. Ramsay was the central life force which created a home, and now that she is gone, Woolf interrogates the changes wrought on the family, which are suggestive also of the changes wrought on the postwar world. Bazin and Lauter argue that part three demonstrates “A feeling of security that could be found in the Victorian Age has been shattered by the war,” resulting in “permanent loss” (22). In this final section, Woolf, as she does in *Three Guineas*, examines the Victorian legacies in the postwar world. While Mrs. Ramsay’s death is linked to the devastating losses of war, Woolf also continues to sift through the fragments, putting together a new order; Lily is part of this new order. When they return to the lighthouse, she is able to consider Mrs. Ramsay’s legacy, both what Lily breaks from and reconfigures. Mrs. Ramsay’s legacy illustrates that maternal self-sacrifice created a home, but at the cost of perpetuating a cycle of violence; however, Lily also mourns the loss of Mrs. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay’s ability to grasp the moment—language that occurs throughout Woolf’s writing—is linked to the cultivation of home, and Woolf further situates this ability as akin to artistic creation, seeing the pattern behind “the daily cotton wool.” In this final section, Lily

reconfigures the private house traditions away from maternal self-sacrifice to a female-embodied home as a site of self-development and artistic creation.

Lily Briscoe becomes an outsider who reconfigures the private sphere and privacy itself as a means to defy patriarchal tyranny, a move Woolf demonstrates in *Three Guineas* is also reflective of pacifism. In the absence of the mother, Mr. Ramsay turns to Lily—as a woman—to find replenishment in sympathy, but as an artist, she finds his demand for her self-sacrifice at odds with her painting. In order to create, she requires independent thought, and his demands require that she empty herself in order to create space for him. In her refusal to occupy this feminine subject position, we can see one of Woolf's experiments in passivity, an alternative to the Angel in the House or the path of violence. In Lily's refusal to be the angel for Mr. Ramsay, she also refuses to perpetuate the separate spheres and its cycles of violence.

When Lily resists Mr. Ramsay's demand for sympathy, she engages in a psychological battle over her identity in relation to the separate spheres. The language of gender and warfare are intertwined in Woolf's depiction of their struggle. In the absence of Mrs. Ramsay, there is now a gap, a role he demands should be filled, but Lily prioritizes her art over his needs, and thus defies the Angel in the House: "She could not see the colour; she could not see the lines; even with his back turned to her, she could only think, But he'll be down on me in a moment, demanding—something she felt she could not give him" (2703-13). But in Lily's resistance, she also expresses anger: "That man, she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had

died—and had left all this” (2713). In this moment, Lily reflects on Mrs. Ramsay’s legacy as Mr. Ramsay calls for a reinforcement of the separate spheres.

Momentarily, Lily considers giving into his request in order to dispatch him as soon as possible. In doing so, she would reinforce the gender roles Mr. Ramsay relies on to maintain his tyrannical ego. She contemplates submitting to an artificial performance of the maternal ideal:

Surely, she could imitate from recollection the glow, the rhapsody, the self-surrender, she had seen on so many women’s faces ... when on some occasion like this they blazed up ... into a rapture of sympathy, of delight in the reward they had, which, though the reason of it escaped her, evidently conferred on them the most supreme bliss of which human nature was capable. Here he was, stopped by her side. She would give him what she could. (2717-26)

Despite her decision to relent, she finds herself immobilized by his all-consuming imposition. Mr. Ramsay’s need threatens to swallow her whole: “this was one of those moments when an enormous need urged him, without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy” (2726). This language of force recalls violence, and though here it is emotional and psychological, it represents all forms of violence. His need imposes self-sacrifice upon women as a group and extends the separate spheres beyond his wife to all women. When Lily cannot submit to his demands, she reflects a little teasingly that she is “not a woman” (2728). She has resisted becoming *the sex* through her resistance to self-sacrifice: “A woman, she had provoked this horror; a

woman, she should have known how to deal with it. It was immensely to her discredit, sexually, to stand there dumb” (2745).

Thus far, Lily has utilized silence as a form of resistance, and Mr. Ramsay registers this rebellion: “what woman could resist him?” (2749). But he threatens her soul, everything Woolf argues women should nurture and protect: her mind and will, her freedom and privacy, her moral integrity as an individual. She protects herself in her silence: “They stood there, isolated from the rest of the world. His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet. In complete silence she stood there, grasping her paint brush” (2755). Lily’s silent defiance shifts and she finally speaks, but all she is able to muster is not an offer of sympathy, but a mundane comment about his boots, which breaks the tension and his pressure on her. He responds enthusiastically to this topic, finding his need redirected; Lily calls this new space “the blessed island of good boots” (2761). This gender struggle, so lyrically and minutely detailed, is primarily a psychological battle, as there is little dialogue. This reinforces Woolf’s depiction of how the violence and tyranny associated with war can also be seen in the warlike violence inherent in the separate spheres.

The separate spheres create a cycle of violence in which Mrs. Ramsay sacrifices herself in order to restore Mr. Ramsay’s faith in himself. But Mrs. Ramsay’s construction of faith in him is hollow and it creates a cycle of violence, a cycle Mrs. Ramsay helps perpetuate by elevating maternal self-sacrifice. When Lily refuses to offer him sympathy, she not only defies him, but defies this cycle of violence through non-violent means: a mundane conversation about boots. Lily’s defiance protects her own moral integrity and

enables him to join his children on the boat to the lighthouse, where he surprises them with moments of connection rather than tyranny. Woolf illustrates that though the war initiated a breakdown in the Victorian separate spheres, there is a continued pressure to return to it. But this return only perpetuates the violence which Woolf connects from the private to the public sphere.

By refusing to occupy the feminine subject position, Lily is able to resume her painting. While she denounces Mrs. Ramsay as the Angel in the House in her battle with Mr. Ramsay, Lily mourns her and comes to a point of clarity about Mrs. Ramsay's legacy to her. Lily turns away from maternal self-sacrifice in order to adopt Mrs. Ramsay's ability to find the artistic pattern within the quotidian and thereby form connections. Mrs. Ramsay has a love of life that emerges from the daily, domestic moments of joy and connection, and this is a gift she gives to Lily, a gift that only truly comes to her after Mrs. Ramsay departs, prompting Lily to ask, "What was the meaning of life?" (2860). She concludes that there is no "great revelation" to that question, but only "little daily miracles, illuminations" (2860). Lily learns this from Mrs. Ramsay, who holds a moment with a kind of presence that relates to Lily's painting:

Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)—this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she repeated. She owed it all to her. (2860)

Mrs. Ramsay's "life stand still here" echoes back to Lily; this domestic cultivation brings purpose to life and possesses an artistic quality, emerging from Mrs. Ramsay's ability to create order and meaning within domesticity. Lily tries to capture this meaning in her painting.

Lily has reconfigured an artistic quality from the fragments of Mrs. Ramsay's legacy, but she also resists adopting the legacy whole. She reflects on the dinner party in which she determined never to marry: "She had been looking at the table-cloth, and it had flashed upon her that she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody, and she had felt an enormous exultation. She had felt, now she could stand up to Mrs. Ramsay—a tribute to the astonishing power that Mrs. Ramsay had over one" (3060). That revelation was a coming to herself, and Mrs. Ramsay enables it at the same time that Lily defies Mrs. Ramsay's desires for her life. Lily chooses her artistic vocation over the Angel in the House. Lily's vision reconfigures the private sphere away from self-sacrifice to self-development through her artwork. For some time, she has feared her art would only decay in attics and not serve anyone. It is not until she defies this artistic expectation that she finds confidence that her art need only please herself. In the language of *Three Guineas*, she practices chastity by refusing to prostitute her art to the marketplace. In the end, she accepts that it will be hung in attics or destroyed, but she does not care. The painting is finished, and she has "had [her] vision" (3493). In connecting with Mrs. Ramsay's legacy—both what Lily breaks from and what she extends—Lily embodies Woolf's feminist pacifism.

The novel's ending reinforces this hopeful reconfiguration and disrupts the cycle of violence. Woolf demonstrates a peaceful relationship between the sexes, as Mr.

Carmichael's silence and privacy enable Lily to have her own space. Their private spaces are shared in an unspoken unity: "They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything" (3479).

Without imposition, they share a moment of connection, and this leads him to offer a silent benediction:

He stood there as if he were spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind; she thought he was surveying, tolerantly and compassionately, their final destiny. Now he has crowned the occasion, she thought, when his hand slowly fell, as if she had seen him let fall from his great height a wrath of violets and asphodels which, fluttering slowly, lay at length upon the earth. (3479-86)

Mr. Carmichael's benediction over "all the weakness and suffering of mankind" includes all the tyranny, grief, and trauma that the novel contains, including the numerous deaths in the center section of "Time Passes." These three deaths are contextualized together as maternal images mingle with the battlefield. This largely unspoken, ambiguous ending suggests hope in the momentary reconciliation of Mr. Ramsay to his children and Lily's artistic vision and shared space with Mr. Carmichael. They stand together self and self, neither imposing on the other. This suggests the possibility, even while homeless and at sea, that there might be peace if the cycle of violence can be disrupted.

To the Lighthouse demonstrates how the Victorian private house constructs a cycle of violence. Both the sacrificial mother and the tyrannical father keep the cycle going. Lily sets herself in opposition to both Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay by negotiating her own artistic vision as an outsider to the separate spheres. This vision,

enabled by Mrs. Ramsay's love of simple private moments, is a coming to self. Lily's act of defiance, largely through silence and passivity, enables Mr. Ramsay an opportunity to suspend his dictatorship, if only for a moment. Only then is Lily able to offer him authentic sympathy and finish her painting.¹⁴ In contrast to Kilian's argument that the ending "bears the imprint of irredeemable loss" (157), I would argue that Woolf situates the losses of the Great War within a longer trajectory of the Victorian separate spheres. In doing this, she both breaks from the separate spheres as a symbol of patriarchal violence at the same time that she reconfigures the private house as a space of defiance and creation.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf reaches back to the Victorian separate spheres as way to discuss war. She reconstructs the virtues of the domestic sphere as a mode of resistance to tyranny and war. In *To the Lighthouse*, the legacies of the separate spheres and war are intertwined in the domestic language of the house; in *Mrs. Dalloway*, these legacies are more overtly examined in the heart of London through the relationship between Clarissa Dalloway and the returning soldier Septimus Smith. The relationship between Clarissa and Septimus resists tyranny by reconfiguring the private sphere through outsider strategies.

The landscape of *Mrs. Dalloway* reflects a wounded 1920s London, traumatized by loss and grief in the aftermath of the Great War. Woolf comments, "This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing" (7). While

¹⁴ Kilian interprets the ending as pessimistic: "There is a movement into the future, but it bears the imprint of irredeemable loss, as we can see in Part III: the trip to the lighthouse envisaged in Part I is finally undertaken and Lily Briscoe finally finishes her painting, but the empty space in its centre testifies to the lack of Mrs. Ramsay and the spirit of harmony she represented" (157).

London struggles back to life after the war, Septimus struggles to reintegrate to life beyond the battlefield and suffers from shell shock (PTSD). Initially, Septimus joins the war effort, persuaded by its rhetoric and ideals; for him this is a corner of England “which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (64). Woolf frames his patriotic demonstration as an extension of masculinity: “There in the trenches the change which Mr Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness” (64). Septimus successfully survives the war, returning with his badge of masculine honor as well as an Italian wife, Lucrezia, but his return comes at a cost. The very masculinity that propelled him to war requires his own de-humanization and an indifference to the loss of his closest comrade in the trenches:

when Evans was killed ... Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The war had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. (64)

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf contends that the procession of educated sons is an initiation into the masculine professions. The world of the professions is ultimately dehumanizing, as one by one Woolf identifies the senses which are dulled: “What then remains of a human being who has lost sight, and sound, and sense of proportion? Only a cripple in a cave” (88). Here, that language is extended to the institution of war, as Septimus

internalizes the logic of dominant masculinity: he survives, but he cannot feel. “When peace came he was in Milan . . . and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him—that he could not feel” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 64).

Seeking restoration from war, he turns to Lucrezia to find a feminine shelter, but he becomes increasingly convinced that the dehumanizing lessons of war have followed him home and extend to humanity entirely: “For the truth is . . . that human beings have neither kindness nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness” (66). After examining this brutality in himself, drawn out by the war and the rhetoric of masculinity that fuels it, Septimus asks, “And would *he* go mad?” (67). Septimus represents the returning soldier’s disillusionment and difficult reintegration back into society, but this difficulty is framed less because there is a gap between the battlefield and the home front, and more because Septimus so clearly sees the brutality of war around him at the home front.

The violence that haunts Septimus comes from his own indifference at the loss of his comrade Evans; that same violence is brought home in the medical efforts to cure him by reinserting him in the same gender ideology that led him to war. Dr. Holmes asserts that nothing is wrong with Septimus: “Didn’t one owe perhaps a duty to one’s wife? Wouldn’t it be better to do something instead of lying in bed?” (68). Dr. Holmes accuses Septimus of not fulfilling his national and masculine obligations to his wife, and of not fulfilling his social obligations by working; Septimus is marked as a gender failure by Dr. Holmes. But Septimus believes that human nature has condemned him to death for the

worst crimes against humanity: “that he did not feel” (67). His inability to feel when Evans died is connected to his other “crimes”—that he married Lucrezia without love: “The verdict of human nature on such a wretch was death” (67). Holmes’s refusal to acknowledge Septimus’s illness and his insistence that Septimus take his place within the masculine order reinforces this condemnation. Septimus later reflects while with Sir Bradshaw, “The European War—that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed” (71). While Septimus did earn distinctions during the war, he can only see the failure of friendship. As Cole explains, male friendship stands in for cultural values trumpeted during war: “The friendships associated with combat become important because they humanize and temper the terrible ferocity of war, injecting into mass warfare a hint of the culture’s values: loyalty, love, community, sacrifice, valor” (*Modernism, Male Friendship* 138). This is the narrative, so closely intertwined with gender, which Septimus interprets as a failure. But as Cole further argues, those ideals envisioned by combat friendships were doomed to fail: “despite all its self-presentation as the site of male loyalty, the war destroyed friendship” (148). Septimus interprets dominant masculinity as a failure and rejects it; in Holmes and Bradshaw’s attempts to return him to gender ideology and nationalism, Septimus is further alienated from the nation-state.

While Sir Bradshaw acknowledges what he calls a “complete breakdown” (70) in Septimus, he intends to impose his own methods of “proportion and conversion,” which even more insidiously invoke the patriarchal ideologies of tyranny and violence. Holmes attempts to reinsert Septimus into the separate spheres, but Bradshaw reflects a more fundamental level of tyranny undergirding that system. Bradshaw’s methods of

proportion and conversion represent the patriarchal order, separating acceptable from unacceptable and imposing national order on the individual. Conversion is the tyrannical imposition of the self on the other—the “Goddess whose lust is to override opposition, to stamp indelibly in the sanctuaries of others the image of herself” (75). It is to define another’s identity—“the sanctuary” of another—and Woolf further explains that conversion is sometimes disguised as “love, duty, self-sacrifice” (74). These ideals are predominant within the discourses of the separate spheres and war, as women were called upon to sacrifice for the family within the private sphere, just as men were called upon to sacrifice for the war within the public sphere.

Bradshaw is not the only image of conversion in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Miss Kilman wants to convert Clarissa’s daughter Elizabeth to her religion and supersede her relationship to her mother. Miss Kilman desires to “overcome” and “unmask” Clarissa because Miss Kilman considers her a “Fool! Simpleton!” who has “trifled [her] life away” (91). Woolf depicts this conflict utilizing the same language as Bradshaw—conversion, imposition, tyranny—the language she associates with the separate spheres and war. Miss Kilman thinks: “If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying. You are right! But this was God’s will, not Miss Kilman’s. It was to be a religious victory” (91). Echoing Lee, Woolf illustrates how Miss Kilman’s desires reveal dominance in the guise of religious justification. As she does in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf shows how the desire to impose upon others is not confined to patriarchy only, but is rather a human trait. Septimus uses the language of “brute human nature” to describe

the violence of his practitioners Holmes and Bradshaw, and Clarissa similarly uses the phrase to describe Miss Kilman. The desire to impose one's will on another takes a violent form in patriarchy, but it also emerges in female acts of conversion.

Like Septimus, Clarissa interprets conversion as a form of violence: "Had she ever tried to convert anyone herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves?... love and religion would destroy that ... the privacy of the soul. The odious Kilman would destroy it" (92). But, as she does in *Three Guineas*, Woolf demonstrates that staying focused on the human figure within the image of the dictator is a difficult practice. Clarissa also struggles with "brute human nature," as considering Miss Kilman also rouses her hatred. But this hatred must be resisted because it opens Clarissa to a further layer of violence within herself: "It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul" (9). Clarissa's hatred robs her soul of its serenity and also denies Miss Kilman of her otherness, her humanity. Clarissa, perceiving the conflict between them, both resists Miss Kilman and pities her, and in doing so, her image of Miss Kilman as "some prehistoric monster armoured for primeval warfare" shifts to the "dwindling of the monster" until she becomes "merely Miss Kilman, in a mackintosh, whom Heaven knows Clarissa would have liked to help" (92). In this shift, Clarissa practices what Woolf calls for in *Three Guineas*: to see the human amidst the tyrannical figure. Clarissa offers a contrast in protecting "the privacy of the soul" and wishing "everybody merely to be themselves." While this philosophy appears to Miss Kilman as "nothing" (92), Woolf situates it within her nonviolent ethics of feminist pacifism.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa gestures toward Woolf's feminist pacifism by interpreting the complex directions of violence and reconfiguring the private sphere as a space of connection while maintaining her own privacy of the soul, what I would argue is akin to a "mind and will of her own." As a society wife and mother, Clarissa occupies a space similar to Mrs. Ramsay, but in contrast to Mrs. Ramsay, Clarissa maintains her space within the private sphere without relinquishing her own privacy. This is reflected in her decision to marry Richard Dalloway instead of Peter Walsh. "For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him" (6). Her relationship with Peter is passionate, but it threatens this independence. Richard allows her to be herself, protecting this individual freedom and independence, as Clarissa takes to her own attic room (23).

Clarissa further clarifies Woolf's reconfiguration of the private sphere by reclaiming the work women do in the domestic sphere as akin to art, as many of her female characters are able to discern mundane moments as beautiful. Clarissa strives to cultivate these moments in her day to day life and through her parties as spaces of connection. As Peter explains, "She made her drawing-room a sort of meeting-place; she had a genius for it. Over and over again he had seen her take some raw youth, twist him, turn him, wake him up; set him going" (57). Clarissa's "natural instinct" and care of others stands against the self-serving oppression of the forces of proportion and conversion (58). According to Peter, she has an "atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness" (58). Clarissa reflects that her parties are about celebrating life and connection; in bringing people together, her parties are "an offering for the sake of

offering” (89). Clarissa attempts to offer connection without the imposition of conversion. As Makiko Minow-Pinkney explains, Woolf constructs parties within the framework of artistic creation: “The domestic art of social entertaining can be equated to an aesthetic practice, because both combine people, things, words, shapes, colours together to create an illusion which alleviates the devastating possibility ... ‘that the world itself is without meaning’” (238). Clarissa cultivates a domestic space which both nurtures her own soul and offers a site of connection without imposition. Essentially, Clarissa exists in the private sphere; she does not overtly concern herself with political affairs. But Woolf demonstrates that Clarissa need not campaign for equal rights in order to challenge patriarchy.

Woolf aligns her feminist pacifism more closely with a reconfigured home than with the altruistic figure of the maternal angel. In *Lucrezia*, Woolf reveals that the maternal shelter cannot ultimately protect Septimus from the forces of tyranny. Returning from the war broken and shell-shocked, Septimus is pressured by his physicians Dr. Holmes and Sir Bradshaw to return to normative masculinity, the same masculinity that propelled him to war. His wife does not understand him or his illness, but they have a moment of connection over her hat making: “She was a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes; not Bradshaw; a miracle, a triumph, the last and greatest” (107). This maternal sanctuary soothes him and seems to defy the patriarchal law of Holmes and Bradshaw, but when Holmes breaks into the room to take him away for treatment, Lucrezia cannot protect him from Holmes: “He could see her, like a little hen, with her wings spread barring his passage. But Holmes persevered” (108). Here, the

maternal is unable to protect him from the tyrannical imposition of Holmes and Bradshaw; the same tyrannies that are linked to the separate spheres and war.

Septimus is the outsider, burdened by his visions of brute human nature, who commits a radical act of defiance in his suicide. When Lucrezia is unable to protect him from Holmes, Septimus decides that he will not submit: “Holmes would get him. But no, not Holmes; not Bradshaw” (108), and Septimus flings himself from the window, asserting to Holmes in defiance: “I’ll give it you!” (108). While relinquishing his life, he also makes a radical refusal to participate in a corrupt system of tyranny and exploitation—the systems of proportion and conversion that are linked to patriarchy. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf states, “we, daughters of educated men, are between the devil and the deep sea. . . . Had we not better plunge off the bridge into the river; give up the game; declare that the whole of human life is a mistake and so end it?” (90). Woolf contemplates suicide as an act of defiance and resignation, to be caught between evils and choose neither. This act, emerging from the outsiders’ ethic of indifference, refuses to participate in a system of oppression and tyranny in which the only way to resist is to refuse life. This passage illuminates Septimus’s suicide; it is not as an act of cowardice, despite Holmes’ declaration “The coward!” (108) or despair, but is an act of defiance and agency. His suicide does not redeem the soldier’s sacrifice nor is it reconfigured as a valuable failure, as we have seen with Brittain. Rather, like Lee, Woolf has furnished an act of agency and indifference to war and the nation-state. Septimus’s suicide does not reinforce nationalism or war, but opts out of the violence he perceives within the battlefield and the home front.

By rejecting their attempts to return him to the patriarchal order and dominant masculinity of the war, Septimus's suicide functions as a form of dissent to both the separate spheres ideology and war, making him a traitor to the state. In calling for connection and defiance in his final statements of "Only human beings?" and "I'll give it you," Septimus embodies the soldier's dissent, but his suicide requires interpretation in order to be heard as such. This is the relationship between Septimus and Clarissa; she is able to interpret his suicide. The party that frames the novel draws all the elements together, as Bradshaw tells Clarissa of Septimus's suicide. At first, Clarissa is frustrated that he brings death to a party that should celebrate life (133). But then she begins to understand his death as a protest to Bradshaw's power: "forcing your soul, that was it—if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?" (134). Clarissa perceives Septimus's radical choice as a resistance to tyranny. As Bazan and Lauter assert, "Carefully protective of her own freedom, [Clarissa] understood too why Septimus chose to kill himself rather than turn himself over to doctors who had continually refused to listen to him. They had repeatedly imposed their will upon him. The patriarchy exacts a heavy price from both men and women" (29). Clarissa mediates on his death and understands: "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate.... one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (134). Woolf shows an affinity between the two characters in their resistance to the larger social forces of patriarchy that affect both individual and national relationships between power and violence. Holmes's interpretation of Septimus's suicide as an act of cowardice reinforces the narrative of war—the ideals and rhetoric of war that are tied to gender—

but, Clarissa is able to empathetically interpret his action as one of defiance, as a disruption of the cycle of violence.

Like Brittain's Ruth, the survivor is obligated to interpret the soldier's sacrifice—his voice of dissent—but what does one do with that interpretation? In *Honourable Estate*, Ruth goes out into the public sphere in order to challenge patriarchy and war at the institutional level. She does this to redeem her brother's sacrifice as a valuable failure on behalf of pacifism. But in contrast to Ruth's political speeches, Clarissa remains within her bedroom, contemplating Septimus. Woolf contends in *Three Guineas* that defiance is embodied in private acts that ripple out into the public sphere, which she illustrates in her analysis of Antigone and Victorian feminists. Antigone's private act of mourning her brother—a traitor to the state—defies Creon's patriarchal order. By viewing Clarissa through the lens of Antigone, we can see her interpretation of Septimus as act that honors his dead body, which the state has rejected. Moreover, Clarissa models Woolf's feminist pacifism by internalizing his dissent.

While Clarissa honors his body by hearing his voice of dissent in suicide, she also embodies Woolf's insistence that reform comes from within. After interpreting Septimus's act as one of self-assertion and defiance, Clarissa begins to internalize this interpretation. His act of seizing life in the embrace of death forces her to grapple with the precarity of her own life: "there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear.... She had escaped. But that young man had killed himself" (134). Recognizing her own frailty, she further listens to his act of defiance: "Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace. It was her punishment to

see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success” (134). His suicide recalls her not only to appreciate the frailty of her own life, but to appraise her own follies and weaknesses and initiate reform. This returns her to her cultivation of mundane moments, and she is able to affirm his act: “She felt somehow very like him.... She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living” (135). The novel ends with Clarissa’s return to life and to the party.

Without Clarissa’s interpretation, we might be tempted to read Septimus’s suicide as an act of cowardice or despair, or perhaps simply as the voice of disillusionment, as war takes its final irony in claiming the returning soldier. But through Clarissa, Septimus’s body is honored as a disruption to the cycle of violence. He has betrayed the state by rejecting the gender narrative which propelled him to war and has asked him to reintegrate into the patriarchal system. But because Clarissa is attuned to the voice of tyranny, she hears him, and readers are encouraged to listen. Clarissa’s ability to hear is a result of domestic sphere virtues: the ability to seize the moment, artistic creation within the domestic sphere, and her ethics of non-imposition. Clarissa takes on the role of Antigone giving an honorable burial to someone whose actions betray the state’s imposition of masculine civic virtue.

Clarissa’s interpretation of Septimus’s suicide as an act of defiance carries political implications. But the tendency to read Woolf through traditional feminist goals of political equality in the public sphere misses this reading. Karen DeMeester contends

that while Clarissa has the insight to understand his death, this insight is limited to herself when it should go out into the community:

Clarissa does not ... proclaim aloud in the middle of her party that this young man had killed himself to protest the twin evils of proportion and conversion.... Trapped in Clarissa's consciousness, Septimus's message cannot effect social or political change unless Clarissa herself, through her own actions or testimony, channels it to those in the community who need to hear it. (88-89)

DeMeester fundamentally misses Woolf's reconfiguration of the private sphere as something political. Clarissa's interpretation occurs within the private sphere and yet it ripples out to readers, if they are willing to grapple with the implications of Septimus's suicide and Clarissa's private interpretation. This makes the ending of *Mrs. Dalloway* its own reconfiguration of the private, as the novel itself mitigates the boundaries between private and public through the relationships between author and reader. While Clarissa does not go out into the public sphere, Woolf consistently returns to the private sphere and its relationship to art as a mediator of dissent. For Woolf, art is the site of ethical reform.

To interpret Clarissa's external silence as a political failure misses the alternate form of feminism Woolf builds over the course of her writing. While she argues for women's equality in the world of education and the professions—the traditional route of feminism evinced by Schreiner and Brittain—she ultimately locates her politics of resistance to patriarchy and war through a reworking of the private sphere, as Egerton does. Woolf constructs a community of outsiders in her novels, characters who engage in

a variety of defiant acts based on the methods of the private house traditions—experiments in passivity and indifference. This outsiders’ subject position affords its own advantages—insight, visions, freedom, and a mind and will of one’s own. Woolf makes her case for feminism and pacifism based on these unwritten laws and traditions, turning to nineteenth-century feminists and to Antigone for inspiration. In doing so, her analysis creates a complex relationship to the Victorians and to feminism. On the one hand, she critiques Victorian gender ideology of the separate spheres, and on the other, she argues for a reworking of the private sphere as the location for a feminism that is able to resist tyranny and war. Additionally, she is a feminist who resists feminism. This distinction is clarified by Antigone’s differentiation between moral law and the state. She uses different kinds of language to articulate her ideals of individuality and freedom, her desire to find the moral laws that govern civilization, but they all lead to a protection of the self in balance with respect to the other; she advances a language of individuality within the context of community. Neither the self nor the other is exploited or extinguished through gender, but allowed what she calls “a mind and will of her own” in *Three Guineas* or “the privacy of the soul” in *Mrs. Dalloway*. This constructs an alternate relationship between the individual and society and between private and public. It is the survivors of war—Lily Briscoe and Clarissa Dalloway—who embody Woolf’s feminist pacifism. Lily’s refusal to occupy the role of maternal self-sacrifice disrupts the cycle of violence and Clarissa’s ability to interpret Septimus’s suicide as an act of dissent becomes an honorable burial. Both acts emerge from the private sphere and the privacy of internal reflection, underscoring Woolf’s insistence that reform begins with the inward battles. These acts ripple out from the private sphere mediated by art.

In many ways, Woolf makes similar claims as Brittain does—both argue that patriarchy and war are linked; both construct sympathy and peace between the sexes. Both return to the late Victorian period in order to grapple with legacies of the separate spheres, feminism, and the Great War. Yet they differ in their emphases, as Brittain, like Schreiner and Sackville, propels women into the public sphere in order to disrupt war, and Woolf, like Egerton and Lee, challenges the tyranny within the private sphere of domesticity and identity in order to intervene in the violence of war. Both writers reach back to their Victorian feminist foremothers in order to argue for pacifism. Literary feminism tells the story of the separate spheres and the Great War; writers such as Woolf and Brittain saw them as inextricably linked ideologically, historically, and culturally, and they ultimately argue that in order to achieve the goals of equality and freedom, feminism must be pacifist.

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