PICTURING REPOSE: BETWEEN THE ACTS OF BRITISH MODERNISM

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A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENGLISH

Advisers: Maria DiBattista, Susan Stewart

November 2011
Abstract

In Picturing Repose: Between the Acts of British Modernism, I attempt to retell the dominant and widely accepted story of modernism by considering the importance and prevalence of a "dream of rest" within the shock-effects of modernity. Exploring hitherto overlooked “spaces of time” between the major acts of the period before, during, and after the Second World War in Britain, I offer an alternative to Theodor Adorno’s desperate description of modern life as a series of “empty, paralysed intervals” between “a timeless succession of shocks.” Instead, I uncover the complex and often consolatory counter-pressures exerted by, and within, such intervals. Through an agile play with sightlines, framing, and visibility that resists a transfixing and anaesthetizing flatness, the works of Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, and artists associated with them offer not simply escapes from, but also resources for counterbalancing, a reality that is experienced as in some way overwhelming. Connecting literary works with painting, photography, film, and statuary, I trace the mobility of late modernist aesthetic practices, which draw the reader's and spectator's vision outwards, inwards, and sideways, stretching the limits of the frame in an interplay between different visual, temporal, and affective registers.

Unfolding in three "acts" that address unsettled vision, intensities of vision, and dynamic vision, Picturing Repose proposes that any account of modernism -- and of late modernism in particular -- needs to be wide enough to encompass something more consolatory than the trauma and despair that have largely come to define it. The dominant story about the period, which tells us of fragments shored against ruin, of a relentless barrage of shock and violence, and which largely denigrates what Greene calls
"ways of escape," is correct in intertwining modernism and violence, yet the dream of rest that I consider challenges the heroic and anti-escapist underpinnings of much modernist writing and criticism. Woolf, Bowen, and Greene, I suggest, in drawing upon tactics of disorientation that refuse to let the reader settle or feel comfortable, unexpectedly yoke together an aesthetics of shock and repose in ways that oppose habitual vision and refuse distinct boundaries.

Chapter One, "Voyages Out: Virginia Woolf and Vanishing Points," considers Between the Acts (1941) and the ways in which Woolf's engagement with the pictorial realm in her last novel becomes more fraught than in her earlier works. Set in an English country house on a June day soon before the start of the Second World War, an unsettled, vertiginous vision alternates with moments that seem to aspire to the condition of still life painting. Such moments, in which Woolf continues her extended conversation with the visual arts, and with her sister, Vanessa Bell, in particular, offer a reprieve from the human world; frames dissolve and there is a sense of peril as well as possibility in voyaging out into a realm of silence. Refusing to let the reader settle comfortably, Between the Acts is, I argue, at once anchored and unmoored by its glimpses of worlds of solidity and sensuousness wholly indifferent to the human drama that it describes.

Chapter Two, "Still the Moon: Elizabeth Bowen, Bill Brandt, and Quiet Exposures," brings together the wartime short stories of Bowen and the photographs of London (and other parts of England) taken by Brandt during the blackout and the Blitz. Specifically, this chapter explores the concept of “stillness” in Bowen’s The Demon Lover and Other Stories and in a series of Brandt’s photographs, linking both artists through the language and techniques of pictorial, rather than “snapshot,” photography.
Whereas for Benjamin photography exemplifies the technological assault upon the mind and senses of the modern subject and the disintegration of the aura typical of the twentieth century, I suggest that the stillness enabled by the medium in fact allows Bowen and Brandt to present new “spaces of time” for reverie and repose, however imperiled or disturbing they may be. Their work challenges the longstanding critical association between photography and death, presenting instead “overflows of livingness” amid the cataclysmic disruptions of the war.

Chapter Three, "Ways of Escape: Graham Greene and the Shelter of Blind Spots," considers Greene’s wartime and post-war “entertainments,” *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) and his collaboration with Carol Reed, *The Third Man* (1949). In both of these works Greene takes the genre of the thriller, which is predicated largely on suspense, speed, exposure, and shock, and destabilizes it by carving out unexpected forms of retreat through a play with sightlines and blind spots, forgetting and remembering. Through a dynamic flickering of identities in *The Ministry of Fear*, whereby the protagonist is able to recuperate and the narrative is able to jump-start, as well as a nagging sense in *The Third Man* of what lies beyond our visual field, largely signaled through the presence (or absence) of statues, Greene's (and Reed's) works engage with personal and historical loss, offering the relief of alternative visions and "third" spaces.

I conclude with an epilogue that considers the question of speed and what Enda Duffy calls an "adrenaline aesthetic" in relation to the seeming regressiveness (and transgressiveness) of a dream of rest. An understanding of what Woolf calls "a respite, a pause, perhaps" from a reality experienced as distressing allows us, I suggest, to tell the story of modernism -- or picture it -- afresh.
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Acknowledgments

It is with great delight as well as a sense of wonderment that I take this opportunity of acknowledging the numerous individuals who have supported me and made my life at Princeton immeasurably rich.

I could not have asked for two more supportive, kind, and truly inspiring advisors. Maria DiBattista's sense of perspective, her personal and intellectual grace, and her deep empathy and encouragement, have seen me through not only this project but also graduate student life more generally. Her lively quickness of mind, which swoops in to find what is most promising in a scattered heap of ideas, and her quickness to offer reassurance or thoughts on how to move forward, have, more times than I can count, guided me when I was sure that I was lost. Susan Stewart's compassion, her exhilarating ability to help me think at both the micro and macro levels, and in the most practical and abstract terms, as well as her magical sense of knowing what I'm writing about even when I don't (or think I don't), have also helped me more times than I can count. The ways in which she can catch at ideas and texts from unexpected angles has expanded my understanding of what literary criticism can do. I am endlessly grateful to both Maria and Susan and look forward to continuing our conversations.

My conversations with other faculty members at Princeton over the years have also been wonderfully illuminating. I have delighted in my discussions about reading, writing, and teaching with Michael Wood, and appreciate his deeply humane approach to each of these practices; I am also grateful for my talks with Claudia Johnson, whom I consider to be an inspiring and supportive mentor. Diana Fuss was especially helpful in shaping my ideas in the early stages of the dissertation, and speaking with her never fails to push my thinking further. I have also been fortunate to teach for and learn a great deal from Oliver Arnold and Sophie Gee, who made teaching outside of my field great fun; Bill Gleason, the greatest friend that a graduate student could have; Jeff Nunokawa, whose lectures are always thrilling; and P. Adams Sitney, who has shaped my thinking about film and whose approach to teaching I take to be exemplary. I would also like to thank Deborah Nord for her warm kindness and support and for leading one of the best seminars I have ever taken, and April Alliston for her down-to-earth perspective on academic life.

I am grateful for the extraordinary administrative support of Pat Guglielmi, without whom the lives of all graduate students in our department would soon fall apart (with a welcoming smile and readiness to laugh she makes keeping everything organized seem effortless); for the helpfulness and efficiency of Karen Mink; for the teaching-related support and enjoyable chats with Marcia Rosh; for the kindness and patience of Nancy Shillingford and Trish Doskoczynski; and for the always generous assistance of Kevin Mensch. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, the Princeton Graduate School and English Department, the Princeton Canadian Studies Program and the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. I appreciate being given the opportunity to present my work on Elizabeth Bowen and Bill Brandt at the 2009 International Conference on Narrative.
My advisors from the University of British Columbia were instrumental in getting me to where I am now, and I would like to thank Mary Chapman, Pamela Dalziel and Jonathan Wisenthal for inspiring me with their passion for literature and for helping me feel that I had something worthwhile to say. This past year, Cathy Parrish at Rowan University has also been wonderfully supportive.

I am incredibly lucky to have colleagues and friends whom I greatly admire and who I know, in each and every case, will have bright futures that I look forward to being a part of. This dissertation would not have been completed without the help of Adrienne Brown, who is able, despite the odds, to keep me on track and out of worlds of trouble with her savvy, sense of humor, and the deep compassion that I feel is the gift of the most insightful readers. She and Andy Ferguson form one branch of my Princeton family; the other is comprised of Ana Rodriguez Navas, Ben Whitford, and their truly exceptional daughters, Elena and Beatriz. Ana also offered crucial support in the final stages of writing, and, since I have known her, has inspired me with her quick intelligence, generosity, and amazing resources of energy. My lovely B&B friends, J.K. Barret, Briallen Hopper, Mary Noble, and Rebecca Rainof Mas (my former roommate and the most thoughtful person I know), never fail to impress me with their brilliance, and have cheered me on, cheered me up, and offered support that I will always be thankful for. My writing group -- Wendy Lee (dear friend and inspiration), Renee Fox, Alyson Shaw, and, our honorary member, Barbara Gershen -- have made sharing work and ideas a genuine pleasure. Erwin Rosinberg's sense of fun and his fine sensitivity as a reader of texts and of life have been, and continue to be, a source of delight; I am grateful to him for being such a steadfast friend, and to Paul Kelleher for his warmth and kindness. Jonathan Foltz, the Dale Cooper of academia, has also been a wonderful friend and reader of my work, and I relish our conversations on film, poetry, and how to look at the world through the eyes of love. Jules Hurtado, modernist extraordinaire, has enlivened my life with his playful wit, sportsmanship, and remarkable intelligence. I am constantly amazed by his ability to be right and by his gifts as a scholar, writer, and teacher; with him I am sure I will never run out of things to say.

I am grateful as well to marvelous friends who have made my day-to-day life in Princeton pleasurable and who I always wish I could see more of, especially now that many have moved away: Yaron Aronowicz, Jason Baskin, Roger Bellin, Hall Bjornstad, Michelle Coghlan, Parween Ebrahim, Will Evans, Erin Forbes, Rachel Galvin, Abby Heald, Katie McEwan, Annie Hirsch Moffitt, Ed Muston, Nuria Sanjuan Pastor, Ethel Rackin, David Russell, James Rutherford, Susannah Rutherglen, Ellen Smith, Natasha Tessone, Dave Urban, Sonia Velazquez, Casey Walker, Amelia Worsley, Grant Wythoff, and Wesley Yu. Although I have not seen Colleen Burlington, IlIan Nam, or Debbie Paparone in a while, I think fondly of their friendship and kindness, as well as that of Heather Watts and Onjana Yawnghwe.

My league of extraordinary cousins, whom I deeply respect and admire, have supported and challenged me, helped to distract me and offered me places to stay: especially Eddy, Cathy, Paul, James, and Ian. Finally, without the support of my beautiful family -- my parents, Ik Ho and Kyong Sin Shin, my brother David, my sister-in-law Yvonne, and my
sister Yvonne (who is an amazing support system unto herself) -- and their unshakable, often unreasonable belief in me, I would be nowhere. Their love (and laughter) is restorative, always a respite, always there, and is, I am convinced, all that matters. This dissertation is dedicated, with love and gratitude, to my parents, who always insist that I owe them nothing when in fact I owe them everything.
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Introduction: The Lotus-Eaters

I. "All things have rest"

In 1832 Alfred Lord Tennyson published his poetic account of the Lotus-eaters that Odysseus and his men encounter (and which some of them become) on their voyage home to Ithaca after the nine-year Trojan War. To the mariners who partake of the enchanted fruit of this languid "land of streams," with its lingering sunset and sense of stasis -- "where all things always seem'ed the same" -- "Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar, / Weary the wandering fields of barren foam" (ll. 41-42). As part of their Choric Song, the men lament:

Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
While all things else have rest from weariness?
All things have rest: why should we toil alone,
We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown;
Nor ever fold our wings,
And cease from wanderings [...]? (ll. 57-65)

The powerful longing for a respite from their wanderings and travails conveyed in this song is underscored by the repetitions, alliteration, rhymes, and passive constructions of the poem, which together build up a sense of weight and weary lassitude.¹ Perhaps

¹ Resonating with the mariners' song -- in a very different context and with very different implications -- is a passage from Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987), which expresses a desire to rest and forget, as well as the
unexpectedly, this is the note on which the poem ends ("O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more"), without Odysseus, as he does in Homer's account, actively breaking into the frame to force his men away and onwards, refusing to let them "forget the voyage home," instead "haul[ing] them under the rowing benches, lash[ing] them fast" while the other mariners sit "at the oars in ranks / and in rhythm churn[...] the water white with stroke on stroke"² [Fig. 1].

![Image](image.jpg)

**Fig. 1 Theodor van Cre Thulden, Ulysses and His Companions in the Land of the Lotus-Eaters, 1633**

As James Joyce's Leopold Bloom, in the "Lotus-Eaters" section of *Ulysses* (1922), sets forth on his own odyssey through a June day, he fantasizes about Ceylon, in

almost gravitational force of repetition. The trauma of slavery as experienced physically and emotionally by Sethe understandably threaten to overwhelm her; at one point she recalls the advice of her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs: "She wished for Baby Suggs' fingers molding her nape, reshaping it, saying, 'Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Down. Both of em down. Down by the riverside. Sword and shield. Don't study war no more. Lay all that mess down. Sword and shield.' And under the pressing fingers and the quiet instructive voice, she would. Her heavy knives of defense against misery, regret, gall and hurt, she placed one by one on a bank where clear water rushed on below" (101).

the "far east," as "the garden of the world, big lazy leaves to float about on, cactuses, flowery meads, snaky lianas they call them," "those Cinghalese lobbing around in the sun, in dolce far niente, not doing a hand's turn all day," the land's climate one of "Lethargy. Flowers of idleness" (58). Not limited to an imagined exotic locale, as in Tennyson's poem, lotus-eating becomes a metaphor of bodily languor and mental stupor; Bloom remarks to himself on how the soldiers in a recruiting poster look "[h]alf baked" and "hypnotised" (59), and he remembers an Old Master painting of Martha and Mary with its "[n]ice kind of evening feeling. No more wandering about. Just loll here: quiet dusk. Let everything rip. Forget. Tell about places you have been, strange customs"

[Fig. 2].

Fig. 2 Jan Vermeer, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, c.1654-1655
Echoing John Donne's "Song," with its invitation to tell the speaker "All strange wonders that befell thee" (while removing the poem's bitter sting), Bloom recalls, in latently sexualized terms, how one of the women in the painting "listens with big dark soft eyes" to the words of a fatigued Jesus. "Tell her: more and more: all. Then a sigh: silence. Long long long rest" (65). Bloom likewise observes an incoming train carrying barrels of porter -- the "bungholes sprang open and a huge dull flood leaked out, flowing together, winding through mudflats all over the level land, a lazy pooling swirl of liquor bearing along wideleaved flowers of its froth" (65) -- and muses on the stupefying opiate of religion that "[l]ulls all pain" (66) as well as the lethargy induced by drugs from the chemist's shop (69). He also plans on going to the Turkish bath, this section of the novel ending with him foreseeing "his pale body reclined in it at full, naked, in a womb of warmth, oiled by scented melting soap, softly laved," the sensuous words taking on a botanical and also sexualized register (the language of flowers) as he envisions his pubic hair floating "around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower" (71).

Whether told by Homer, Tennyson, or Joyce, what runs as an intoxicating temptation throughout the narrative of the Lotus-eaters is what Lionel Trilling, in a different context, refers to as a "dream of rest" -- or what Bloom might name a dream of long long long rest. Such a twilight dream (famously evident in John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," with the speaker's desire to "[f]ade far away, dissolve, and quite forget" the "weariness, the fever, and the fret") is certainly a long-standing one and can be traced at least as far back, within a Judeo-Christian tradition, to the longing to return to a

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3 "Song," l. 15.
5 "Ode to a Nightingale," ll. 21, 23.
prelapsarian state of ease and leisure in the Garden of Eden. To wish for respite from a distressing reality and to be part of an organic cycle that allows one to "ripen, fall, and cease" (l. 97), as Tennyson's mariners sing of doing, as well as to forget, seems natural; yet it is often regarded by artists of the twentieth century in particular with suspicion and derision, as patently unnatural. That is, to entertain a fantasy of rest or retreat -- to yield oneself to a kind of peace and to the desire to set down one's heavy burdens -- can seem somehow regressive, childish, indolent, degenerate, dishonest, irresponsible, and even reckless, having the air of "a certain insolence of withdrawal." Linked with Thanatos's pull towards stasis and cessation over the forward-moving drive of Eros (and of narrative), it is often cast as a reversion to an earlier stage of development ("in a womb of warmth") that is invariably gendered as feminine, or even as a regression to an animalistic, a-historical state of existence. It also appears to be fundamentally antithetical to any notion of a modernist aesthetic, which, according to most critical accounts, not only valorizes technology, speed (what Enda Duffy calls an "adrenaline aesthetic"), the shock of the new, and life in the metropolis, but also a vanguard of artists that individually and collectively sought to blast things apart and shatter illusions, -- whether about the hypocrisies of bourgeois life or the inflated rhetoric over the Great War -- thus

6 In the same scene from Morrison's Beloved quoted above, Sethe, wanting only to manage her pain, feels the hands of Beloved on her neck; under them "the anguish rolled down" and the "peace Sethe had come there [the Clearing] to find crept into her" (114).
7 From a review of Woolf's A Voyage Out by A.N.M. (Allan Monkhouse) in Manchester Guardian, 15 April 1915, 4.
8 In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud writes that, "The attributes of life were at some time awoken in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception... The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavored to cancel itself out. In this way the first drive came into being; the drive to return to the inanimate state" (qtd. Cathy Caruth, "Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals," Assemblage, 20 [Apr. 1993], 25).
9 In The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), which I will discuss at greater length in the epilogue.
10 We see the urban disconnect from any organic rhythms in Charlie Chaplin's City Lights, for instance, with the city artificially lit twenty-four hours of the day.
revealing the "truth" and defying the need for any consoling myths. Indeed, the notion of an "avant-garde" is central to most stories that have been told about modernism, with the term itself, as Christopher Reed notes, "drawn from military theory," asserting the "ideals of art as onslaught and of the artist as hero" (2).\textsuperscript{11} To consider the importance of a dream of rest within British modernism, then, as this project will do, seems counterintuitive; moreover, to acknowledge its power may seem an almost perverse and embarrassing, if not shameful, admission. The keen edge of contempt and judgment in Joyce's account of some of the manifestations of "lotus-eating" in the Dublin of June 16, 1904 through which his modern Odysseus wanders, are not, after all, very far from the surface of his text, nor from that of others written and published in the period.

Such scorn is largely tempered with a fuller acknowledgment of the hunger for retreat in \textit{The Return of the Soldier} (1918), a novella that I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 3, yet Rebecca West's shell-shocked soldier who blissfully forgets his war experiences (and indeed, his life after the age of twenty-one), who is protected and vigilantly watched over by two women in his country house, must, after these women decide to help restore his memory to him, return to the Front to face danger and potential death, but at least to live as a man rather than as a coddled child. The narrator, Jenny, tempted to let her cousin continue to live happily and perpetually in his easeful state of forgetting, realizes that "there is a draught that we must drink or not be fully human."

She insists,

\textit{I knew that one must know the truth. I knew quite well that when one is adult one must raise to one's lips the wine of the truth, heedless that it is not sweet like milk}

\textsuperscript{11} In \textit{Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity} (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004).
but draws the mouth with its strength, and celebrate communion with reality, or else walk for ever queer and small like a dwarf. (87-88)

Implicitly contrasting the waters of Lethe (the river of oblivion in Hades) with this "wine of the truth," the novella shows how choosing escape into a "magic circle" of comfort over a painful "communion with reality," however unbearable that reality may be, would be blasphemous to the "divine essential of [the] soul" (88), deforming and twisting it. Facing reality thus becomes a marker of what it means to be truly manly, adult, and fully human, with these three terms becoming largely synonymous, enabled by a maternal, passionate love. To refuse to face the truth would be to willfully accept a lie, which, for Marlow in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), carries with it "a taint of death, a flavour of mortality" that makes him, like a modern Hamlet, "miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do" (129). Marlow cannot tell Kurtz's Intended the eloquent man's last words and final summation of the "universal darkness" -- a cry that, for all its devastating power, reverberating throughout the modernist period, at least bears the "appalling face of a glimpsed truth -- the strange commingling of desire and hate," an affirmation "paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions" (179). Acknowledging that his lie was a damning concession (however, the indifference of the "heavens" to such dishonesty is taken as further proof of the affirming force of Kurtz's assessment of "The horror"), Marlow explains that to take this bereaved woman out of her protected sphere would have been "too dark -- too dark altogether" (186). Outside the realm of fiction, yet remarking upon it, Katherine Mansfield, in a well-known letter to John Middleton Murray, indicts Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day* (1919) for "leav[ing] the war out" (an assessment of Woolf's early novel that could be
challenged). Although she is not responding directly to a desire for rest, her judgment against the novel as a "lie in the soul" is a judgment against an all-too comfortable forgetting and withdrawal from history. She maintains that, "It is really fearful to me the 'settling down' of human beings."

I feel in the profoundest sense that nothing can ever be the same [,] that as artists we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to take it into account and find new expressions [,] new moulds for our new thoughts & feelings. (qtd. MacKay 7)

In a post-war context, the word "traitor" takes on a damning force; to write as if the war had never happened is, for Mansfield, to betray the work of the artist, whose aesthetic is aligned with the "new," requiring "new expressions" and "new moulds" for our "new thoughts & feelings."

It would seem that for most modernist writers and critics of modernism, to in any way withdraw from history or choose to rely on consolatory myths becomes an ethical problem that carries with it comparable overtones of regression, dishonesty, delusion and treachery. Like the genre of the idyll that Trilling discusses in relation to Jane Austen's Emma, any gesture towards retreat appears to be "a betrayal of our awareness of our world of pain" -- one that is "politically inappropriate," especially in fiction, "the art which we believe must always address itself to actuality" (50).12 Similarly, in her 1961 essay "Against Dryness" Iris Murdoch privileges moral as well as aesthetic "difficulty and complexity," seeing human beings not as "isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy" (29). Only the truly great -- the true --

12 An assessment of the genre that Trilling goes on to challenge, discussing how it can have "an important bearing upon social and political ideals" (50).
artists, refuse to deform reality by resisting the consolatory impulse. In other words, if history, to paraphrase Stephen Dedalus in Ulysses, is a nightmare from which one tries to awaken, there is a pervasive sense among several artists of the period that they, like Conrad's Marlow, are obliged to "dream the nightmare out to the end," to dream it vividly in all of its manifestations and to expose its horrors with the affirming if devastating clarity of the dying Kurtz. Yet, as I will argue, the dream of rest, in various forms, does run throughout many works of British modernism, particularly in the years leading up to, during, and after the Second World War, when it was difficult not to envision history as the very darkest of nightmares that one would wish to escape, retreat, and find shelter from. This is an aspect of modernist texts and works of visual art that has not yet been fully considered; in Picturing Repose I am also interested in questioning the reluctance on the part of critics to acknowledge the longing for retreat within works that are not wholly relegated to "popular" genres of escapist fiction that would seem to dispense nostalgic or utopian or idyllic fantasies to readers seeking a temporary release.

Like Marina MacKay's Modernism and World War II (2007), Jed Esty's Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England (2003), and Tyrus Miller's Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars (1999), this study focuses on late modernism. It does so for two primary and interconnected reasons. First, late modernism, as opposed to an explosive, vital period of "High" modernism, is often characterized in terms of decline, diminishment, retrenchment, and, especially,

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13 We might think here of the link that Sarah Cole draws between dynamite and melodrama in "Dynamite Violence and Literary Culture" (Modernism/modernity, 16.2 [2009]: 301-328): "Indeed, the most salient and consistent characteristic of dynamite, as it was imagined and represented in fiction and elsewhere, was the hyperbole and excess it generated -- in a word, its melodrama" (303). Cole's description of how dynamite "[s]hattered, exploded, ripped, and tore; [how] it created its own palpable and recognizable form of wreckage; and [how] its employment for radical causes suggested a future with unknowable and potentially frightful contours," with "dynamite violence" adding "a potent new element to the modern imaginary" (301), resonates with descriptions of High modernism (or simply of modernism) itself.
exhaustion. MacKay and Esty in particular re-script such characteristics as part of distinctive and self-conscious cultural "turns" that engage with "the fading significance of English universalism to the emergent significance of English particularism" (Esty 5) as the British empire shrinks, the nation shifts to a welfare state, and as a "major literary culture" is "caught in the act of becoming minor" (Esty 3). These two studies are largely interested in the intersections between literary culture and wider national and geopolitical shifts: interventions that my project benefits from yet will essentially skirt, exploring instead how Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and Graham Greene as well as other artists engaged more particularly with the experience of war and with longstanding aesthetic and ethical debates, staking their territories in the realm where visibility and knowledge, literature and visual art, historical reality and its alternatives, converge.14

Second, I focus on this later phase of modernism -- and on what Mackay refers to as "public modernism"-- since it is in the decades that include the anticipation, duration, and aftermath of the Second World War15 that, as MacKay argues, "Britain's political culture finally caught up with its interwar avant-garde," creating "a historical moment at which the polemical conflation of poetry and protest, literary and political dissent, ceases to ring true" (9). In other words, this period sees the forging of a "consensus politics" (14) whereby authors move to the center, no longer marginal or alienated (if they ever

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14 Miller suggests that, "late modernist writing appears a distinctly self-conscious manifestation of the aging and decline of modernism, in both its institutional and ideological dimensions. More surprising, however, such writing also strongly anticipates future developments, so that without forcing, it might easily fit into a narrative of emergent postmodernism" (7). It has a "double life," he argues, with its "linkage forward into postmodernism and backward into modernism." I would like to build on this understanding of the at once forward- and backward-looking element of late modernism.

15 Whereas these critical works differ in their determination of the time frame for "late modernism" -- indeed, Lecia Rosenthal, in Mourning Modernism (2011), defines it as "an aesthetics of lateness that probes the very question of modernism's terminality," "rather than a historically determined and finite period" (3) -- I will be following MacKay's designation of the years leading up to, during, and after the Second World War, as my project, like hers, is intimately concerned with the significance of the war within a modernist aesthetic.
were) from their political contexts, all of them making "the guilty compromise, knowing it to be exactly that, of supporting the Second World War" (10). As public opinion and that of artists drew closer together, that is, with the rift between an avant-garde and a seemingly ignorant or unsympathetic bourgeois public that it sought to outrage growing less substantial, the dream of rest that this project considers becomes more powerful, more collective, and perhaps more understandable given the context of actual exhaustion from the experience of war. As the "shock-effects" of modernity moved from a figurative to literal register, from the shock of new technologies and the increasing speed of everyday life to the shock of bombs, particularly during the London Blitz, the ways in which artists imagined and envisioned spaces and moments of repose took on a new resonance. The desire for respite becomes more pressing and more fraught than in previous periods, and that knife-edge of contempt towards the Lotus-eaters that we see in *Ulysses* becomes dulled as questions of fantasy and truth recede, displaced by an interest in how -- not whether -- respite is to be achieved. As Greene (who established his career as a writer between the world wars) muses in the preface to his autobiography, *Ways of Escape* (1980), citing himself from another work, "sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation" (9). He goes on to quote a line of W.H. Auden's: "Man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep." It makes sense, then, to explore a dream of rest within this period of late modernism, when one might expect the horrors of war to demand some form of escape. While it is true that this demand was felt as a pressing need, I want to trouble -- as the writers and artists that I

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consider do -- the essentializing binaries between nightmare and fantasy, reality and
dream that are difficult to avoid when thinking of modernism -- as most critics have done
-- as anti-escapist.\textsuperscript{17}

II. Fantasies of the Real

The Second World War, like the first, was a catastrophe of staggering
proportions. Not only was war experienced by civilians as never before, with buildings
and streets blasted apart in aerial bombings and millions of non-combatants killed across
Europe; and not only did the invasion of Britain seem like a real possibility, especially
after the fall of France in 1940;\textsuperscript{18} but knowledge of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis
against whole races and groups of people challenged the possibilities of representation
itself, ravaging any notions of "civilized" behavior to an extent not seen even in the Great
War, during which Sigmund Freud expressed bewilderment both at the extent to which
the war was "more bloody and more destructive than any war of other days," and also
how it "brought to light an almost incredible phenomenon: the civilized nations know and
understand one another so little that one can turn against the other with hate and
loathing".\textsuperscript{19} In his biography of his aunt, Quentin Bell cites a passage from the last

\textsuperscript{17} Christopher Reed also discusses a "binary of heroic progress versus domestic stasis" in the rhetoric of
"post-war American modernism" (3), and the opposition between modernism and the domestic more
generally in \textit{Bloomsbury Rooms}.

\textsuperscript{18} MacKay: "What makes the cultural context of the second war so radically different from that of the first
was the new primacy of the civilian experience: whereas the 'home front' was primarily a propaganda
metaphor in 1918, the Second World War was halfway through before the number of dead British
combatants exceeded that of dead British civilians. And, as Tony Judt points out in his important new
history of post-war Europe, only in Britain and Germany did military losses finally outnumber the civilian
death toll; in total more than 19 million non-combatants were killed across Europe (6). In "the Blitz that
followed later in the year [19xx] [...] 'British' territory came closer to invasion than it had in a millennium"
(4).

\textsuperscript{19} Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (1915), in \textit{Civilisation, War and Death}, ed. John
volume of Leonard Woolf's autobiography, exemplifying as it does "the image that stared Leonard and Virginia in the face in July 1940" -- the "quality of the enemy who now had victory almost within his grasp and who, having achieved it, would be released from all restraints" (216).20 According to Bell, Leonard and Virginia "had the advantage, if it was an advantage, of knowing enough about their adversary to be free from illusions" -- something that could not be said for all citizens facing possible invasion.21 In Leonard's autobiography he writes of how "Jews were hunted down, beaten up, and humiliated everywhere publicly in the streets of towns"; he notes that he "saw a photograph of a Jew being dragged by storm troopers out of a shop in one of the main streets in Berlin [...]":

On the man's face was the horrible look of blank suffering and despair which from the beginning of human history men have seen under the crown of thorns on the faces of their persecuted and humiliated victims. In this photograph what was even more horrible was the look on the faces of respectable men and women, standing on the pavement, laughing at the victim. (qtd. 216)

Unlike the "bitterly disillusioned goodbyes-to-all-that" of the literature of the Great War, with its writers "once and for all trash[ing] the militarist mystique by writing so harrowingly of its betrayals" (MacKay 5), here we have a more disturbing sense that seemingly "civilized" and respectable men and women -- not combatants, military officers or politicians -- are also participating and implicated in the horrors of

21 "On 13 May, when the battle was at its height, they had discussed the question of suicide" (216). Not everyone had such foresight or clarity about the Nazis. According to MacKay, Rebecca West "worried mid-war about the impossibility of writing about what the Nazis were really up to, suggesting that interlocutors with every reason to despise these crimes were priding themselves on their 'superior wisdom and culture' in seeing two sides to a story that was starting to look as if it only had one: why, she wondered, was it so difficult to say that 'what the Germans have done is flatly abominable.' In a hauntingly awful legacy of the Great War, hostility towards violently affective appeals was so pervasive and profound that evidence of the real atrocities being perpetrated in Nazi Germany could be dismissed by many as the reflux of sensationalist propaganda from twenty-five years earlier" (11).
persecution, turning against others with "hate and loathing." Their laughter, and the realization of the banality of evil, to use Hannah Arendt's phrase, was perhaps more devastating than any inflated patriotic rhetoric, trumpeted "with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory," such as "Dulce et Decorum est / Pro patria mori." During and after the Second World War it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine a separate space of idyll or escape that isn't contaminated by some violence or horror.

In addition to the devastations of the war was what MacKay calls its "sheer secondness" -- or Woolf's sense, expressed in a diary entry from 1938, that "One more shot at a policeman, & the Germans, Czecks [sic], French will begin the old horror. The 4th of August [1914] may come next week" (142). That is, this war, unlike the first, presented a feeling of familiarity and almost Beckettian absurdity that were greeted with exasperation as well as exhaustion as a potential "endgame." "This war has begun in cold blood," Woolf noted with numb detachment on the 6th of September 1939. "One merely feels that the killing machine has to be set in action. [...] It seems entirely meaningless -- a perfunctory slaughter, like taking a jar in one hand, a hammer in another. Why must this be smashed? Nobody knows. This feeling is different from any before" (235). When considering the ways in which the war was anticipated and experienced it does not seem like an exaggeration to call modern life, as did Theodor Adorno, a series of "empty, paralysed intervals" between "a timeless succession of

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24 We might think here of the absurd, exhausted, empty (and comic) repetitions of Endgame. Early on in the play Clov flatly notes, "It may end." There is a pause, and he further notes, "All life long the same questions, the same answers" (5).
shocks. However, to cast the war and this period of late modernism as a nightmare that artists sought a reprieve from through a purely escapist dream of rest -- succumbing, as Murdoch would have it, to the temptation to deform reality by fantasy -- is to risk essentializing: an impulse that I hope to resist by attempting to tell a more nuanced story about the resources that such a dream offered. That is, to consider the desire for respite as simply escapist would require that reality be a nightmare, while valorizing truth, courage and endurance in the face of it; yet the nightmare of history, even one that includes the catastrophes and destructiveness of the Second World War, is not a uniform or wholly unmitigated one.

In his essay "Narcissism, For and Against," collected in Promises, Promises (2000), Adam Phillips notes how "[a]ll escapist theories need a concept of the real; that is to say, they are all, somewhere, essentialist theories. Though this makes them no less valuable -- as belief-systems, or heuristic devices, or possible facts or regulative fictions -- it does make them morally and epistemologically suspect" (208). In considering the British psychoanalyst John Steiner's theory of narcissism as a "psychic retreat" that has "isolation, stagnation and withdrawal" (qtd. 219) as its costs, for instance, Phillips argues that such a notion of retreat relies upon an omniscient determination of what development actually entails. Instead, he suggests that if "we were to say that there is simply change" rather than development, "and thereby shrug off all the progressivist associations, we might say that different people prefer some kinds of change to others":

26 It is interesting to think in this context of Claudia L. Johnson's new study of Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures, where she discusses the ways in which, during the Second World War, Austen was "understood to be an important respite for a war-weary public, a precious resource in short supply." Austen helped her readers "to forget the war" while "at the same time" inviting "them to remember it."
Psychic retreats would then no longer look like retreats, but rather more like resorts and resources. By calling it a retreat one might have preemptively privileged the alternative. (221)

For Phillips, narcissism poses a threat to psychoanalysis because it offers an alternative model, which, (like most stories told about modernism) "of whatever persuasion, always describes itself as anti-escapist; and it can only do this, in my view, by being unduly omniscient about what there is to escape from, and so about the nature of escapism" (204). To be more precise, "Our notions of escapism are entirely complicit with our fantasies of the real [...]" (207). In a similar way, I would like to argue, casting history or modern life as a nightmare from which one is tempted to awaken or fully escape through another, more comforting dream is to tell a very dramatic story about modernity -- one that is dominated by shocks and the irrevocable damage of trauma, in an unrelentingly somber vision of what Conrad's Marlow calls a "universal darkness." It is to privilege the heroism of being an adult, being truthful, being upright, moving forward and "working through" experiences rather than moving backwards or standing still. It is to privilege, as Murdoch does, not just aesthetic but also ethical difficulty that intransigently refuses to make any concessions. Yet, as Phillips notes in another essay, "Bombs Away," the Second World War was not an unrelenting nightmare and was in fact experienced by some as therapeutic (Bell claims that the Battle of Britain had a restorative effect on Woolf); and, as MacKay points out, many people looked forward to the war as an opportunity to abolish outmoded class structures and old hierarchies, drawing on an
earlier Futurist rhetoric, expressed by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909, that declared, "We want to glorify war -- the only cure for the world."\(^{27}\)

The day-to-day experience of war on the home front was filled with ennui as well as moments of pleasure; air raids, as in the First World War, became familiar and adapted to at the same time that the incredibly destructive power of the bombs could not be ignored;\(^{28}\) social relations were turbulent while the war offered new opportunities, new moulds for work and relationships. I certainly do not wish to downplay the horrors of the war, or to perpetuate what Angus Calder calls the "myth of the Blitz" -- a myth of cheerful endurance and a heroic, national pulling together\(^{29}\) -- yet one need only think of Woolf's letter to Vita Sackville-West, written in November 1940, to realize that the experience of war was not completely shattering, nerve-wracking, and full of suffering. Thanking Vita for her bounteous gift of butter in what is almost a prose poem of praise, Woolf playfully writes, "Bombs fall near me -- trifles; a 'plane shot down on the marsh -- trifles; floods damned -- no, nothing seems to make a wreath on the pedestal fitting your

\(^{27}\) Phillips, "Bombs Away," in *Promises, Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000): "What could be more inspiring than an enemy?"(45), and "For the people of London the war disclosed unprecedented resources of communal feeling and personal resilience. For the psychoanalysts -- especially for the Klein group -- the war was reassuring proof. War was no surprise. War becomes, with the experience of the Blitz, that most paradoxical thing: the trauma that is apparently easy to incorporate" (57). Also see MacKay 3; Bell 217; Marinetti's "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909," in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, Eds. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998): 251-53.

\(^{28}\) In the 1917 section of Woolf's *The Years*, Eleanor and others take shelter in a cellar during an air raid:

> "She sat down again. 'D'you mind air raids?' Nicholas asked, looking at her with his inquisitive expression. 'People differ so much.'
>
> 'Not at all,' she said. She would have crumbled a piece of bread to show him that she was at her ease; but as she was not afraid, the action seemed to her unnecessary.
>
> 'The chances of being hit oneself are so small,' she said. 'What were we saying?' she added. It seemed to her that they had been saying something extremely interesting; but she could not remember what." (211).

Eleanor's sense of forgetting what they had been saying could be read as an instance of trauma, yet the entire scene unfolds in its insistence on the everydayness of the event. During WWII the chances of being hit during a raid were greater than in the first; air raids were still regular occurrences that were to some extent at least adapted to.

butter" (qtd. Bell 223). In the story of modernism that I will tell in the following pages, the dream of rest explored by various artists offered them "resorts and resources" and a means of responding to their historical contexts with an agility and playfulness that did not exclude a deadly seriousness. Rather than deforming reality through fantasy, their manipulations of sightlines and their engagement with visuality allowed them to explore "spaces of time" -- pockets of inarticulacy, stillness, or forgetfulness -- that performed impressive counter-balancing acts. In each case, what is being escaped from, whether the human world with its familiar scripts, the mechanization and impoverishment of everyday life by war, or the impossibility or else ease of forgetting, changes, as do the techniques for imagining possibilities of retreat.

Modernist criticism generally tends towards the highly dramatic, picking up on the language of manifestoes and the radical, dissident nature of much modernist art. In contrast, MacKay suggests that late modernist work is "anti-transcendent" and "concessionary," allowing us to see "where the subdued and deflationary ironies of post-war English writing came from" (13). While I disagree about the necessity of reading the art of the period as necessarily (and earnestly) "concessionary" or "valedictory" -- in fact, in the chapters that follow, I will trace a far more agitated and disorienting aesthetic that draws upon modernity's shock effects to imagine means of reprieve -- it does make sense to deflate, as MacKay and other scholars have done in different contexts, some of the critical rhetoric about modernism. Focusing less on origins and more on multiplicity, considering the "more complicated conversations between literary experiment and political culture" (10) during this period, allows us to reconsider "what modernism means as a description of distinctive aesthetic modes that were not monolithic or static but
capable of development and transformation" (15). In *Picturing Repose* I trace the 
*mobility* of modernist aesthetic practices, which draw the reader's and spectator's vision 
outwards, inwards, and sideways, stretching the limits of the frame in an interplay 
between different visual, temporal, and affective registers.

**III. Against Flatness**

Recent criticism of the modernist period tends to caution against an 
oculiarcentrism or privileging of vision over the other senses. Challenging what Jonathan 
Crary calls a "regime of vision" can certainly open up fascinating fields of study, yet this 
project, while not ignoring the body and other senses, does focus primarily on the 
relations between works of fiction and visual art. More specifically, each chapter 
revolves around questions of sightlines, framing, and visibility, connecting literary works 
with painting, photography, film, and statuary. Because the dream of rest and the desire 
for retreat are always open to accusations of willful blindness, and because epistemology 
and knowability are intimately bound to a rhetoric of vision (of insight, blindness, and 
what is inside or outside the frame), such a focus is, I believe, called for by the material 
itself. Further, the realm of visual art naturally engages with questions of stasis and 
stillness that the dream of rest is deeply invested in. And whereas one might imagine 
repose to be found consistently in the countryside, in the loveliness and verdure of hills 
and in prospects of barns and church spires,\(^30\) or in the refreshment of a garden or the 
otherness of an exotic locale (such as the island of the Lotus-eaters), I also discover

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\(^{30}\) After a visit to Sussex on 24 December 1940, Woolf describes the landscape's "incredible loveliness. The downs breaking their wave, yet one pale quarry; & all the barns & stacks either a broken pink, or a verdurous green; & then the walk by the wall; & the church; & the great tithe barn. How England consoles and warms one, in these deep hollows, where the past stands almost stagnant. And the little spire across the fields..." (346)
spaces and moments of repose where one might least expect to find them. It is often within the disorienting experience of shock itself that what Bowen calls "saving resorts" are depicted, offering an escape from, as well as a counter-pressure to, the realities of the period. This study excavates the ways in which Woolf, Bowen, and Greene as well as artists associated with them explored the retreat to be found in interstitial spaces between the major acts of world war. Turning away from the realities of a historical moment experienced as traumatic or exhausting can seem insolent or treacherous, yet the works that I consider reveal the necessity for such retreats, which function, in Phillips's terms, as exits that are also entrances.  

My project focuses on this particular group of writers because of their intimate connections to and interest in the visual arts, which each chapter will set forth. Unfolding in three "acts" that are set (with some overlap) in the years leading up to, during, and after the Second World War, Picturing Repose argues that any account of modernism needs to be wide enough to encompass something more consolatory than the trauma and despair that have largely come to define it. The dominant story of modernism, which tells us of fragments shored against ruin, of a relentless barrage of shock and violence, is correct in intertwining modernism and violence, yet the dream of rest that I consider is one that I believe powerfully abides, and finds expression within, the period's works of art.

Drawing on tactics of disorientation that refuse to let the viewer settle or feel comfortable -- which Walter Benjamin links with Dadaism and the technical innovations of film over the contemplative realm of painting -- Woolf, Bowen and Greene yoke together an aesthetics of shock and repose in ways that resist a transfixing and anaestheticizing flatness.

31 "Narcissism, For and Against," 217.
and oppose habitual vision. MacKay warns against valorizing modernism and "modernist forms" in general for their renunciation of "the mindlessly habitual, unthinkingly collective perspectives that make war possible," with "modernism's fractured and estranging modes simultaneously mimic[ing] the damage of war and blow[ing] to bits the lazy mental habits of mind that produced and sustained it" (8-9). There is "something unhistorical, even anti-historical," she contends, about "a general conflation of formal and political heroism in this period as in any other" (9). The artists that I consider, however, do not heroically blast apart unthinking and habitual perspectives; instead, they absorb and reflect the disorienting experience of a reality in which boundaries are by nature permeable. What Benjamin refers to as the "uselessness for contemplative immersion" (237) that Dadaist works celebrated is useless in late modernist works because such immersion in a Kantian space of contemplation is no longer available. As Benjamin notes, the "shock effect of the film" lies in the fact that the "spectator's process of association," which would be engaged in the contemplation of a painting, is interrupted by the "constant, sudden change" of images on the screen. Making use of this unsettled perspective itself -- one in which an encompassing or stable vision is inaccessible -- the wartime work of these artists carve out temporary spaces of stasis, stillness and shelter that resist the flatness of mere surfaces.

In Chapter One, "Voyages Out: Virginia Woolf and Vanishing Points," I consider *Between the Acts* (1941) and the ways in which Woolf's engagement with the pictorial realm in her last novel becomes more fraught than in her earlier works. Set in an English

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33 In *On Photography* (NY: Anchor Books, 1990), Susan Sontag writes that once one has seen images of horror and atrocity, "one has started down the road of seeing more -- and more. Images transfixed. Images anesthetize" (20).
country house on a June day soon before the start of the Second World War, an unsettled, vertiginous vision alternates with moments that seem to aspire to the condition of still life painting. Such moments, in which Woolf continues her extended conversation with the visual arts, and with her sister, Vanessa Bell, in particular, offer a reprieve from the human world, with its familiarity, habitual scripts and relentless drive forwards (towards the war); frames dissolve and there is a sense of peril as well as release in voyaging out into the realm of silence. The temptation to become pulled out towards a vanishing point is stronger than in any of her other works and the tug back towards the realm of the social and human far more violent. As I will argue, there is no unvexed space of retreat in this novel; only a tacking between two realms that is both violent and restorative. Refusing to let the reader settle comfortably, *Between the Acts* is at once anchored and unmoored by its glimpses of possible worlds wholly indifferent to the human drama that it describes: where words almost threaten to overwhelm meaning in their solidity and sensuousness, where the future is not scripted, and where the very notion of a script loses any meaning or value.

Chapter Two, "Still the Moon: Elizabeth Bowen, Bill Brandt, and Quiet Exposures," brings together the wartime short stories of Bowen and the photographs of London (and other parts of England) taken by Brandt during the blackout and the Blitz. Specifically, this chapter explores the concept of “stillness” in Bowen’s *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* and in a series of Brandt’s photographs, linking both artists through the language and techniques of pictorial, rather than “snapshot,” photography (an aesthetic of freezing and stunning images that *Between the Acts* is also set in opposition to). While for Benjamin photography exemplifies the technological assault upon the mind
and senses of the modern subject and the disintegration of the aura typical of the twentieth century, I argue that the stillness enabled by the medium in fact allows Bowen and Brandt to present new “spaces of time” for reverie and repose, however imperiled they may be. Rather than arresting or stunning a moment in motion, their photographs – both literal and figurative – capture the capaciousness and paradoxical restlessness of stillness, creating the potential for respite under conditions that would seem to preclude it. In so doing, their work challenges the longstanding critical association between photography and death, presenting instead, with their almost violent intensities of vision, “overflows of livingness” amid the cataclysmic disruptions of the war.

Chapter Three, "Ways of Escape: Graham Greene and the Shelter of Blind Spots," considers Greene’s wartime and post-war “entertainments,” The Ministry of Fear (1943) and his collaboration with Carol Reed, The Third Man (1949). In both of these works Greene takes the genre of the thriller, which is predicated largely on suspense, speed, exposure, and shock, and destabilizes it by carving out unexpected forms of retreat through a play with sightlines and blind spots, forgetting and remembering. Through a dynamic vision of flickering identities in The Ministry of Fear, whereby the protagonist is able to recuperate and the narrative is able to jump-start, as well as a nagging sense in The Third Man of what lies beyond our visual field, largely signaled through the presence (or absence) of statues, Greene's (and Reed's) works engage with personal and historical loss, offering the relief of alternative visions and "third" spaces.

I conclude with an epilogue that takes up the question of speed and an "adrenaline aesthetic" in relation to the seeming regressiveness (and transgressiveness) of a dream of rest. An understanding of what Woolf calls "a respite, a pause, perhaps" from a reality
experienced as somehow distressing allows us, I suggest, to tell the story of modernism -- or picture it -- afresh. Taken as a whole, Picturing Repose offers a more consoling and complex view of modernism and where it ends up (it's "afterlife," as MacKay calls it) that is not so tied to a narrative of the nation and its geopolitical, post-imperial destiny. It considers instead an impressive array of counter-balancing acts that restores a sense of play, however serious, to the period of late modernism (versus the valedictory, the concessionary, the elegiac), exploring resilient tactics for resisting flatness -- whether of polemic, propaganda, or an all-too-easy vision that "cannot be arrested" (Benjamin 238) -- that is located in a zone where shock and rest, absorption and distance, contemplation and distraction, fruitfully converge.
Voyages Out: Virginia Woolf and Vanishing Points

"Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music: -- do I wake or sleep?"
(Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale, ll. 75-80)

"And off winged my mind along those wild uplands.
A hint for the future. Always relieve pressure by a
flight. Always violently turn the pillow; hack an
outlet. Often a trifle does. [...] These are travellers
notes which I offer myself shd I again be lost."
(Diary entry 26 January 1940, 260)

In an absorbing talk delivered and recorded at the Courtauld Gallery in London in
February of 2009, Gillian Beer discussed the pleasures and subtleties of Vanessa Bell's
painting, *A Conversation* (1913-16), which forms part of the Courtauld's collection [Fig.
1]. Beer convincingly draws out the "degree to which there's a brooding *in* everywhere"
in this painting, which centers on three women -- one seeming to speak and two to listen-
in front of what appears to be a window looking out onto a garden. There is an overall
"sense of immediacy and intimacy" in the work, with everything "coming forward" as
Bell does away with linear perspective. Unable to determine where precisely the flowers
in *A Conversation* are placed, Beer contends that it doesn't really matter, "because
everything is right up against the front of this picture [...] I think that's partly where the
tease comes from," she suggests, "because it's so intimate and we're so caught into this
conversation, we're so close to it, that we're surprised that we can't hear what [the three

34 Gillian Beer on *A Conversation* by Vanessa Bell:
"In the second of a series of six talks by celebrated authors on their favourite paintings at London's
Courtauld Gallery, the eminent literary critic tunes into what's being silently said in this teasing painting by
Virginia Woolf's sister. Recorded as part of Picture This at Somerset House – Writers' talks in the
Courtauld Gallery. Initiated by Ruth Padel."
women are saying." In contrast to this work, Beer turns to *Studland Beach* (c.1912) [Fig. 2], which shares with Bell's later picture "a sense of secret life,"
with the key woman in this case having her back to us; yet this earlier picture, Beer contends, is all about distance, whereas in *A Conversation* "everything is close to us, but sealed from us" -- each element of the painting "crowds forward to be part of the conversation, without perspective."

And one might argue that there are two windows here: the one that we gaze through as the picture frame, which silences the conversation for us, and the one immediately behind the women, which draws in the garden, the glow, the gravitas; I think as one watches they're held against each other, neither of them dominates.35

Beer's assessment of Bell's painting is a wonderfully persuasive and resonant one. I would go on to suggest that the extent to which the elements in the work crowd forward, flattening out the pictorial plane in their eagerness to participate in what we might guess is the enticing gossip of the central figures, is countered by an equally strong element of distance and silence that dominates *Studland Beach*, with its matte blue sky and neutral, flesh-like tones and its almost inhospitable refusal to acknowledge the viewer (with each of the figures fully absorbed in his or her own reclusive vision). That is, the frame behind the women, while it does draw *in* "the garden, the glow, the gravitas," also invites the eye *outwards* and potentially "silences the conversation for us," as does the outer frame. The sense of calm and reassurance that Beer traces in the painting, its "quiet gaiety" as well as its "brooding silence," is, it seems to me, far more fraught, and part of a more antagonistic relationship between conflicting impulses within the work.

35 I have transcribed these quotations from the recording of Beer's talk that is available online.
At the same time that the flowers and what might be a tree or shrub beyond the three women crowd in, they also absorb the viewer's attention with their color and sense of self-sufficiency, tempting the eyes to wander away from this most intense of conversations, vying with the women's attentive faces -- drawn together in an intimate circle -- as the central focus of the painting. This pattern of colors in the garden, which may indeed be read playfully as "speech-bubbles" -- a possibility that Beer says was suggested to her by a friend -- or simply to give visual form to the unheard words being spoken, also have a life of their own as spots of color patterned on the canvas, seeming to live, out there in the garden, an existence that has no bearing on the human world inside, connected to and separated from it by the theatrical curtains. Chiming in a visual harmony of their own, they attract the eyes, the white flowers seeming almost reflective, giving off a kind of glare against the duller yellow, red and pink.

Meanwhile, the curve of the horizon, which contrasts a vivid green with a warm ochre sky, its arc echoing that of the horizon in Studland Beach, potentially pulls the eye up or down, behind the curtains and beyond the edges of the frame. It is as if the known social world of the women speaking, the familiar gossip that one could easily imagine being shared, however silent the painting (and all paintings) is and must be, as Beer notes, as well as the personalities of the women thus gathered, which one might project upon them, is being contrasted with what lies beyond the curtains: a world beyond language, beyond the social, beyond the familiar, which one can journey towards and become lost in without a guarantee of making it back to the other side. The unheard words being spoken could dissolve into mere sound and then silence as one, like a swimmer, is drawn further and further away, absorbed in a reverie of form and color,
with what Beer calls the "rich sensory pleasures" of the brushstrokes -- not necessarily towards hidden depths (in a vertical model), but out to some vanishing point that can never, by definition, be reached.

This tension between the talkative and the silently self-sufficient is one that Virginia Woolf often discussed in her writing about painting, particularly in relation to the work of her sister and that of other post-Impressionist artists. In her introduction to Bell's exhibit at the Cooling Gallery in 1930, for instance, she acknowledges Bell's susceptibility towards the "lustre of grass and flower," the "glow of rock and tree," which she could, and which most artists would, have used to lure "us on by one refinement and felicity after another to stay and look forever." She also acknowledges Bell's talents as a satirist with her flashes of laughter, which she could, and which most artists would, have used to "have caricatured and illustrated" her subjects. Instead, though, Woolf locates Bell's art in a realm of silence in which even human subjects seem to attain the status of objects in a still life ("to be aesthetically on an equality with the China pot or the chrysanthemum"). Her "uncompromising" works "claim us and make us stop. They give us an emotion. They offer us a puzzle" (204). This puzzle is "that while Mrs Bell's pictures are immensely expressive, their expressiveness has no truck with words. Her

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36 We see this in another "conversation": Woolf's essay, "Walter Sickert: A Conversation" (1934) where she stages a discussion between dinner party guests about the paintings of Sickert and the relations between painting and literature more generally. At one point the speakers fall silent. "Perhaps they were thinking that there is a vast distance between any poem and any picture; and that to compare them stretches words too far. At last, said one of them, we have reached the edge where painting breaks off and takes her way into the silent land. We shall have to set foot there soon, and all our words will fold their wings and sit huddled like rooks on the tops of the trees in winter. But since we love words let us dally for a little on the verge, said the other" (198-9). The question, "what sort of meaning is that which cannot be expressed in words?" looks ahead to Lucy Swithin's sense that for paintings, "We haven't the words -- we haven't the words [...] Behind the eyes; not on the lips; that's all." to which Bart responds, "'Thoughts without words. [...] Can that be?'" (55).

vision excites a strong emotion and yet when we have dramatised it or poetised it or translated it into all the blues and greens, and fines and exquisites and subtles of our vocabulary, the picture itself escapes. It goes on saying something of its own" (204). This imperturbable "saying something of its own" contrasts with the unheard words in *A Conversation*, and might indeed be read as the key "conversation" in the picture. The tension between the two impulses forms part of the taut energy of the painting and is a contrast present in many of Bell's works\(^\text{38}\) as well as in those of her sister. 

As has been noted by several critics and by now almost goes without saying, Woolf's longstanding interest in the nature of painting, influenced by the work of Bell as well as their friend Roger Fry and a circle of English post-Impressionist artists,\(^\text{39}\) is evident in her body of fiction. From her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1919) to her last, *Between the Acts* (1941), her works are very much engaged with the pictorial realm, drawing in particular upon techniques of framing and, in *To the Lighthouse*, exploring the process of composition through the painting of Lily Briscoe. The various acts of framing and representation that she depicts often anchor significant moments, usually ones of emotional turbulence, helping to order and contain them (however resistant such experiences prove to be). In *Between the Acts*, I suggest, Woolf's engagement with the pictorial realm becomes far more vexed than in her earlier works. In this novel, which is set in an English country house on a June day suspended on the brink of the Second

\(^{38}\) Anachronistically, this might be compared to the "Vertigo effect" in film, where the camera zooms forward at the same time that it pulls backwards, creating a disorienting effect.

World War, an unsettled, vertiginous vision alternates with moments that seem to aspire to the condition of still life -- to be "on an equality with the China pot or the chrysanthemum." Such moments offer a reprieve from the human world -- from what Woolf calls "the loquacities and trivialities of daily life" -- drawing the attention, as in Bell's *A Conversation*, outwards and away. The social world with its sense of familiarity, habitual behavior (the rhyme of expected speech and behavior) and its relentless drive forwards includes the looming war, which, in 1939, was accepted as inevitable (in April of 1939 Woolf refers to "our dear old war -- now postponed for a month" (215)), and is presented to us in the novel through the eyes of a satirist rather than elegist\(^{40}\) whose vision refuses to settle. Frames dissolve and there is a sense of peril as well as possibility in voyaging out into the realm of silence; the temptation to become pulled out towards a vanishing point -- to fade far away, dissolve and forget -- is stronger than in any of her other works, and the tug back towards the realm of the social and human is far more violent. There is no unvexed space of retreat as there is in, say, *The Voyage Out* or even *The Years* (1937); only a tacking back and forth between two realms and a 'hacking of outlets' which, again as in *A Conversation*, is both antagonistic yet somehow reassuring. Refusing to let the reader settle comfortably while also allowing for temporary retreats (a "moment's respite," a "moment's liberty," as she claims Bell's Cooling exhibit provides), *Between the Acts* is at once anchored and unmoored in its glimpses of possible worlds where the future is not scripted -- where, in fact, the very notion of a script loses any meaning or value.

\(^{40}\) This is opposed to MacKay's reading of *Between the Acts* as "as much of a war elegy, however precipitate, as *To the Lighthouse* [...]" ("Blitz, 247).
Whereas recent critics have largely focused on the aural elements of the novel (its interest in the gramophone, the loudspeaker and sound waves, for instance), and on the pageant that is performed within it, what follows will explore the ways in which the tensions between speech and silence, a brooding in and a pulling outwards, and the human and nonhuman realms, which are present in Bell's *A Conversation*, are at play in *Between the Acts*. Critics who have discussed the novel in relation to the visual arts tend to link it to aesthetic movements such as Cubism, while the importance of still life -- particularly its unexpected dangers and violence, its expelling not just of physical human presence but also "the values which human presence imposes on the world," as Norman Bryson puts it -- in relation to the novel has not yet been fully considered. Woolf's posthumously published work, which she described in her diary as constituted by a "series of contrasts" (4 August 1938, 159), and which was written as a reprieve from composing Roger Fry's biography, with its grinding facts, presents an unsettling of vision that, in its disorienting alternations and sketch-like quality, performs a complex and exhilarating series of counter-balancing acts that assures the existence of a "world outside," or a "world elsewhere."

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43 Bryson, 60; "The very place where personal being takes its stand is overturned, in a radical decentering that demolishes the idea of a world convergent on the person as universal centre" (145).

44 "Yes, Stephen gave me 3 hours of continuous illusion -- & if one can get that still, there's a world -- whats the quotation -- There's a world outside? No. From Coriolanus?" (9 Feb 1940, 266)
I. Unsettled Vision

The opening lines of *Between the Acts* each enact an unsettling turn: “It was a summer’s night and they were talking, in the big room with the windows open to the garden, about the cesspool. The county council had promised to bring water to the village, but they hadn’t” (3). As in many of Bell's pictures, this scene is set on the threshold between the inside and outside, in a large room that looks out onto a garden; yet the undifferentiated “they” who are gathered there are talking about a cesspool, the word and the image of festering filth that it summons striking discordantly against the temperate setting, the garden’s suggestion of green. And while the county council had made a promise to bring water to the village, they hadn’t. This deflating statement of fact jolts against the council’s offer of water, after which the reader is further jarred by the introduction of “Mrs. Haines, the wife of the gentleman farmer, a goosefaced woman with eyes protruding as if they saw something to gobble in the gutter,” who says “affectedly: ‘What a subject to talk about on a night like this!’”

Then there was silence; and a cow coughed; and that led her to say how odd it was, as a child, she had never feared cows, only horses. But then, as a small child in a perambulator, a great cart-horse had brushed within an inch of her face. Her family, she told the old man in the arm-chair, had lived near Liskeard for many centuries. There were the graves in the churchyard to prove it.

Our attention is tugged from one thing to another: from the woman’s protruding eyes down to an imagined gutter, from silence within to the cough of a cow outside, from cows to horses, from a traumatic memory of a “great cart-horse” rushing past a child in a

“Despising,  
For you, the city, thus I turn my back:  
There is a world elsewhere.” *Coriolanus*, III. iii. 131
perambulator (mirrored later by the “old man” who rushes out at his grandson with a roar, wearing a newspaper beak, destroying “the little boy’s world”) to the graves in a churchyard that prove the antiquity of Mrs. Haines’s genealogical line. Then a “bird chucked outside. ‘A nightingale?’ asked Mrs. Haines. No, nightingales didn’t come so far north. It was a daylight bird, chuckling over the substance and succulence of the day, over worms, snails, grit, even in sleep.” Set adrift on a series of “then”s, the floating narrative voice stretches outwards towards the unseen bird, savoring its deeply satisfying supply of worms, snails and grit, almost falling into a reverie by imaginatively inhabiting the creature’s chuckling sleep, which seems to enclose it in a space of oblivion and self-sufficiency. The narrative thread, extended and pulled into an eddy of absorption (what I will later discuss as a moment of still life) in this close attentiveness to the bird – this typically Woolfian instance of negative capability –threatens to break, extending to a vanishing point, and then snapping back to the “old man in the arm-chair – Mr. Oliver, of the Indian Civil Service, retired,” who pulls the drifting conversation back to the cesspool, noting how “the site they had chosen for the cesspool was, if he had heard aright, on the Roman road. From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars.”

Given a brief sketch of the man and his background of civil service, which orients us once more in the human scene, our vision is quickly ungrounded by this aerial view of the supposed site of the cesspool, on the Roman road, the land as observed from this height marked and re-marked by the activities of successive groups. Centuries are passed over swiftly in Mr. Oliver’s condensed account, which seems to present a line of
progression but does not, ending as it does with the ages-old plough and fact of war (during the Napoleonic wars) rather than any specifically modern invention such as the aeroplane from which we are given this elevated perspective.

From its first words, then, *Between the Acts* refuses to settle or lie flat or follow a straight line or a “fixed focus of attention” (Charney 75). It vertiginously unsettles the reader’s vision, enacting a kind of violence that at the same time offers an invigorating alternative to the more staid rootedness one might expect from a novel set within "that deathless country house tradition" (MacKay "Blitz," 252). Zooming in and out, moving forwards and then circling backwards, coming close to stopping and then starting again, plunging deep down into a lily pool or the “friable” earth, then unexpectedly, exhilaratingly lifting up to view the earth from an aeroplane or up to hear the wild heartbeats of darting swallows, or offering a cosmic view of the planet from the void of space, Woolf uses her novel to trouble any sense of “straightforward linearity” by its “returnings, knottings, recrossings, crinklings to and fro, suspensions, [and] interruptions” (Miller 17). It breaks up any “even continuity of experience” with what Leo Charney describes as “modernity’s characteristic form of attention,” one comprised of a “mercurial, variable flow of highs and lows” (52) that resists a lazy, habitual vision.45 Indeed, in its refusal to settle, the narrative vision seems to enact a "constant, sudden change" that, for Walter Benjamin, "constitutes the shock effect" of film, which interrupts the "process of association" that would be drawn out in a spectator's contemplation of and absorption in a painting (238).

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45 According to Bryson, still life painting presents a challenge to habitual vision: "The kind of attention provoked by still life isolates both painter and viewer from the rather hazy, rather lazy visual field the subject normally inhabits" (88). Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" discusses the ways in which photography and film fundamentally challenge habitual ways of seeing (236-240).
The narrative perspective also powerfully echoes the one we see in Woolf's posthumously published essay, "Flying Over London," where Woolf imagines taking a flight that ungrounds habitual vision. The reader's attention is drawn from "spaces tranquil as the deep sea," to "chop and change, breeze and motion" (204). The solid becomes transparent, evidence of civilization disappears and reappears, and there is a sense of the body as made up of "[v]ertebrae, ribs, entrails, and red blood" (203) that faces the potential to become extinct, "pulverized, frozen to lightness and whiteness" in a "spectral universe, and nothingness," and then, "as if some part of us kept its ponderosity, down we fell into fleeciness, substance, and colour; all the colours of pounded plums and dolphins and blankets and seas and rain clouds crushed together, staining -- purple, black, steel, all this soft ripeness seethed about us, and the eye felt as a fish feels when it slips from the rock into the depths of the sea" (207-208). Throughout the essay, Woolf's narrative voice "assembl[es] things that lie on the surface" below, eventually resenting surfaces and craving depth (209-10); at the end of "Flying Over London," we realize that the author's virtuosic imaginative and visionary flights have rivaled and completely displaced the actual physical flight that the airplane would have provided.

Few critics have closely considered the novel’s tactics of visual disorientation, or its concern with the problems of attention and distraction that are put into play from its first lines and not just within the pageant that is enacted within it. The visual register of the novel, whose title was tellingly changed in composition from the settled Pointz Hall to the suspended Between the Acts, is aligned, within the world of the novel itself, with the imaginative flights, the failure to fix the gaze, of Lucy Swithin (in whose mind "this led to that; that to the other" (24)). It is also aligned with the aggressive tactics of Miss
La Trobe, whose play makes her audience feel “a little not quite here or there. As if the play had jerked the ball out of the cup; as if what I call myself was still floating unattached, and didn’t settle.” While Lucy skips lightly from one thing to another “to the just rage of authority,” following chains of association and, as Maria DiBattista perceptively observes, the “circuitous digressions favored by comic imaginings, the circularity of thought” that confirms the “essential integrity of all experience” (201), the narrative thread of the novel often seems, in contrast, like Miss La Trobe's play, in danger of snapping -- going too far to be recalled, weighed down, pressed flat, oblivious to its human characters, disturbed by superimpositions, juxtapositions and images of violence that are then quickly moved on from by the narrator's “roaming eye.” The narrative movements take on a drama of their own, lightening the weight of the human drama -- the social world of company, pageants, and war -- that it unfolds.

In “Cubist Elements in Between the Acts,” Stewart acknowledges the striking disjunctiveness and discontinuity of the novel, exploring the work’s parallels with Cubist painting. He argues that Woolf “felt the need to resist those symphonic or oceanic tendencies that had reached their fullest expression in The Waves” (71), instead evolving “from inner necessity a disjunctive style equivalent to Cubist form-language, and more capable than Impressionist techniques of articulating her increasingly ironic perceptions of reality” (87). Having progressed, he contends, from Impressionist to Cubist and even at times to the “flux and struggle” of Expressionist techniques (82), Stewart argues that Woolf’s aesthetic in Between the Acts is one that affirms a “multiplicity of viewpoints simultaneously” (79). The “edge between images” becomes “more pronounced, giving a

46 I would disagree with Stewart’s evolutionary model of Woolf’s “progress” through these artistic categories, as well as with his claim that Woolf turned to a new style out of “inner necessity” rather than through deliberate choices.
brittle, kaleidoscopic effect” (68), forming a “mosaic pattern” (69) with a “disjointed structure of interlocking facets” (74) that intersect “on a single plane of reality” (77). The “flat plane” of the novel, he insists, replaces a sense of “recessional depth,” accentuating instead “the non-hierarchical interrelation of everything,” with the “[p]ast and present, nature and art, audience and actors, self and others, cows, swallows, butterflies, kings and queens” all interpenetrating as equal “facets of experience” (85-86). Similarly, but in a different vein, Christine Froula, in her discussion of La Trobe’s pageant, describes the gaze of the novel’s narrator as more closely resembling “a documentary cinematographic apparatus than an omniscient, moralizing storyteller,” recording as it does each voice “moment by moment as if it were a rolling camera” (304). The narrative, Froula suggests, operates in a “quasi-documentary mode,” its “wide-angle lens exceed[ing] and even betray[ing] La Trobe’s local intention,” making her “radically dialogic art fully visible, even as it weaves it almost imperceptibly into that greater work of art, the world” (305).

Documentary film and Cubist painting do offer fruitful parallels for thinking about Woolf’s novel; however, I wish to consider instead the novel’s resistance to the flat pictorial plane of a Cubist painting or a film. Like Bell's *A Conversation*, Woolf's novel presents greater visual depth than it may appear to do, yet in a far more agitated and even aggressive manner than in the painting. Rather than a destructive and reconstructive assemblage of discrete “orts, scraps and fragments,” the novel moves through jolting shifts in time and space, distance and focus, highs and lows, with an elastic tracing of eccentric circles that stretch out temptingly to vanishing points before being tugged
back. If the novel is composed of fragments, they are not discrete but instead connected by a narrative thread that, like Lucy's vision, expands "the bounds of the moment" and the space of this particular English country house. In "Putting the House in Order: Virginia Woolf and Blitz Modernism," MacKay notes how the "novel's scenes beyond the pageant are dominated by physical violence" (204); the narrative vision takes on some of this violent agitation but with an accompanying sense of excitement, not just horror, as it dips in and out, moves here and there, even as it describes the various forms that violence takes in this world.

The talk between Mr. Oliver and Mrs. Haines in the opening scene, for instance, is interrupted by the entrance of Isa, Mr. Oliver’s daughter-in-law, who “came in with her hair in pigtails; she was wearing a dressing gown with faded peacocks on it. She came in like a swan swimming its way; then was checked and stopped; was surprised to find people there; and lights burning.” While her eyes, we imagine, are adjusting to the unexpectedly bright lights, she asks what they had been saying. “‘Discussing the cesspool,’ said Mr. Oliver. / ‘What a subject to talk about on a night like this!’ Mrs. Haines exclaimed again.” The narrative seems to enclose a circle, returning to its original subject with a slight jolt before continuing onwards as Isa wonders what he “said about the cesspool; or indeed about anything?” Her musings figure forth another person from the background, “the gentleman farmer, Rupert Haines.” The two of them, connected by invisible threads of attraction, are set afloat on the two rings made by Mr. Oliver’s quoting of Byron:

47 We might think here of Benjamin's description of the powers of the camera, which "intervenes" in our passive acceptance of familiar routines with "the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (237).
“She walks in beauty like the night,” he quoted.

Then again:

“So we’ll go no more a-roving by the light of the moon.”

Mrs. Haines, aware of “the emotion circling" her husband and Isa, excluding her,” waits, “as one waits for the strain of an organ to die out before leaving church. In the car going home to the red villa in the cornfields, she would destroy it, as a thrush pecks the wings off a butterfly.” After our vision is briefly pulled out towards this red villa and the cornfields that lie at the limits of this fictional world, and then stunned by the violent simile of destruction that follows, we are told that Mrs. Haines rises, offering Isa her hand, glaring at her “out of goose-like eyes” until Isa too is forced to rise in her “faded dressing-gown, with the pigtails falling over each shoulder,” to acknowledge her existence. This reverse repetition (of “her hair in pigtails; she was wearing a dressing gown”) again circles backwards while the section comes to an end. Woolf’s narrative creates a texture of movement that refuses to let the reader settle comfortably into the fictional world and the human drama that it presents. Instead, it exposes our status as spectators and outsiders traveling within this fictional landscape, transposing what we might take to be a particularly modern, urban, and kinesthetic experience of “vision, motion, and perception” (Charney 52) upon the world of this country house set in the heart of England on a June day in 1939.

We get a full view of the house in *Between the Acts* the morning after the incongruous talk of the cesspool. The narrator zooms back from the evening gathering with its taut and vibrating threads of connection, to Pointz Hall, “seen in the light of an early summer morning to be a middle-sized house.” Located in a “remote village in the
very heart of England,” taking “over three hours to reach” by train, and inhabited by the Oliver family, who have “only” lived there for “something over a hundred and twenty years” (7), the house seems at first potentially even more “remote & solitary & ancestral,” “modest & sound, & solid” than Blo Norton Hall, the Elizabethan manor that Woolf stayed in and described in 1906, at the start of her career as a professional writer. Yet for all its seeming remoteness, and despite the fact that, as the Olivers “always said” to their guests, the (fictional) Figgis of Figgis’s Guide Book would find that “1830 was true in 1939,” the house and village and countryside in which it is located lack the sense of isolation and peaceful sleepiness that one finds in Woolf’s early accounts of life at Blo Norton. In her 1906 journal she projects herself into the future and imagines thinking of the town while in London, wondering whether “it is still alive; or whether it has really ceased, peaceably, to exist any longer. No one would notice if the whole town forgot to wake up one morning” (315). In Between the Acts the “curtain” between “you & the world” is consistently pierced, letting in “possibilities” that are both destructive (the fields potentially scarred by exploding bombs) and refreshing (the presence of Mrs. Manresa, who breaks through conventions like a ship, allowing others to leap like

48 From the 3rd to the 31st of August, 1906, as Mitchell A. Leaska notes in A Passionate Apprentice, the Stephen siblings “rented Blo’ Norton Hall, a moated Elizabethan manor house in Norfolk on the Little Ouse River (309).” Soon after arriving there, Woolf describes the house in her journal as “too remote & solitary & ancestral for anyone to wish to live here, except Americans who find these qualities, I suppose, medicinal”; it is “so modest, & sound, & solid all through; as tho’ the centuries had only confirmed its original virtues” (309-10). “We are to begin with 7 miles from a railway,” she observes, “& every mile seems to draw a thicker curtain than the last between you & the world. So that finally, when you are set down at the Hall, no sound what ever reaches your ear; the very light seems to filter through deep layers; & the air circulates slowly, as though it had but to make the circuit of the Hall, & its duties were complete” (310). Blo’ Norton Hall, a “profound seat of solitude dug […] somewhere very near the heart of England,” surrounded by churches that “date from the era before the Black Death, when sheep farming prospered, [and] piety throve,” is the model for the “dignified little house” that, on a June day, catches the “archaeological eye” of the almost Nabokovian narrator of Woolf’s short story, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,” composed during the Stephens’s stay at Blo Norton. In the story the house forms the center of “a little square picture” that is “framed delicately between green boughs at the far end,” drawing the antiquarian, Miss Rosamond Merridew, towards it as she drives “along the Thetford road from Norwich to East Harling” (35).
dolphins in her wake). There is no chance that the inhabitants of the village or of Pointz Hall could fall out of existence by simply forgetting to wake up one morning, lost in their own deep dreams.

This sense of openness to the outside world is reinforced by the fact that, after our first view of Pointz Hall, our field of vision is also traversed by passing travelers, who drive past the house and wonder whether it will ever come on the market, asking their chauffeur who lives there. “The chauffeur didn’t know. The Olivers, who had bought the place something over a century ago, had no connection with the Warings, the Elveys, the Mannerings or the Burnets; the old families who had all intermarried, and lay in their deaths intertwined, like the ivy roots, beneath the churchyard wall.” As these unnamed travelers speedily enter and exit the novel and we watch them “pass & disappear,” the narrative voice takes on the role of guide or annalist, supplying the information that the chauffeur could not, directing our eyes from the exterior of the homely but desirable house down into the earth under the churchyard wall, where the genealogical lines and bones of all the old families (including, we suppose, that of Mrs. Haines), lie tangled together like roots of ivy.

Woolf’s unsettling jumps and juxtapositions in Between the Acts brings something both wild and quintessentially urban into the stability of the country house tradition. Whereas MacKay argues that "For all that international modernism is characterized by its

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49 The visual register of the novel has a wildness and sketchiness that is far more aligned with Woolf’s account of the heath located less than a mile from Blo Norton Hall than her descriptions of the remote house and town. The heath is “a wild place, all sand & bracken, with innumerable rabbits, & great woods running alongside, in to which I plunge; down green drives as shady as any in the New Forest. It is a strange lonely kind of country; a carriage comes bowling over the hill, & you watch it pass & disappear & wonder where it comes from & whither it goes, & who is the lady inside.” This “wild place” is full of motion and variety, traversed by carriages that pull the viewer’s eye and imagination along with it until it reaches a vanishing point, following even beyond, until one is supposedly snapped back to the sand and bracken, the rabbits, the woods into which one can plunge, and the shady green drives that recall those of the New Forest in the south of England.
emphasis on the urban and deracinated, British modernism suggests an ongoing preoccupation with the meaning of rootedness" (229), with Miss La Trobe's pageant a "rearguard" attempt on Woolf's part to find a "common ground" between various groups in her political move to "the central ground" (231), I would contend that the novel absorbs and reflects the way in which war undoes the separation between urban centers and the countryside. *Between the Acts* shows how the country house has not fallen out of history but is rather part of a modern landscape that is closer to the city than it appears to be -- a landscape that, like the city, has its own shock effects, and can be experienced very much in motion.

Even the narrator’s additional gestures towards orienting the reader by taking on the role of tour guide and annalist are both successful and disrupted. After we are provided with a view of Pointz Hall from the exterior, we are told that, “[s]till, on going up the principal staircase – there was another, a mere ladder at the back for the servants – there was a portrait. A length of yellow brocade was visible half-way up; and, as one reached the top, a small powdered face, a great head-dress slung with pearls, came into view; an ancestress of sorts. Six or seven bedrooms opened out of the corridor. The butler had been a soldier; had married a lady’s maid; and, under a glass case there was a watch that had stopped a bullet on the field of Waterloo.” Guiding the reader up the staircase (after noting the servants’ staircase in the back, momentarily jolting us to the other side of the house and to a time when servants were only thought to need a “mere ladder”), the narrator points out this portrait, glimpsed in motion, a face and headdress coming into view, its presence as an “ancestress of sorts” counterbalancing the relatively brief span of time the Olivers have lived in Pointz Hall. Throughout this passage the
narrator sounds much like Lucy as she later guides William Dodge through the house, extending her hospitality to him as a guest, noting objects and facts of interest. Both name, in different words, the woman in the portrait as “an ancestress of sorts”; both move up the stairs and down the corridor, although Lucy doesn’t mention the watch in the glass case, instead leading Dodge to the nursery and then a window from which they watch the audience for the pageant assembling. This act of guiding a guest through a house offers a means of orienting the person thus led in time and space. We are given a temporary platform from which to look, just as we are when the narrator cites *Figgis’s Guide Book* while describing the surrounding countryside.

This gesture of orienting the reader in the world of Pointz Hall is constantly in tension with the novel’s techniques of disorientation. *Between the Acts* seems to possess several parallels with the “Wandering Rocks” section of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, with its cross-cutting between various characters as they move about Dublin on a June day, where the slight overlaps between interlocking pieces or strands increasingly orients the reader. Repetitions of phrases lead the reader back to earlier moments, creating an overlapping sense of simultaneity – Father Connem walking through Clongowes fields, for instance, “his thinsocked ankles tickled by stubble,” or the “generous white arm” that flings a coin from “a window in Eccles Street,” or the “darkbacked figure” of Leopold Bloom “under Merchants’ arch scann[ing] books on the hawker’s cart,” or the glimpse of a young woman carefully removing a twig from her skirt. Meanwhile, the sandwich board men spelling H.E.L.Y’s, the throwaway announcing that “Elijah is coming” and the viceroy cavalcade all make their way through the city, the latter’s path reprised at the end of the chapter, drawing together the various strands while introducing new ones. Woolf’s
technique also has the effect of layering time, as I will discuss later, yet is far more jarring than Joyce’s mapping of the city, lacking a grid and calling attention to the fragility and elasticity of the narrative thread. While we are provided with landmarks and a sense of the house’s rootedness in time and space, we are also persistently unsettled, jolted, led astray into moments of reverie, or dazed by visions of violence, tugged one way and then another, led up and then plunged down, so that the landmarks we are provided with are confused and eventually erased.

In Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift (1998), Leo Charney cites Georg Simmel in his 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life": “‘With each crossing of the street,’ […] the city dweller is accosted by ‘the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions.’ Simmel’s description, Charney comments, “itself crowded with perceptions, gives us a vivid sense of the disjunctions, distractions, and discontinuities that were seen to characterize the emerging experience of modern life” (75). For Benjamin, too, Charney points out, the “experience of the urban street” was one that “bombarded” the subject with “stimuli and distractions from different directions, barraging and overloading sensation and perception. The transformations of perception that constituted modernity invoked a new kind of discontinuous, momentary attention, attention as distraction, diffused, scattered, and flickering. Benjamin perceived this modern overstimulation as a form of assault against which the subject must protect himself or herself […]” (52-3). I want to suggest that Woolf’s tactics of disorientation and her unsettling of vision in Between the Acts are aligned with “[m]odernity’s visual environment,” which plunges “the subject into a ceaselessly shifting effort at selection
and attention” (76), at the same time that it also draws in part upon a picturesque
aesthetic (particularly that of picturesque travel, with its “ingredients of landscape – trees
distances” (42)) that William Gilpin describes in his seminal *Three Essays on
Picturesque Beauty*. Gilpin defines the picturesque in terms of roughness or ruggedness,
variety, contrast, and movement, as opposed to the smoothness and regularity that are so
“disgusting” to the eye when represented in a work of art. The roughness of the
picturesque, as Woolf observes in her memoir, *A Sketch of the Past*, its “oddity” and
“romance,” are what her mental image of her father lacks. Instead, “[t]hat type is like a
steel engraving, without colour, or warmth or body; but with an infinity of precise clear
lines. There are no corners or crannies to catch my imagination; nothing dangles a spray
at me. It is all contained and complete and already summed up” (109). From this angle,
modernity’s shock-effects can be seen as an extension of the roughness of the
picturesque, perhaps sharing with it a common genealogy, only far more violent and
distracted in its effects than we might expect. In other words, there is a merging of a
"distracted mode of looking" (Charney 83) and a picturesque view of the seemingly
insular world of a country house in Woolf’s novel, with the narrative perspective finding
absorption in the dangling sprays of distraction, at the same time tangling threads of
vision.

Unlike MacKay, who argues that the "liberating flightiness of the modernist
flâneuse" gives way in the novel to "the experience and anticipation of a forced
displacement," with Woolf knowing (with the loss of "both of her London homes in the
bombing, and hearing nightly the planes passing over her country house in vulnerable
Sussex") "at first hand that modernist homelessness could become much more than a metaphor" ("Blitz," 247), I see the "flightiness of the modernist flâneuse," not as a tactic that Woolf rejected in a longing for rootedness, but instead as part of the fabric of *Between the Acts* -- part of the "adventures of the eye" that it is engaged in, opposed to that which is habitual and all too familiar. We see such a blurring of boundaries in the narrator's description of Lucy Swithin, in her room in Pointz Hall in the early morning, "expanding the bounds of the moment" by imagining the earth populated by “elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth; from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend."

It took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest.

Without warning – with the jerking open of the window that returns us with a jolt to an earlier suspended moment, when Lucy’s hand was first placed on the hasp of the window, her act of pushing it open interrupted by the narrator’s meandering account of her perennial question of whether to stay at Kensington or at Kew for the winter – two visual registers are comically superimposed, leaving the reader to disentangle them just as Lucy is forced to separate the two in her mind. As the narrative continues, with Grace calling Lucy “Batty” in her mind and feeling “on her face the divided glance that was half meant for a beast in a swamp, half for a maid in a print frock and white apron,” the realms of the

50 Bryson 92, in a description of a Chardin painting.
“green steaming undergrowth” of a forest and that of a maid serving an elderly woman her tea in a country house collide, leaving us as readers little time to recover from the impact so that when our attention is again directed elsewhere – to the singing of birds outside and to one bird in particular that obligingly hops on the lawn with a worm in its beak – the realms are still “intertwisted,” the primordial forest as well as with the trees of Pointz Hall casting their green shadows on the worm, the bird and the lawn.

As critics have noted, this superimposition of beast and maid is later echoed in Isa’s tragic vision, which is conjured by a newspaper article that she reads in the library while seeking a remedy for the "toothache" of her generation. The account is of a young girl who was raped by soldiers in a barrack room at Whitehall. Upon reading this story, Isa can see the event as it must have occurred, her vision telescoping in so that “on the mahogany door panels she saw the Arch in Whitehall; through the Arch the barrack room; in the barrack room the bed, and on the bed the girl was screaming and hitting him about the face, when the door (for in fact it was a door) opened and in came Mrs. Swithin carrying a hammer.” We are disoriented in time and space (and assume that Isa is too) as Lucy “advance[s], sidling, as if the floor were fluid under her shabby garden shoes, and, advancing, pursed her lips and smiled, sidelong, at her brother.” We are struck by the force of this superimposition of the girl’s hands lashing out at her attacker’s face and Lucy’s hammer, which has been used to nail a placard on the barn, and which, as MacKay notes, returns “in a fantasy of still more violent defense in which [Isa] has the raped woman beat her attacker ‘about the face’ with it instead of her fists.” The hammer, resonating with Woolf’s description of the war as akin to a hammer meaninglessly smashing a jar, thus “has become inseparable from its violent potential” (235).
Momentarily, then, Lucy’s innocent smile is overshadowed by corruption, her sense of
guilt at taking the hammer and nails without her brother’s permission colored by the
troopers’ guilt. For the reader too the floor becomes fluid as a door opens in two
different realms at once, tangled together before they can be disentangled.

These superimposed visual registers provide a means of thinking about the interplay
in the novel between different “mode[s] of looking” (Charney 83). In this respect I
would take quite the opposite view from that of MacKay, who contends that:

What is frightening here is the indistinct and the indistinguishable, the fluent
crossing of boundaries that modernist writing once celebrated [...]. Here the
intersubjective effects of high modernist narration generate strange monsters, as
when the narrative oscillates between Bart's point of view and that of his
grandson. ("Blitz, 250)

While I agree that the blurring of boundaries is cast as dangerous, producing "strange
monsters" in the novel, I am not convinced that the "work of assimilation and merging
that Woolf championed when Mrs. Ramsay or Mrs. Dalloway did it" has now
"accumulated dangerous connotations of infiltration and occupation," with an alignment
between the obliterating of "national specificities" in "interwar pacifist internationalism"
and "the occupying totalitarian regime that it could do nothing to resist" (250). Not only
are boundaries not "to be observed" (250), but any convenient opposition between
country and city, here and there, a space of escape or rootedness and one of urban
deracination, is dissolved. In a similar way, the moments of still life in the novel that are
presented as contrasts to this unsettled vision -- and which form an integral part of its
"visual field" -- can be read as both restful and perilous, calm and utterly violent.
Boundaries offer reassuring but ultimately makeshift separations.

II. Up, Down, From the Curve to the Straight

Because *Between the Acts* so persistently refuses -- like Lucy Swithin -- to settle or fix its gaze, it is worthwhile to consider moments when the narrative slows down, becomes still, threatens to halt, becomes enclosed or absorbed in self-sufficiency -- when Woolf strives to make her work attain the status of a still life, without the stability of a frame. These moments are engaged with the realm of painting, which, as we saw earlier, Woolf associated with silence and self-sufficiency -- a "saying something of its own" evident in Bell's *A Conversation*, which vies with the talkativeness of the social world. We see this contrast early on in Woolf's novel, when we are presented with a description of Candish, a servant who "paused in the dining-room to move a yellow rose. Yellow, white, carnation red -- he placed them. He loved flowers, and arranging them, and placing the green sword or heart-shaped leaf that came, fitly, between them. Queerly, he loved them, considering his gambling and drinking. The yellow rose went there. Now all was ready -- silver and white, forks and napkins, and in the middle the splashed bowl of variegated roses. So, with one last look, he left the dining-room." The satirical incongruity of this man, who enjoys gambling and drinking, enjoying flowers and their careful arrangement, is lightly touched upon as the colors are set forth, a medley of yellow, white, red, green, and silver, with the contrast of variegated roses. Like the flowers in *A Conversation*, these colors absorb the reader's attention and pull one away from the social world into the silence of the empty room as Candish departs.

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51 We might also think of these moments in relation to film: as "excursions into the whirlpools of the motionless," as Sigfried Kracauer wonderfully describes still moments in film, the "inherent motion" of which actively enables such stillness (*Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960], 44).
What we see in the empty room is two pictures hanging opposite the window. One is of a "long lady," the other of a "man holding his horse by the rein. The lady was a picture, bought by Oliver because he liked the picture; the man was an ancestor."

He was a talk producer, that ancestor. But the lady was a picture. In her yellow robe, leaning, with a pillar to support her, a silver arrow in her hand, and a feather in her hair, she led the eye up, down, from the curve to the straight, through glades of greenery and shades of silver, dun and rose into silence. The room was empty.

Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was; a vase stood in the heart of the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence. (35-37)

It is as if the viewer has been drawn into the realm of the lady's painting, pulled out to some limitless vanishing point, leaving the room empty, evacuating it of any human presence (except the mysterious narrative presence "which notes that a room is empty" and glories in sound, almost melting words down to their sound rather than meaning, like the nursemaids seen earlier rolling words like sweets on their tongue, and that is "not 'we' nor 'I,' nor the novelist either; for the novelist, all agree, must tell a story; and there are no stories for this spirit; this spirit is not concerned to follow lovers to the altar, nor to cut chapter from chapter; and write as novelists do").

Now the silence of the picture

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52 Pointz Hall earlier typescript draft, 61. "But who observed the dining-room? Who could [possibly] note the silence of emptiness? This presence certainly requires a name, for without a name what can exist? And how can silence be observed by a thing which has no existence? Yet by what name is that which enters rooms?" Woolf revises this right after: "Who noted the silence, the emptiness? What name is to be given to that which notes that a room is empty? This presence certainly requires a name, for without a name what can exist? And how can silence or emptiness be noted by that which has no existence?" (61). Right before this meditation, Woolf describes the picture of the lady, "whose purple, pink, yellow, and green was pleasing, whose pose was satisfying, so that the eye went back to it, and as it went back, laid a bar upon the tongue; as if the eye had led the mind down a silent and solitary path away from words [...]" (60).
resonates with that of the room, forming part of a shell that is filled with emptiness, silence, the sibilance like the breeze that sweeps through the "Time Passes" section of To the Lighthouse. This slowed-down moment, where the familiar social world is kept in the wings, as it were, invites the reader to linger and pause, offering a reprieve from the relentless disorientations of the narrative's elastic vision. The two portraits in the empty room seem part of an abandoned world, continuing their unspoken conversation while life continues elsewhere and the shell of the room sings its baffling song. Eddying in this backwater, this moment provides both a sense of refreshment in the coolness of color, the "glades of greenery and shades of silver, dun and rose" and the whispering breeze, as well as the danger of narrative progression coming to a complete halt. The drama of the social world is not just reduced, as it is with the flightiness of the narrative vision. Rather, it is turned away from in such moments as the attention is lured out and away, constituting the utmost limits of the novel's visual field.53 There is an assurance of a world "outside" or a world "elsewhere," that is presented as a reprieve as well as a real peril.54

As Bryson notes in Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting, this is precisely the lure as well as the menace of the still life genre. Still life paintings present aspects of "the world trampled underfoot to make way for what is of importance

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53 Helpful here is Jeff Nunokawa's "Eros and Isolation: The Antisocial George Eliot" (ELH, 69 [2002]: 835-860), although the turn away from "wordly involvements -- the push and shove of the claims that others make on us, the entanglements of aversion and attraction, all the pains of mind and heart such as those from which the dead, [Daniel] Deronda notes with something like envy, are disentangled" (853), or the "feat[s] of awayness" (859) that Victorian novels perform are more extreme in Between the Acts.

54 We could consider this still, silent moment described by Woolf in a diary entry from 20 January 1940: "Then L. went & skated & I walked on the bank & home over the marsh. The beauty was ethereal, unreal, empty. A June day. 10 degrees of frost. All silent, as if offered from another world. No birds, no carts, men shooting. This specimen against the war. This heartless & perfect beauty. The willows ruby red, no rust red; plumed; soft; & all the roofs orange & red; & the hills white. But some emptiness in me -- in my life -- because L. said the rent was so high. And then the silence, the pure disembodied silence, in which the perfect specimen was presented; seemed to correspond to my own vacancy, walking muffled with the sun in my eyes, & nothing pressing urging only this iron hard, ground, all painted" (259-60).
-- whether in life or in art" (86), a reality in which "there are no events" and "none of the
drama of history" (87).

Its whole project forces the subject, both painter and viewer, to attend closely to
the preterite objects in the world which, exactly because they are so familiar,
elude normal attention. Since still life needs to look at the overlooked, it has to
bring into view objects which perception normally screens out. The difficulty is
that by bringing into consciousness and into visibility things that perception
normally overlooks, the visual field can come to appear radically unfamiliar and
estranged. (87)

This attention to the overlooked, or to those aspects of the non-social and non-human
realms that are beyond narrative interest and progression, are brought out in the still
moments when the narrative vision of Between the Acts is stretched out to a vanishing
point. In The Common Ground, Beer discerningly observes how one of the “features of
Virginia Woolf’s style is her fascination with taking language out towards
obliterativeness, towards things she feels cannot be described, like the clouds near the
beginning of Between the Acts and the sky whose blue cannot be symbolized […]” (13).

While images cannot be detached from language, at least not in narrative (Lucy’s
suggestion of “thoughts without words” when discussing paintings goes “quite beyond”
Mrs. Manresa), in Woolf’s novel she takes vision as well as language out towards its
vanishing point, testing its limits and powers, so that the scene with the clouds not only
gestures towards that which “escapes registration,” but also stretches the narrative thread
and the reader’s perspective out towards an alabaster cloud and the “blue, pure blue,
black blue” of cosmic space “that had never filtered down.” At this point our vision is
snapped back to the earth, which we are told has never felt that black blue as "sun, shadow, or rain," then swept back up into space to view "the little coloured ball of earth" that is disregarded by the cosmic rays, then tugged back as the narrative voice insists, "No flower felt it; no field; no garden." Grounding and ungrounding the reader, zooming in and out, backwards and forwards, jolting from one thing to another, from assertion to negation (which superimposes what isn’t upon what is the case), the novel’s gestures towards orientation and its disorientations occur in the same space.

In the moments of still life, the novel "breaks with narrative's scale of human importance"; located at a level "where nothing exceptional occurs," such moments render narrative helpless and create "a sense of estrangement from the social field" (Bryson 60-61, 89). If they do tell a story, they are narratives that "tell only of brief journeys across a corner of everyday life" (93). Like the trompe l'oeil paintings that Bryson describes, moments of still life in Woolf’s novel reveal the autonomy of objects, rendering human beings "incidental to their independent life" and in so doing, "cast[ing] doubt on the human subject's place in the world, and on whether the subject has a place in the world." As Bryson puts it, very much echoing Woolf’s meditations in her earlier typescript draft that I mention earlier, trompe l'oeil (and, as I argue, these linguistic moments of still life) induce "a feeling of vertigo or shock" in offering a view of "the appearance the world might have without a subject to perceive it, the world minus human consciousness, the look of the world before our entry into it or after our departure from it" (142-43).

There is a constant movement back and forth between the human and non-human realms in Between the Acts, between an unsettled vision that is an implement to absorption, and moments of still life that form part of the disorientation. After the
narrative slows down with its depiction of the two paintings, the silent and empty room is noisily interrupted by a chorus of voices that is itself interrupted by the realization that there is company, with the arrival of Mrs. Manresa and William Dodge. "Across the hall a door opened. One voice, another voice, a third voice came wimpling and warbling [...]":

Coming out from the library the voices stopped in the hall. They encountered an obstacle evidently; a rock. Utterly impossible was it, even in the heart of the country, to be alone? That was the shock. After that, the rock was raced round, embraced. If it was painful, it was essential. There must be society. (37)\textsuperscript{55}

This push and pull is more complicated than the tension evident in \textit{A Conversation}. In the novel, the pull outwards and away from the social world also facilitates a curving backwards, its moments of "still life" slowing down and layering time, helping to create a sense of familiarity as well as inevitability that is again, as I will show, drawn back from.

\section*{III. Adventures of the Eye}

\textit{Laughter in the Bushes}

“Cubist dissonance,” maintains Stewart, “substituted a multi-faceted view of the object for the illusion of oneness” (66). The “limited temporality of perception (against which Cézanne had struggled) was superseded by a so-called ‘fourth dimension,’ in which successive views of an object would appear simultaneously” (67). While Woolf,

\begin{footnote}
From the earlier typescript: "For want of a better name, let us call it Society, that eternal sensation or desire implanted not in humanity only, for the cow and the weasel have it, to meet; even if it be but to collide; to meet, even though the collision is painful; as indeed it was at this moment, one thirty-five on a June morning in the hall at Pointz Hall" (62); "In order to give the full effect of collision, there should be added to this speech (very imperfectly reported) the fluttering sound of Lucy's voice; old Bart's mutter; but that was scarcely articulate, and Isabella's level, silent stare. (For in every sound there is an element of silence.)" (63)
\end{footnote}
Stewart argues, intersperses “pageant and ‘reality’” in *Between the Acts*, “cutting the novel into thirty-six unnumbered sections,” she “seldom departs from sequentiality,” creating instead a “tension or ambiguity between temporal dimensions: the accelerated procession of historical scenes, with its artificial continuity, intersects with the narrative present, where space often overwhelms time as duration slows to a standstill” (70). In a footnote, Stewart mentions what he considers to be the one instance of simultaneity in the novel: “The sixteenth and seventeenth sections describe simultaneous events, as they are juxtaposed within the same time-frame, marked by the repetition of the phrase, ‘The laughter died away…’ at the head of sections sixteen and eighteen” (88, n.16). There seem to me at least two other instances of simultaneity in the novel, which I will discuss below, but for now, I would like to examine with a “closer gaze” how this repeated “laughter in the bushes” creates a kind of “jerky syncopation” that Stewart sees as characteristic of the pageant, presenting an uncannily historical sense of repetition whereby what we see is something that has both already happened and has yet to occur.

The Oliver family and their two unexpected guests, Mrs. Manresa and William Dodge, are sitting outside, looking at the view under “the shelter of the old wall” (52). They discuss art and the English insensitivity to painting (“‘We haven’t the words – we haven’t the words,’ Mrs. Swithin protested. ‘Behind the eyes; not on the lips; that’s all’”), a conversation that Mrs. Manresa insists is quite beyond her, helping herself to coffee and cream which she stirs “[s]ensuously, rhythmically,” looking over her cup at Giles, “with whom she felt in conspiracy. A thread united them – visible, invisible, like those threads, now seen, now not, that unite trembling grass blades in autumn before the sun rises.” She looks at her drink – “Looking was part of drinking. Why waste
sensation, she seemed to ask, why waste a single drop that can be pressed out of this ripe, this melting, this adorable world? Then she drank. And the air round her became threaded with sensation.” Attuned to a close vision of the threads that unite grass blades in autumn mornings, and almost overloaded with sensation, we move from the narrative’s absorption in Mrs. Manresa’s drink to her question about the pageant, “‘into which we’ve gone and butted’ – she made it, too, seem ripe like the apricot into which the wasps were burrowing,” asking, ‘what’s it to be?’ She turned. ‘Don’t I hear?’ She listened. She heard laughter, down among the bushes, where the terrace dipped to the bushes.”

After a double line break, we see that “[b]eyond the lily pool the ground sank again, and in that dip of the ground, bushes and brambles had mobbed themselves together. It was always shady; sun-flecked in summer, dark and damp in winter. In the summer there were always butterflies; fritillaries darting through; Red Admirals feasting and floating; cabbage whites, unambitiously fluttering round a bush, like muslin milkmaids, content to spend a life there.” Expecting to be taken to the source of the laughter that Mrs. Manresa has called our attention to, our vision is disoriented and our senses again nearly overloaded with these darting, feasting, floating, fluttering butterflies. Like the lily pool or empty barn, or the portrait of the lady, we see a self-enclosed world, indifferent to the human, yet here this world is interrupted by butterfly-catching, which, “for generation after generation, began there; for Bartholomew and Lucy; for

56 We are told that, "The Barn was empty. Mice slid in and out of holes or stood upright, nibbling. Swallows were busy with straw in pockets of earth in the rafters. Countless beetles and insects of curious sorts burrowed in the dry wood. A stray bitch had made the dark corner where the sacks stood a lying-in ground for her puppies. All these eyes, expanding and narrowing, some adapted to light, others to darkness, looked from different angles and edges. Minute nibblings and rustlings broke the silence. Whiffs of sweetness and richness veined the air. A blue-bottle had settled on the cake and stabbed its yellow rock with its short drill. A butterfly sunned itself sensuously on a sunlit yellow plate." (100)
Giles; for George it had begun only the day before yesterday, when, in his little green net, he had caught a cabbage white.” Within this visual reverie we are grounded in the continuities of the past, and then jolted by the words, “It was the very place for a dressing-room, just as, obviously, the terrace was the very place for a play.” Again we are disoriented: “‘The very place!’ Miss La Trobe had exclaimed the first time she came to call and was shown the grounds. It was a winter’s day. The trees were leafless then.

“That’s the place for a pageant, Mr. Oliver!’ she had exclaimed. “Winding in and out between the trees…” She waved her hand at the trees standing bare in the clear light of January. “There the stage; here the audience; and down there among the bushes a perfect dressing-room for the actors.”

We see here the genesis for the play that follows, just as we later glimpse another moment of vision when she envisions the stage and actors for her next play – the play. The focus on this inhuman world of the butterflies, self-sufficient in their colors, their feasting, pauses the narrative, almost distracting us with its absorptive power.

After another double line break we hear that “The laughter died away.” We get the sense of a visual ellipsis, of something that has happened in the interval, outside of our vision, in a blind spot, shown the site of the laughter but not what is currently taking place there. “‘Are they going to act?’ Mrs. Manresa asked.” Giles answers, “‘Act; dance; sing; a little bit of everything’”; Mrs. Swithin notes Miss La Trobe’s “wonderful energy”; Isabella notes how she “‘makes everyone do something’”; Bartholomew comments how their part is to be the audience; and William remains silent, his silence contributing to the talk. After more talk that enrages Giles, who “‘hated this kind of talk this afternoon,’” with “[b]ooks open; no conclusion come to; and he sitting in the audience,” the words ceasing
“to lie flat in the sentence,” instead rising, becoming “menacing” and shaking “their fists at you,” and after we discover that William is a homosexual, Isa musing upon why this should matter, she hears “sounds of laughter” once more. “‘I think I hear them,’ she said. ‘They’re getting ready. They’re dressing up in the bushes.’”

We move back to the bushes, where La Trobe is “pacing to and fro between the leaning birch trees. One hand was deep stuck in her jacket pocket; the other held a foolscap sheet. She was reading what was written there. She had the look of a commander pacing his deck. The leaning graceful trees with black bracelets circling the silver bark were distant about a ship’s length.” We still don’t see the actors producing the laughter that Isa hears. “Wet would it be, or fine? Out came the sun; and, shading her eyes in the attitude proper to an Admiral on his quarter-deck, she decided to risk the engagement out of doors. Doubts were over. All stage properties, she commanded, must be moved from the Barn to the bushes. It was done. And the actors, while she paced, taking all responsibility and plumping for fine, not wet, dressed among the brambles. Hence the laughter.” Here we are finally given an account of the laughter we have twice heard mentioned, although it is as yet unclear whether this laughter corresponds to the first or second time we hear it mentioned. “The clothes were strewn on the grass. Cardboard crowns, swords made of silver paper, turbans that were sixpenny dish cloths, lay on the grass or were flung on the bushes. There were pools of red and purple in the shade; flashes of silver in the sun. The dresses attracted the butterflies. Red and silver, blue and yellow gave off warmth and sweetness. Red Admirals gluttonously absorbed richness from dish cloths, cabbage whites drank icy coolness from silver paper. Flitting, tasting, returning, they sampled the colours.” Absorbed once more in the feasting of the
butterflies, our attention is allowed to linger before we are pulled back to Miss La Trobe and her plans for a new play and her orders to the actors, who “appealed to her” in “little troops.” She paces between the birch trees. “The other trees were magnificently straight. They were not too regular; but regular enough to suggest columns in a church; in a church without a roof; in an open-air cathedral, a place where swallows darting seemed, by the regularity of the trees, to make a pattern, dancing, like the Russians, only not to music, but to the unheard rhythm of their own wild hearts.” Moved quickly from La Trobe’s depths, the image of her splashing like a stone into the depths of a lily pool, up to the exhilarating flight of swallows dancing to the rhythm of their heartbeats, forming a pattern in the trees, the reader is once again unsettled, “neither here nor there.”

“The laughter died away.” We are brought back with a slight thud to the group still assembled, looking at the view, realizing that the scene in the dip behind the lily pool was indeed occurring at the same time that Giles felt manacled to a rock and William caught a cup that Isa purposefully let fall. This scene outside by the shelter of the wall has been stretched out and dilated, the thread of continuity almost snapped, but here we return again, with Mrs. Manresa repeating (although we don’t hear the first time she says it) “‘We must possess our souls in patience […] Or could we help?’ she suggested, glancing over her shoulder, ‘with those chairs?,’” after which we are very quickly plunged into an uncomfortable scene where the characters feel exposed, under an “intolerable burden,” looking at the view.
Incidents of Garden Life

Before moving outside, the group had been assembled in the dining-room, becoming acquainted and drinking the champagne brought by Mrs. Manresa, when, “[o]ut of the corner of his eye, as he raised his glass,” Bart “saw a flash of white in the garden. Someone passing.” After this Joycean observation and a double line break we see the “scullery maid, before the plates came out,” cooling “her cheeks by the lily pond.” Not entirely certain whether or not the scullery maid on her way to the pond was the flash of white seen by Bart, we are plunged into a description of the lily pond. Our eyes and attention are absorbed by the “self-centered world” of fish, silting mud, and silent movement. “A grain fell and spiraled down; a petal fell, filled and sank.” We are told of the lady who might have drowned herself for love “in that deep center, in that black heart,” although when the pool was dredged only a sheep bone was discovered. “Alas, it was a sheep’s, not a lady’s. And sheep have no ghosts, for sheep have no souls. But the servants insisted, they must have a ghost; the ghost must be a lady’s, who drowned herself for love. So none of them would walk by the lily pool at night, only now when the sun shone and the gentry still sat at table.” Narrative interest is both presented and evacuated as we, following the spiraling of a grain and the falling, filling and sinking of a petal, which again totally disregards human life, are in danger of becoming absorbed, lost and sinking. Then we see that the “flower petal sank; the maid returned to the kitchen; Bartholomew sipped his wine.” Bart’s sipping of his wine (or champagne) seems to continue his earlier movement, begun in the previous section, of raising his glass to his lips, seeing a flash of white in the garden.

As we see the maid returning to the kitchen we are returned to the interrupted
moment with a thud, just as we are returned to Lucy jerking open the window after leaving her there, with her hand on the hasp, while the narrator describes her perennial question of Kensington or Kew and how she woke earlier to the sound of birds and reached for her Outline of History. The question of ghosts and servants is then returned to by Bart’s desire to entertain the “adorable lady,” as the “first thing that came handy; the story of the sheep’s thigh,” suggested to him by the flash of white, of “someone passing.” We recognize that the maid’s cooling of her cheeks, the filling and sinking of the petal in the still waters of the pool, was simultaneous with Mrs. Manresa’s pouring of champagne and her ogling, her staking of her claim, with “blow after blow, with champagne and ogling,” to be “a wild child of nature, blowing into this – she did give one secret smile – sheltered harbour; which did make her smile, after London; yet it did, too, challenge London.” The connection that Mrs. Manresa soon afterwards draws between herself and the servants, insisting to the rest of the group that “‘I’m nothing like so grown up as you are,’” “approving of her adolescence,” is already established by this pulling of the narrative thread to circle backwards and down into the heart of the lily pool before moving outwards, eventually into the portrait of a lady that draws her viewers “down the paths of silence” and the painting’s own self-centered world.

Before the arrival of the guests and after describing Lucy in her bedroom as she expands the bounds of the moment and drinks her morning tea, the narrative moves outside, after breakfast, “where the nurses are “trundling the perambulator up and down the terrace; and as they trundled they were talking – not shaping pellets of information or handing ideas from one to another, but rolling words, like sweets on their tongues; which, as they thinned to transparency, gave off pink, green, and sweetness.” The narrative
wanders from the nursemaids to the hollow in which Pointz Hall was built, to the terrace itself, which “was broad enough to take the entire shadow or one of the great trees laid flat. There you could walk up and down, up and down, under the shade of the trees. Two or three grew close together; then there were gaps. Their roots broke the turf, and among those bones were green waterfalls and cushions of grass in which violets grew in spring or in summer the wild purple orchis,” shifting thus from one shade of color to another. Zooming out to view the entire length of the terrace, including the vertical height of the trees, the narrative swiftly, disorientingly, zooms in to the roots of the trees and the “green waterfalls and cushions of grass” among which violets or the purple orchis bloom in spring or summer. “Amy was saying something about a feller when Mabel, with her hand on the pram, turned sharply, her sweet swallowed. ‘Leave off grubbing,’ she said sharply. ‘Come along George.’” Our eyes must refocus as we see that the “little boy had lagged and was grouting in the grass. Then the baby, Caro, thrust her fist out over the coverlet and the furry bear was jerked overboard. Amy had to stoop. George grubbed. The flower blazed between the angles of the roots. Membrane after membrane was torn. It blazed a soft yellow, a lambent light under a film of velvet; it filled the caverns behind the eyes with light. All that inner darkness became a hall, leaf smelling, earth smelling, of yellow light. And the tree was beyond the flower; the grass, the flower and the tree were entire. Down on his knees grubbing he held the flower complete.”

Suddenly “there was a roar and a hot breath and a stream of coarse grey hair rushed between him and the flower. Up he leapt, toppling in his fright, and saw coming toward him a terrible peaked eyeless monster moving on legs, brandishing arms.” A “hollow voice” booms at him “from a beak of paper. / The old man had sprung upon him
from his hiding-place behind a tree.” Echoing Lucy’s vision of a primeval monster, superimposed upon the figure of Grace, Bart-as-monster destroys, in what Woolf would call a "moment of being," his grandson’s vision of unity, erupting in his world with violence, heat, and a roar. The nurse, Mabel, urges George to say good morning to his grandfather, pushing the boy towards Bart. “But George stood gaping. George stood gazing. Then Mr. Oliver crumpled the paper which he had cocked into a snout and appeared in person.” After this section we return inside, where Isa is drawing a “comb through the thick tangle of hair which, after giving the matter her best attention, she had never had shingled or bobbed.” We shift scenes without any apparent connection, while Isa muses over her feelings for the “gentleman farmer,” and sees her reflection in “the three-folded mirror, so that she could see three separate versions of her rather heavy, yet handsome, face; and also, outside the glass, a slip of terrace, lawn and tree tops.”

Looking out the window, above the mirror, she sees “coming across the lawn the perambulator; two nurses; and her little boy George, lagging behind.” With this repetition of George “lagging behind,” we seem to be taken back to the moment of its first iteration, before the boy’s world has been “destroyed” by the intrusion of his grandfather with his beak of newspaper. This return (as I see it) layers our sense of time, expanding the bounds of the moment, yet is also uncanny, submerging the scene and coloring it with a sense of fatality and inevitability that resonates with the novel’s historical context, as it depicts a world in which the Second World War has not yet intruded, although the war has already begun for the author writing it and for her readers. This inability to act upon the scene is reflected in Isa’s tapping on the window “with her embossed hairbrush. They were too far off to hear. The drone of the trees was in their
ears; the chirp of birds; other incidents of garden life, inaudible, invisible to her in the bedroom, absorbed them. Isolated on a green island, hedged about with snowdrops, laid with a counterpane of puckered silk, the innocent island floated under her window. Only George lagged behind.”

IV. Dazing the Eye

What I am calling moments of still life, in which words and images aspire to a sensuousness and self-sufficiency that expel human and narrative importance, and where a sense of depth is achieved in the pull towards a vanishing point in a realm beyond language, are in opposition to what Michael North calls a "snapshot aesthetic" that I will discuss in Chapter Two, and which is concerned with freezing and stunning images, keeping everything on the surface. During an interval of the pageant, Isa wanders alone, muttering to herself (as is her wont): “‘Where do I wander?...Down what draughty tunnels? Where the eyeless wind blows? And there grows nothing for the eye. No rose. To issue where? In some harvestless dim field where no evening lets fall her mantle; nor sun rises. All’s equal there. Unblowing, ungrowing are the roses there. Change is not; nor the mutable and lovable; nor greetings nor partings; nor furtive findings and feelings, where hand seeks hand and eye seeks shelter from the eye…” This frozen realm where "there grows nothing for the eye" is intimately linked with the particular violence of the camera, as we witness in the virtuosic mirror scene that forms part of La Trobe’s final act: the Present. Ourselves. This crucial scene in the play takes place when, after the broken jazz rhythms are played – the tune changing, snapping, breaking, jagged – children or “[i]mps – elves – demons” come out from the bushes holding reflective
objects, and can be read as a specifically photographic moment. While the objective of La Trobe’s “little game” is to reflect “ourselves” in present time, on a June day in 1939, its cruelty, as a random voice notes, is “To snap us as we are, before we’ve had time to assume… And only, too, in parts… That’s what’s so distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair” (184). Even ”the old who, one might suppose, hadn’t any longer any care for their faces” are rendered helplessly self-conscious, caught out by the broken images. The “riff-raff,” “[m]opping, mowing, whisking, frisking,” with their looking-glasses that “darted, flashed, [and] exposed,” create a visual cacophony that is compounded by the sound of cows joining in, undoing the “reticence of nature,” and the noise of the actors speaking broken-off lines from the play. After all this “uproar,” which forms part of the overall disorienting texture of the novel, the children and mirror objects finally come to a stand-still, as one boy finds the cheval glass from the Rectory too heavy – “for all his muscle [he] couldn’t lug the damned thing about any longer” – and “all stopped. And the audience saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still.” Meanwhile, the “hands of the clock had stopped at the present moment. It was now. Ourselves.” They all shift in their seats, preen and mince – “hands were raised, legs shifted. Even Bart, even Lucy, turned away. All evaded or shaded themselves – save Mrs. Manresa who, facing herself in the glass, used it as a glass; had out her mirror; powdered her nose; and moved one curl, disturbed by the breeze, to its place” (186). “Alone she preserved unashamed her identity, and faced without blinking herself. Calmly she reddened her lips.” The tin cans, candlesticks, old jars, the cheval glass and the cracked mirror, might as well be cameras taking snapshots, with their flashes and exposures, ambushing the audience before they have time to assume proper poses,
catching them out in parts with a brutal honesty reminiscent of the tactics of Brassai or Cartier-Bresson. Only Mrs. Manresa escapes being “caught,” exposed and flattened in a static image – instead, she uses the surface as a mirror, turning the reflective function of a camera back on itself, calmly reddening her lips. “The mirror bearers squatted; malicious; observant; expectant; expository.” Their images not only reflect, but they observe and explain. The audience members in the back row titter, pleased that the others have been caught, while those in the front ask, “Must we submit passively to this malignant indignity?” Each tries to “shift an inch or two beyond the inquisitive insulting eye,” while some “made as if to go.”

The violence and discomfort of this scene can perhaps be read in relation to Woolf’s experience with the photographer, Gisèle Freund. On a June day in 1939, Woolf received a visit in her Bloomsbury home from her Argentine friend, Victoria Ocampo, who bought along Freund as her guest. Woolf had long avoiding getting her photograph taken (later stating, “Twice I had made excuses so as not to sit to Madame Freund”), yet felt coerced into accepting Freund’s offer to photograph her in her home. As she writes in her diary, “Ocampo bringing Giselle Freund [sic] & all her apparatus, which was set up in the drawing room, & all the literar[y] gents & ladies shown on a sheet […] And the upshot is, a sitting […] No getting out of it, with Okampo [sic] on the sofa, & Freund there in the flesh. So my afternoon is gone in the way to me most detestable & upsetting of all.” Woolf felt tricked by what she considered their ruse (or “little game”) to entrap her, leaving her no option but to accept or else be unthinkably rude to guests in her own home. Woolf vents her outrage in her diary and in a letter to Vita Sackville-West, and expresses her annoyance in a letter to Ocampo: writings that Freund later read and
expressed great surprise and defensiveness over, attributing Woolf’s to her otherwise inexplicable response to “an acute anxiety attack.” Freund complains, “Her exegetes accuse me of having ‘violated’ Virginia Woolf by making her pose for me […] The truth is quite another story!” In her letter to Vita, Woolf insisted that she loathed “being hoisted about on top of a stick for any one to stare at.” She tells her that she is “in a rage,” calling Freund, who has apparently just calmly informed her that “she’s showing those d—d photographs – and I made it a condition she shouldn’t,” a “devil woman.” It is clear that Woolf felt not only exposed and trapped, “filched and pilfered and gate crashed” by “the treacherous vermin,” but also physically violated, hoisted on a stick for public viewing. Her rage at this “petty vulgar photography-advertising stunt,” this fixing of the “inquisitive insulting eye” (as she describes the mirrors in the scene of the Present Day) of the camera upon her, producing a “life sized coloured animated photograph” for anyone to inspect, seems to underlie the audience’s sense of outrage in *Between the Acts*, although there they are caught in parts rather than life-sized, frozen rather than animated, and not given the chance to compose themselves as Woolf was in her portrait session.

The freezing of the image, the maliciousness of being caught and observed, seems to be part of what the novel as a whole stringently resists. Yet it also resists the fluency of film, with its “one-thing-after-another technology” (Charney 86). In a diary entry dated 16 December 1940, Woolf describes a visit paid to her and Leonard by Kingsley Martin, their friend and editor of the *New Statesman*. On this afternoon Woolf notes critically how the “sensitive plate of his mind only takes the surface. Yes, its like going to the films – the film of December 1940 talking to Kingsley. He reels off Bob Boothby; shelters; air raids; politics; not composed, but fluent. I sit with my eyes dazed.” Whether
frozen in a flash or unreeled fluently, the photographic image dazes or dazzles the eye, refusing any sense of depth, enacting a kind of violence of flatness that Woolf’s novel provides a respite from and counters with a violence of its own, in its more dizzying effects and refusal to lie flat upon a pictorial plane.

V. The Roaming Eye

As a point of contrast, we might pause here to consider two works by Bell, which present a feeling of calm and stability, as well as a smooth pull inwards towards the human realm, that are remarkably unsettled in Between the Acts. The interplay between inside and outside that Beer notes in Bell's work is evident in Charleston Pond (c.1919) [Fig. 3] as well as in The Open Door (1926). In the earlier work, a vase and other objects sit on a windowsill overlooking the pond, in which reflections of a fence and trees and the sky draw the viewer's attention across the water's surface and towards the vase, which seems almost sentiently observing the outside world. As much as the eye is absorbed in the play of reflections and overlapping patterns of color, which pull both downwards into the imagined depths of water and across the surface, our attention is always drawn back inside, to the vase, to the soft rose and orange of the wall, to the green of the windowsill and the bright boldness of the patterned curtain on the right of the picture. There seems to be a conversation going on between the domestic and exterior spaces -- an exchange that merges them while they are separated by the window and wall of the house. Here, unlike in A Conversation I would say, the pull outwards is restrained by a stronger pull inwards;

57 This placement of still life objects by windows, as if they were looking out upon the outside scene, is evident in other works by Bell, such as Apples: 46 Gordon Square (1908), Interior with a Table, St Tropez (1921), and Still Life at a Window (1922). In the later Still Life with Bust by Studio Window (1955), the bust instead seems resolutely turned away from the window, whereas a jar of flowers beside it appears to be almost absorbing the outer world.
the temptation to become fully absorbed in the reflections is tempered by the watchfulness of the vase, with its patch of lighter paint sharing the same color as the pinkish reflections that catch the eye upon the water’s surface. There is less of a contrast between a vividly colorful exterior and a more somber interior (that comprises the darker "monumentality," as Beer calls it, of the women's forms in *A Conversation*), and a greater sense of overall harmony in the picture.

![Fig. 3 Charleston Pond, c.1919](image)

In *The Open Door*, there is a similar conversation between indoor and outdoor spaces, with a stronger mirroring: a chair on the inside of an open doorway mirrors another chair in the walled garden space, and the vase of flowers on the table inside mirrors the trees and bushes on the outside. The eye is drawn outwards, moving from a sky-blue cushion on the chair to a hint of blue in the bit of visible sky, but again, it is drawn back inside, to the chair upon which a book rests as if someone had just
temporarily left the room and was on his or her way back. In the meantime, in that space of absence, there is a pressing silence, a pressure of sunlight, an invitation to let one's attention move back and forth across the threshold of the doorway and to become absorbed in patches of paint and color, the vigorous brushstrokes that compose the outside foliage and the contrasting surfaces of the outer and inner floors. The entire space seems almost theatrical with its framing by a set of heavy brown drapes that reach from ceiling to floor, as if drawing the spectator into a secluded, private realm. There isn't the sense, as there often is in Woolf's works, that empty spaces can quickly become wholly and perhaps permanently evacuated, recklessly abandoned by all human presence, as we see in the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse*, in which the summer house has been "deserted," "left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it," the "long night" seeming "to have set in; the trifling airs, nibbling, the clammy breaths, fumbling, seem[ing] to have triumphed. The saucepan had rusted and the mat decayed. Toads had nosed their way in. Idly, aimlessly, the swaying shawl swung to and fro." The scene slows down with each added detail:

A thistle thrust itself between the tiles in the larder. The swallows nested in the drawing-room; the floor was strewn with straw; the plaster fell in shovelfuls; rafters were laid bare; rats carried off this and that to gnaw behind the wainscots. Tortoise-shell butterflies burst from the chrysalis and pattered their life out on the window-pane. Poppies sowed themselves among the dahlias; the lawn waved with long grass; giant artichokes towered among roses; a fringed carnation flowered among the cabbages; while the gentled tapping of a weed at the window
had become, on winters' nights, a drumming from sturdy trees and thorned briars which made the whole room green in summer. (137-38)

We are told that, if "the feather had fallen, if it had tipped the scale downwards, the whole house would have plunged to the depths to lie upon the sands of oblivion" (139). Instead of such teetering on the verge of oblivion, there is a sense of temporary waiting in Bell's painting, of lingering warmth that almost amounts to a scent that has not yet left the indoor or outdoor spaces.

This tension between a pull outwards and inwards, between absence and presence, a social and nonhuman world is, as we have seen, part of the basic fabric of *Between the Acts*, although there is a sense that the stakes are higher, the dangers of the journey outwards far more perilous, linked with the dissolution of Thanatos, and with the pull back to the familiar social world more disorienting and almost violent in its force. The deep sense of calm in *Charleston Pond* and *The Open Door*, that is, are exploded in what is not so much a valedictory war elegy that enacts a "national turn" (MacKay 251) in its longing for stability, but more an experiment in contrasts (as Woolf wrote in July of 1939 in relation to the book, "But I'm all in favour of the wild, the experimental") that pursues a dream of rest in an unexpected realm -- in a non-social, non-human, self-sufficient, silent world that challenges narrative progression and offers to lure the viewer or reader out to the freedom of an unknown future.

After the pageant, we see Lucy standing and "still gaz[ing] at the lily pool. 'All gone,' she murmured, 'under the leaves.'"

Scared by shadows passing, the fish had withdrawn. She gazed at the water.

Perfunctorily she caressed her cross. But her eyes went water searching, looking
for fish. The lilies were shutting; the red lily, the white lily, each on its plate of leaf. Above, the air rushed; beneath was water. She stood between two fluidities, caressing her cross. Faith required hours of kneeling in the early morning. Often the delight of the roaming eye seduced her -- a sunbeam, a shadow. Now the jagged leaf at the corner suggested, by its contours, Europe. There were other leaves. She fluttered her eye over the surface, naming leaves India, Africa, America. Islands of security, glassy and thick. (204-5)

Turning to her brother to ask him about the dragon-fly and its habits, she discovers that he had already left and returned to the house.

Then something moved in the water; her favorite fantail. The golden orfe followed. Then she had a glimpse of silver -- the great carp himself, who came to the surface so very seldom. They slid on, in and out between the stalks, silver; pink; gold; splashed; streaked; pied.

"Ourselves," she murmured. And retrieving some glint of faith from the grey waters, hopefully, without much help from reason, she followed the fish; the speckled, streaked, and blotched; seeing in that vision beauty, power, and glory in ourselves. (205)

While the reader, too, is drawn in by the solidity of the colors in this self-sufficient world of the fish in the lily pool, there is some distance between the narrator's perspective and Lucy's. Moving from the "delight of the roaming eye" to a symbolism (seeing in the various fish a vision of the multiplicity of human life) that does not have "much help from reason," Lucy is wrapped up in a "private vision; of beauty which is goodness; the sea on which we float" (205). That translation from the particular and local to the
symbolic register is one that the novel particularly resists; in its moments of still life we are pressed to encounter that which is usually overlooked or "trampled" in sweeping narratives of love or war. In their "brief journeys across a corner of everyday life" (Bryson 93) that stretch out the novel's perspective and the reader's vision, these pictorial moments counterbalance and relieve the pressure and in a sense thin out the narrative that the novel presents, offering a space where there are no inevitabilities, only the seductions of color, lines and form.

Once the guests have departed and the family is again assembled in the house, night falls and we return to where the novel began, in the large room overlooking the garden on a summer's night, one day closer to the inevitable start of war. After Lucy stops in front of "the great picture of Venice -- school of Canaletto" and then returns gently "from her voyage into the picture," standing silent, for a moment looking "like a tragic figure from another play," we are told that, “Shadow had obliterated the garden. Roses had withdrawn for the night.” Lucy, Isa and Bart murmur and exchange a few words (although not really an exchange, each instead riffing off the same melody), and Lucy reads her Outline of History again, looking at the pictures of mammoths, mastodons and prehistoric birds. “The darkness increased. The breeze swept round the room. With a little shiver Mrs. Swithin drew her sequin shawl about her shoulders. She was too deep in the story to ask for the window to be shut. ‘England,’ she was reading, ‘was then a swamp. Thick forests covered the land. On the top of their matted branches birds sang…” The room is slowly emptied out, turned cold and dark, taken over by a breeze, which echoes, as does Lucy's shawl, the "Time Passes" section of To the Lighthouse that I mentioned earlier, and as we saw earlier in the empty and silent dining room, now
imaginatively populated by prehistoric beasts and forests. “The great square of the open window showed only sky now. It was drained of light, severe, stone cold. Shadows fell. Shadows crept over Bartholomew’s high forehead; over his great nose. He looked leafless, spectral, and his chair monumental. As a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered. He rose, shook himself, glared at nothing, and stalked from the room.” The dog follows and Lucy turns the pages quickly and guiltily. “‘Prehistoric man,’ she read, ‘half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones.’” She marks her page and gets up, smiles and tiptoes silently from the room.”

Time slows and our attention is largely focused rather than pulled from one thing to another, the slowing down here slower than in the moments of still life that we have been considering, and as night falls the distinguishing marks fade, leaving Isa and Giles are left alone together for the first time that day. “Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.” The hooded chairs “had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks. Then the curtain rose. They spoke.”

Poised between speech and silence, like the unheard words in A Conversation, these final words, while they seem to complete a circle, following a traditional pattern whereby the “end of the story is the retrospective revelation of the law of the whole” (18), as J. Hillis Miller puts it in Ariadne’s Thread, also trace smaller circles, back to La
Trobe’s first visions of her new play – the play – pulling our attention backwards just as it creates an arc back to the beginnings of human history and forward into the vanishing point of an unknown yet inevitable future. While the shock-effects of an urban visual aesthetic seem to recede in the stability and grounding of the country house here, the reader is still not permitted to settle down and fall into a lulling complacency. In the interplay between the blindness of the “heart of darkness” and the grounding of the “fields of night,” in the vertiginous obliteration of orienting landmarks and the looming figures of Isa and Giles, seen from “some high place among rocks,” the novel jolts the reader out of the comforts of habitual vision, offering instead the sense of alternate worlds, different temporalities, that lighten the burden of this human world.

This scene resonates with, while it differs from, moments in Woolf’s earlier novels. At a point of crisis in her first novel, The Voyage Out, Terence Hewet is grappling with Rachel Vinrace’s illness, when he suddenly seems “to stand in an unvexed space of air, on a little island by himself; he was free and immune from pain.” In this moment he is certain that “nothing mattered – nothing mattered,” while the “waves beat on the shore far away, and the soft wind passed through the branches of the trees, seeming to encircle him with peace and security, with dark and nothingness”; indeed “the quiet and peace seemed to lap his body in a fine cool sheet, soothing every nerve; his mind seemed once more to expand, to become natural.” The moment, however, is fleeting, and he is brought back to the reality of his situation with a thud of even greater pain, the night now “harder to face” for having stood in this “unvexed space of air.” Yet for that time he was immune. Similarly, in The Years, after an air raid in 1917, a feeling of “great calm” possesses Eleanor Partiger and she unexpectedly feels “as if another
space of time had been issued to her, but, robbed of the presence of death of something personal, she felt – she hesitated for a word – ‘immune’?” She repeats the word to herself, while gazing at a “picture without seeing it. It was a picture of a hill and village perhaps in the south of France; perhaps in Italy. There were olive trees; and white roofs grouped against a hill side. Immune, she repeated, looking at the picture.” As Eleanor looks at the picture without seeing it, the image provides a surface of color and pattern that offers a rest and escape for her eyes, dazed after the dimness of the cellar in which she had huddled with others, faced with the possibility of death. This desire for immunity is one that Woolf explored throughout her writing – for instance, we hear it in Rhoda’s musings upon a “world immune from change” in The Waves, a phrase which she too later repeats, as if these repetitions are both part of its soothing rhythm (“nothing mattered – nothing mattered”) and also a reassuring and necessary insistence that calls the sense of immunity into existence even as it dissipates. In a diary entry from 1932, Woolf describes her own glorious feeling of immunity from criticism. For her, this immunity is “a holy, calm, satisfactory flawless feeling; it "an exalted calm desirable state, & one I could reach much oftener than I do.”

In Between the Acts, this “unvexed space of air,” or the feeling that one is on a “little island” by oneself or that “another space of time” has been issued, where one, for a time, is immune, is no longer available. While certain characters may seem to others to be somehow immune, once we inhabit their perspective this no longer seems accurate: the young George Oliver may appear part of an innocent floating island, yet when he is observed by his mother from her bedroom window his world is about to be destroyed by his grandfather’s little game of jumping out at him from behind a bush. Lucy may appear
immune, caressing her cross and envisioning God on his throne among the clouds, as viewed by Isa, but we do not actually see God from Lucy’s perspective, and the narrator, when later describing her “private vision; of beauty which is goodness; the sea on which we float,” also notes, “Mostly impervious, but surely every boat sometimes leaks?” (205). In the novel, immunity is aligned with complacency, passive acceptance, with being “lulled and dulled,” as Woolf rhymes in her diary in May 1940; it is not experienced by the characters in its fictional world, nor are we offered such “spaces of time” as readers. Instead, our eyes are dazed – both stunned and dazzled – as the narrative swings between orienting and disorienting the reader, offering dangling sprays and moments of reverie and visual absorption, as well as moments of becalming and intolerable pressure that are relieved by flights, releasing pressure by violently “hack[ing] an outlet. The very wildness and sketch-like nature of Between the Acts, its refusal to settle, like Lucy, “to the just rage of authority,” or to allow the reader to settle, rendering us, like Miss La Trobe’s play, “neither here nor there,” can be read as a technique that offers shelter from a reality perceived as all-too familiar.

Rather than challenging the reader to form a pattern out of dispersity, Woolf’s final novel presses upon us the refreshing yet perilous experience of disorientation. By focusing only on the human drama we must overlook the novel’s tactics that keep us at a distance, that lightens the weight of that drama, turning us into outsiders, subjected to vagaries of vision that are at the same time generative, revealing the shelter that lies within modernity’s shock-effects, the relief to be found by wild flights and in violently hacking an outlet, in an unsettling disorientation that both violently pelts our attention “like so many winged stones” while “syllabing discordantly life, life, life, without
measure, without stop devouring the tree. Then up! Then off!” The rhapsody of the novel cannot be separated from its violence, the hum and whizz that signals the first words of a new play from the attack of winged stones, the rapture of wings from the devouring of the tree, the “delight of the roaming eye” from the disorientation that ungrounds us and keeps us travelers merely passing through a fictional world that refuses to lie flat. In a diary entry written on the 13th of April 1938, the day after making her first allusion to what was to become Between the Acts, Woolf writes that "the proofs [of Three Guineas] have not come; & thus I have gained a mitigated respite" (134). Her sense of respite here cannot be complete, as she must still wait for the final proofs,\(^{58}\) echoing her recurrent sense this year in particular that the war was only being "staved off,"\(^{59}\) not averted. This sense of a tempered respite, of a temporary platform, sets the tone for the wartime writing of Elizabeth Bowen (a friend of Woolf's) and Graham Greene, which also locate the potential for a dream of rest within interstitial spaces between the major acts of war. Escape is never complete, nor is it wholly desirable.

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\(^{58}\) Once she "confronted" the final proofs on the 28th of April, she writes of how she now feels "entirely free. Why? Have committed myself. [A]m afraid of nothing. Can do anything I like. No longer famous, no longer on a pedestal; no longer hawked in by societies: on my own, for ever. Thats [sic] my feeling: a sense of expansion, like putting on slippers" (136-37).

\(^{59}\) 16 September 1938, 170.
Still the Moon: Elizabeth Bowen, Bill Brandt, and Quiet Exposures

“Nona woke with a start. Was this daylight? No, it was still the moon.”
(Bowen, unpublished short story fragment, n.d.)

“A respite, a pause perhaps.”
(V. Woolf diary entry, 3 June 1940)

Elizabeth Bowen’s novel, *The Heat of the Day* (1949), opens with the “still”
image of an open-air theatre in Regent’s Park on the “first Sunday of September 1942.”
With its first sentence of three clipped clauses, “That Sunday, from six o’clock in the
evening, it was a Viennese orchestra that played,” the text seems to invite the reader to
look through the lens of a camera, sturdily set upon this semantic tripod, with its shutter
open for a long exposure. Leaves drift and crepitate, people are slowly drawn to the
“tarnished bosky theatre” by the music and “the sensation that they were missing
something,” gnats quiver, cigarette smoke dissolves, color fades, and the “incoming tide”
is “darkness,” yet the overwhelming sense is that these images and movements, not to
mention the music, will not register on the photographic film. The theatre, set in a
“muffled hollow,” holds a “feeling of sequestration, of emptiness the music had not had
time to fill,” and feels permanent in a way that the other elements of the scene do not.
Within the time and space allotted for the narrative opening, the paradoxical restlessness
inherent in the word “still,” with its Keatsean multiplicity, is at play within a frame that
later widens to encompass specific individuals, beginning with a man whose “excessive
stillness gave the effect not of abandon but of cryptic behavior.” A sense of potential
threat or of unreadability (embodied in the “cryptic” nature of the sitting man) as well as
a quiet restfulness (experienced by those somehow refreshed by the music) are held
together in tension, creating a still, charged atmosphere.
Bowen’s excessively still image of the man we later learn is Harrison, a spy, who is sitting in what is described as the “photographic half-light” (9) of Regent’s Park on this anniversary of the start of the London Blitz, appears both motionless and moving, sitting still and still sitting, as Keats’s Grecian urn is “still unravished.” In his stillness, he seems part of what Walter Benjamin, in “A Short History of Photography” (1931), refers to as a “quiet exposure.” Due to the “lower sensitivity to light of the early plates,” preindustrial photographs required a “long period of exposure in the open” in order to register an image, making it “desirable to station the model” in a quiet, secluded place. According to Benjamin, this procedure “caused the models to live, not out of the instant, but into it; during the long exposure they grew, as it were, into the image,” in a manner that “can be sharply contrasted to a snapshot” (Benjamin 204). In the first few pages of The Heat of the Day Bowen is able to convey a similar sense of duration and depth within an enclosed, fixed frame. The stillness that is conjured within this wartime scene offers what Virginia Woolf, in The Years, calls a “space of time” for repose and a retreat from the “shock effects” of war and the experience of modernity. Unlike the snapshot, which attempts to freeze or arrest a moment out of the flux of time, and which Benjamin links with the technological assault upon the mind and senses of the modern subject and the disintegration of the aura typical of the twentieth century, Bowen’s “photograph” is defined by and enables a capacious, resonating, and restful stillness that is, as I will later elaborate, associated with the aesthetic and techniques of Pictorial photography.

A similarly “still” and quietly, restlessly charged atmosphere is apparent in Bill Brandt’s Chester Terrace, Regent’s Park [Fig.1], a photograph that was first published in
the periodical *Lilliput* in August 1942 as part of a series called “London by Moonlight.”

Fig. 1

Here we have an alternate view of Regent’s Park from the one that opens *The Heat of the Day*. Rather than an open-air theatre within the park, slowly being filled by music and people and drained of color and light, we have a perspective on one of the neoclassical residences that architect John Nash designed around the outer circle of the park, looking, in the black-out, “like scenery in an empty theatre” (Bowen, “London 1940” 24).60 This photograph, along with the others in the series, is literally the product of a quiet exposure; set on its tripod for up to half an hour, Brandt’s Rolleiflex camera

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gradually registered an image devoid of human figures, presenting instead the fixity and seeming permanence of a long receding row of Regency terraces, illuminated by moonlight, as viewed from the shadows behind one of Nash’s imposing Corinthian arches.

Presenting the perspective beyond the arcade as well as the shape and part of the supporting structure of the arch itself, this Pictorial photograph, by “one of the most brilliant of English camera-artists” (“Blackout in London” 551), creates a sense of depth and duration that Benjamin circumscribed to the early days of the medium’s history. The foreground, behind the arcade, where the camera (and viewer) is positioned, absorbs the eye with its concentrated darkness, except for where the moonlight illuminates the arch and the cobbled stones of the street. Meanwhile, the receding background of the image constitutes its focal point, while also seeming to move forward to occupy the same flattened plane as the arch that frames it. The eye is drawn back and forth between the shelter of the arcade and the serene view beyond it, or, alternately, from the darkly secretive enclave to the imperiled façade of the terraces. This visual and semantic play creates a restlessness (a tension that we saw in Vanessa Bell's *A Conversation*) within the very restfulness of the scene, with its crisp lines, geometrical shapes and absence of random details – with what its caption deems “the charm of a street which was planned as a street and not a mere jumble of dwellings.” The stillness of the image works on multiple levels: it possesses a visual calm and “staticness,” to use a term of Bowen’s, that could date the scene as archaic, apocalyptic, or timeless, like the surrealist townscapes of de Chirico that critics often compare to Brandt’s photographs [Fig. 2]; it is also still blacked-out and thus potentially a target for German bombs, especially since it is lit by
moonlight; but still, despite this looming peril, it is restful, providing a space and moment for repose or a retreat from the cataclysms of war, experienced as a day-to-day reality in the city and presented in snapshots that flooded the newspapers and periodicals of the day.

Fig. 2 Giorgio de Chirico, *The Soothsayer's Recompense*, 1913

The tensely multivalent atmosphere that pervades Brandt’s photograph of Chester Terrace and the opening of Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* is evident elsewhere in their depictions of wartime London. In *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* and in the photo-stories “Blackout in London” and “London by Moonlight,” these artists cultivated, explored, and firmly positioned stillness at the heart of their imaginative response to war, in the besieged city that they both claimed an allegiance to despite their status as outsiders. Brandt, who was born in Hamburg of English parents and strongly influenced by his contemporaries in Paris – according to the short biography that accompanies “London by Moonlight”– strongly identified himself as English. At times, he even went
so far as to lie about his place of birth, claiming a natal bond with London. He was deeply familiar with the English literary tradition (later publishing a collection of photographs called *Literary Britain*), and not only took a portrait of the Anglo-Irish Bowen in the late 1940s, sitting statuesque and still by a window in her Clarence Terrace home (not far from Chester Terrace) – seeming to rest her eyes, her hands touching the open pages of a book – but he was also a great admirer of her fiction [Fig. 3]. By bringing together their depictions of London during the Second World War, I wish to explore the link between what Bowen called the “territory” of war and a poetics and politics of stillness that was enabled by the techniques of Pictorial, rather than snapshot, photography.

![Fig. 3](image-url)
In contrast to Woolf’s *Between the Acts*, the works I consider in this chapter are very much anchored by their frames, manipulating what lies within and without them -- with the pressure that can be built up pushing against and away from the pressure without, presenting nearly hallucinatory spaces and moments in which a dream of rest is played out. As we will see, neither artist allowed their work to settle “into one determination or another,” just as the word “still,” according to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle in their study of Bowen’s novels, “never settles into one determination or another, whether as adjective, adverb, noun, or verb." "It never settles, for example, into being “motionless” any more than it settles into “yet,” “even so,” “nevertheless.” “Still” is never still; it keeps going" (23). This “strangeness and mobility” of stillness, which forms the subject of Bowen’s unpublished short story fragment, “Still the Moon,” allowed Bowen and Brandt to present charged atmospheres of danger and repose that resisted the machinery of propaganda, myth-making and the routine drudgery of war (Piette 5), while expanding the limits of photography and short fiction.

The wartime work of these artists preserves as well as surpasses what Roland Barthes, in “The Rhetoric of the Image,” deems the “spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority” of photographs, or their claim of “*having-been-there.*” More than providing “the always stupefying evidence of *this is how it was,*” their works also lyrically encompass other “space-time categor[ies]”: that of “*being-there*” (which Barthes associates with the “projective power” of film), as well as *what-might-have-been, what-might-(yet-)be, what-still (as yet, even so, nevertheless)-is.* Within this charged and multivalent space of stillness, I would like to suggest, lies the potential for a reprieve that isn’t necessarily safe, but which is nevertheless sustaining. Bowen and Brandt offer, not fragments of what Barthes calls “reality from which we are sheltered” but “spaces of
time” for reverie, both oneric and socially productive. Instead of “empty, paralysed
intervals between “a timeless succession of shocks,” as Theodor Adorno desperately
described modern life in 1944, such interstitial spaces and moments, between the major
acts and impacts of world war and of modernity more generally, convey the paradoxical
rest within restlessness, providing an escape, not from history, but into it.

I. The “Quiet City” and the “Pictorialist Aesthetic”

“London is quiet for the first time in its history.”
(Max Beerbohm, “Advertisements,” 1942)

In her postscript to The Demon Lover and Other Stories (1944), Bowen describes
her stories, “[t]aken singly,” as “disjected snapshots – snapshots taken close up, too close
up, in the middle of the mêlée of a battle” (223). Meditating retrospectively upon the
collection as a whole, Bowen insists that you “cannot render, you can only embrace – if it
means embracing to suffocation-point – something vast that is happening right on top of
you.” “Odd enough in their own way,” she remarks about her stories, “– and now some
seem very odd – they were flying particles of something enormous and inchoate that had
been going on. They were sparks from experience – an experience not necessarily my
own” (216-17). With such claims, Bowen seems to be positioning herself as a camera,
like the one that can be imagined recording the opening of The Heat of the Day, its
shutter open for a long exposure; except, this time, taking snapshots in the midst of a
battle, catching fleeting impressions and wrestling moments and images from the flow of
time, leaving the processing for posterity. “[T]wenty, forty, sixty years hence they may
be found interesting as documents, even if they are found negligible as art,” Bowen
diffidently maintains about her wartime short fiction. “Transformed into images in the
stories, there may be important psychological facts: if so, I did not realize their importance.” The aesthetic underlying these stories, then, would seem to be one associated with snapshot photography – which Benjamin links with the shock experience of everyday modern life – offering the viewer and reader direct records and literal impressions, or “flying particles,” of wartime experience that impacted the photographic film.

Bowen’s language of the snapshot invokes the work of photographers such as the Hungarian André Kertész, who, according to Paul Delaney, took advantage of the Leica camera’s “speed and unobtrusiveness to capture the shock-effect of urban encounters” (76). Such images stake claims to documentary truth and turn the automatic nature of the technology to their advantage. With the quick click of a camera button, a fragment of reality can be frozen and archived, unprocessed, with all of its referentiality and infinite detail undiluted. Kertész’s working methods were antithetical to those of Bill Brandt, who, as is observed in the technical notes and introduction to his collection, Camera in London, “[did] not usually snap pictures in a hurry, but work[ed] slowly and deliberately” in taking and developing his photographs (89), “intensifying the elements” of an image in order to create a charged and emotionally evocative atmosphere that would “most effectively arrest the spectator’s attention” (12). And as Brandt himself remarked, “Still the things I am after are not in a hurry as a rule. I am a photographer of London” (emphasis mine). While Bowen’s description of her stories as “disj ected snapshots” would seem to align her work with that of Kertész rather than Brandt, there is in fact a tension between these different modes of photography within her postscript to The Demon Lover that has not yet been remarked upon, just as the connection that she draws
between her short fiction and photography is one that critics have not yet given serious attention to.

As a close consideration of the postscript reveals, Bowen only associates her work with a “snapshot aesthetic” (North 47) to a limited extent. She firmly insists, “I do not say that these stories wrote themselves – aesthetically or intellectually speaking, I found the writing of some of them very difficult – but I was never in a moment’s doubt as to what I was to write. The stories had their own momentum, which I had to control.” Bowen is very careful to resist the “mechanical nature of the medium” that is linked with snapshot photography (North 44), especially since she considered the mechanization and desiccation of day-to-day life to be one of the primary impoverishments of war on the home front. By drawing upon the language of the snapshot, then, Bowen was claiming a photojournalistic authority for her work that “she could not question” (216) – that element of “having-been-there” that Barthes identifies as the unprecedented “consciousness of the photograph” (278). However, while apparently only “nominally ‘inventive,’” the execution of her stories was undoubtedly in her control. As Bowen observed,

Painters have painted, and photographers who were artists have photographed, the tottering lace-like architecture of ruins, dark mass-movements of people, and the untimely brilliance of flaming skies. I cannot paint or photograph like this – I have isolated, I have made for the particular, spot-lighting faces or cutting out gestures that are not even the faces or gestures of great sufferers. This is how I am, how I feel, whether in war or peace-time; and only as I am and feel can I write. (223-24)
The techniques of isolating, spot-lighting, cropping, and manipulating images, outlined in this brief statement of artistic creed, are those of Pictorial rather than snapshot photography – the techniques of “photographers who [are] artists” rather than reporters or recorders of “reality.” Bowen even apologizes in her postscript that her stories “do not contain more ‘straight’ pictures of the war-time scene. Such pictures could have been interesting: they are interesting in much of the brilliant reportage that exists,” yet evidently her focus lies elsewhere. These stories, then, cannot be read as “snapshots,” and in fact deeply resist the aesthetic of what Duchamp called the “snapshot effect” (qtd. North), which is closely tied to Benjamin’s “shock effects.” They instead adapt and make use of another branch of photography – Pictorialism – that has often been overlooked in discussions of the medium.

Michael North, in his recent Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word (2005), elucidates the history and underlying philosophy of this once flourishing photographic mode. By his account, Pictorialism was conceived as a resistance to the automatic nature of photography as exemplified by snapshots that simply and mechanically recorded anything and everything within the range of the camera lens, including a welter of unnecessary, superfluous, and chaotic details. In the work of Alfred Stieglitz (who published the periodical Camera Works) and his followers, the visual “noise” of snapshots was quieted and their strict referentiality diluted through the use of careful composition, soft focus, and manipulation of the print in the darkroom. Making a claim for their images as works of art, and for themselves as artists, Pictorialists “tamed” the inherent disorderliness of the medium and “suppress[ed] the inessential” (45) “so that details could be recorded selectively, in response to human dictates, rather than
automatically” (44). Photographers like Paul Strand also achieved more stark and stringent effects than the blurred outlines and scenes of snow, rain, and fog of their “predecessors” by using composition, proportion, and the contrast between dark and light to “do the work of elimination once performed by direct manipulation of the print and then by soft focus” (46). “The problem that is presented is practically one of elimination,” as Stieglitz put it himself in 1905. Lacking composition, “a picture becomes restless and irritating, and the beholder turns from it with a sense of relief” (45). Pictorial photographs attempted to provide a visual reprieve from such noise, creating “a particularly serene kind of photography” (43).

North seems to view Pictorialism as a dead-end for photography, at least within the “pan-artistic” movement of modernism, as amateur, scientific, and commercial photography came to dominate the twentieth-century and, ironically, influenced avant-garde artists like Picasso and Duchamp, whose innovative works were reproduced in Camera Works alongside Pictorial photographs (53). For Benjamin, too, the kind of quiet exposure that he nostalgically describes in “A Short History” comes to an end with newer, post-industrial photographic technologies. However, as any examination of Bill Brandt’s body of work makes clear, Pictorial photography did not die out with the end of Camera Works, nor are quiet exposures, with their sense of depth and duration, limited to daguerreotypes. In “Brandt’s Pictorialism,” Nigel Warburton points out the often unrecognized fact that Brandt saw no problem with manipulating his prints and staging his photographs in order to achieve particular effects. Even in his works of photojournalism from the 1930s, the elements of Pictorialist artistry and aesthetic control are clearly evident. Particularly in his photographs of London during the blackout and
the Blitz, a sense of visual quiet in the elimination of superfluous details is mirrored in, and intensified by, his quiet exposures, which ranged in time from ten to thirty minutes. Warburton also remarks upon Brandt’s interest in “still subject matter”:

Like dreams, Brandt’s photographs often seem to stand outside time. This effect was in part achieved by a preference for still subject matter – Brandt was never a photographer of the decisive moment, his images never relied on fast shutter speeds and photography’s ability to freeze an instant. In fact, those which do feature movement, such as the famous one of a young girl doing the Lambeth Walk, seem curiously un-Brandtian as a result. More representative are still, empty landscapes, stone-like nudes that could almost be sculptures, deserted streets in the manner of de Chirico. (25)

While he focuses on the links between Pictorialism and Surrealism, largely disregarding the quiet and repose, as well as the paradoxical restlessness that Brandt instills in his images through the use of Pictorial techniques, Warburton is correct in observing how central stillness is to Brandt’s work, particularly in his nocturnal photographs of deserted London streets.

In Street Corner [Fig. 4], for instance, first published in the Lilliput series “Blackout in London” in December 1939, the techniques of contrast, composition, and proportion are used to create a “still” atmosphere that goes beyond the serenity of earlier Pictorial works, to powerfully convey both a sense of potentially suffocating darkness and also of pastoral repose. Illuminated by a quarter moon, an unlit lamppost stands in the narrow passageway between the black vertical mass of a building on the left and a dark row of houses sloping irregularly towards the moon on the right.
The viewer’s attention is caught in the triangulation between the delicate scrollwork at the top of the lamppost, the still suspended moon below it, and the cobbled street lit by the moonlight, which leads the eye back to the lamppost. Details and visual noise are quieted in the stark contrast between the black masses of shadow and the light of the moon, between the crisp vertical lines and the roundness of the moon itself. Meanwhile, the scale of the image, set at ground level yet emphasizing the looming verticality of the buildings and solitary lamppost, suggests a stifling compression as well as the potential for retreat within this silent and empty urban forest. Clearly, this is not a snapshot captured at a “decisive moment,” but rather a photograph produced during a quiet exposure and controlled in its effects in order to capture and intensify a sense of immobility as well as the “stillness” of duration and the restlessness of semantic
instability during the period referred to as the “Phoney War,” when German attacks were expected but still imminent.

London during the blackout, as Max Beerbohm noted, was “quiet for the first time in its history.” Virginia Woolf similarly observed, in a diary entry from 22 October 1939, that the nights were “so verduous & gloomy that one expects a badger or a fox to prowl along the pavement. A reversion to the middle ages with all the space & the silence of the country set in this forest of black houses.” In its darkness and quiet, disrupted but not destroyed by the violence of the Blitz, London naturally presented conditions suitable for Pictorial photography, silencing the chaotic noise of crowds and the stimulation of electric lights that are associated with a snapshot aesthetic, and that one would otherwise expect to find there. Brandt and Bowen capitalized upon these conditions and employed the techniques of Pictorialism, resisting the flatness and stunned paralysis of snapshots (as does Woolf in *Between the Acts*), in order to depict restlessly still images, rooted in the territories and scenes of wartime London, while inviting a movement beyond (and back to) them.

II. Bowen’s Pictorialism

> “Am I not manifestly a writer for whom places loom large? As a reader, it is to the place-element that I react most strongly: for me, what gives fiction verisimilitude is its topography.” (Bowen, “Places” 34)

Bowen’s images of the “war-climate” of London during and after the Blitz are not, as she herself insisted, spectacular or grandiose – there are no tottering ruins, mass-movements of people, or flaming skies in her stories (nor in Brandt’s photographs). In contrast to fictional accounts of wartime experience such as James Hanley’s *No Directions*, which depicts “hissing noises,” “bright colours, like an overflow of
revelries,” “[w]ood and stone and steel alive with wrecking power,” roads opened, streets collapsed, hollow stones where old giants had stood, great gaps, fissures, rivers in tumult, showering glass, old giants flat,” “an orgy of movement, in one direction, moving under the light” (140), Bowen’s landscapes seem intensely, almost perversely, quiet and still. Her stories are what she calls “between-time stories – mostly reactions from, or intermissions between, major events” (222) -- located, that is, in interstitial spaces, as are Woolf’s moments of still life (and depiction of the personal dramas) in Between the Acts. They focus on individuals spot-lit against empty and silent streets or homes cracked and crumbling from the impact of bombs. These works, like many Pictorial photographs, powerfully and economically evoke what is left out in the process of cropping or isolating – in the very “act of exclusion, evoking the detail that it eliminates” (North 47), thus emphasizing the effect of silence, both auditory and visual. Through the use of Pictorial techniques – or what she refers to as “devices, foreshortenings, ‘effects,’” in her introduction to a collection of William Sansom’s short stories – Bowen offers still, tensely charged landscapes of retreat and resistance that are both fearful and restful at the same time, claiming the documentary authority of photographs while manipulating and controlling their effects.

In her “Notes on Writing a Novel” Bowen discusses the static weight of scene within narrative – a subject that she later returns to in her unfinished autobiography, Pictures and Conversations. She contends in these “Notes” that, while the “same scene can, by means of a series of presentations, each having freshness, be made to ripen, mature, to actually advance,” the “static properties in scene can be good for advance when so stressed as to show advance by contrast – advance on the part of the characters”:
Striking ‘unchangingness’ gives useful emphasis to change. Change should not be a factor, at once, in both scene and character; either unchanged character should see, or be seen against, changed scene, or changed character should see, or be seen, against unchanged scene. Two changes obviously cancel each other out, and would cancel each other’s contributions to the advance of plot. (260-61)

Bowen’s short fiction deemphasizes the centrality of plot, yet her play with the change and unchangingness of characters and scenes within her wartime short fiction creates a particular kind of stillness – one that seems to generate an impasse while in fact allowing for movement within fixity and rest within restlessness.

In the first story of *The Demon Lover*, Bowen begins to explore the possibilities of Pictorialism which are later expanded upon in several of the works that follow in the collection. Employing the techniques of contrast, montage and image reversal in order to intensify the stillness of “In the Square,” Bowen, with her “atmospheric acuity” (Jordan 76), depicts an unfamiliar terrain, manipulating an image of wartime experience in order to create an effect of great change as well as continuity. The story begins with an empty square “At about nine o’clock” on a “hot bright July evening.” The square, at this time, looks “mysterious: it was completely empty, and a whitish reflection, ghost of the glare of midday, came from the pale-colored façades on its four sides and seemed to brim it up to the top.” There is a pervading sense of quiet to this “extinct scene,” which has “the appearance of belonging to some ages ago” – a stillness that the story allows to unfold with a sense of duration as the sun, “now too low to enter normally,” enters “brilliantly at a point where three of the houses had been bombed away; two or three of the may trees, dark with summer, caught on their tops the illicit gold.” No longer quite timeless once
we have glimpsed the “breach” where the houses once stood and the blacked-out, “semi-blinded” windows, the scene is not unduly ruffled by the entrance of a taxi that “cruise[s] round the polish to a house in a corner,” depositing a man who gets out, pays his fare and glances about him with satisfaction “to find the shell of the place still here.” The fact that it is still there seems more remarkable given our view of the breach that lets the light in.

Through the movements of this man, Rupert, our perspective is soon directed from “glassless windows” that “were shuttered or boarded up,” some framing “hollow inside dark,” to the interior of the building that he enters:

By contrast with the fixed outdoor silence, this dark interior was a cave of sound.

The house now was like a machine with the silencer off it; there was nothing muted; the carpets looked thin. One got a feeling of functional anarchy, of loose plumbing, of fittings shocked from their place. (10)

The dominant formal technique of this story – contrast – is thus quickly established. Juxtaposed against the “fixed outdoor silence” of the square, the interior is full of noise that is unfiltered, chaotic, mechanical (with “fittings shocked from their place”) and fatiguing; one recalls the empty, still square with a sense of relief, just as, according to Stieglitz, one turns with relief from the tiring visual noise of a snapshot. Inside the house, there is a claustrophobic lack of boundaries. Not only do the carpets look thin, but the walls are thin as well, and the shell of this still-inhabited home seems to offer no space of retreat for its various inhabitants, from its original mistress, Magdela, to her visiting nephew, Bennet, to her husband’s secretary and lover, Gina, to the caretakers of the house with their grown-up children, as doors swing open and shut and the smell of cooking wafts up from the basement while bath water trickles down from the pipes at the
top of the house. In this contrast between silence and noise, emptiness and crowding, with each element intensifying the other, Bowen produces the effect of a photomontage—a technique that continues as the story progresses and shifts abruptly from one character’s perspective to another.

Like Brandt’s well-known and iconic photograph, *St. Paul’s Cathedral in Moonlight* [Fig. 5], Bowen’s story manipulates contrast and spot-lighting in order to intensify the effect of restless stillness and multiplicity within fixity. As Delaney describes Brandt’s image, which conveys “the effect of a montage,”

> A great heap of rubble in the foreground is photographed in *Neue Sachlichkeit* style, with loving attention to texture and the play of light and shade; against this the cathedral has no texture at all, but is just a dark silhouette. Its appearance is made unfamiliar by a camera angle that turns a damaged roofline into a cliff that looms menacingly over the church below. Instead of rising triumphantly above the chaos of bombed London – the standard approach of other war photographs – Brandt’s St Paul’s balances its man-made form with two powerful counter-forces: the rubble in front of it, and the ragged border of pure darkness beside it.

(Delaney 168)

Delaney also insists that, “[a]lthough many responded to the picture as a great stroke of propaganda for indomitable Britain, it could also be seen as a nihilistic vision, of forces poised to bring down the temple – and, in 1939, no one could know whether or not it would survive.” Although the photograph wasn’t actually published until 1941, as part of the “London by Moonlight” series -- and it isn't clear whether or not Bowen was familiar with this image or directly influenced by Brandt -- Delaney’s point about the multiple
registers and interpretive multivalence of Brandt’s “montage” still holds true. Spot-lit by moonlight, the rubble does seem part of a different visual grammar from the silhouette of the cathedral and the looming, almost vertical, roofline behind it. The different elements of the scene, juxtaposed and set off against each other as "counter-forces" through the manipulation of light and perspective, generate a restless capaciousness and multiplicity within the quiet stillness of the image, which plays with the nocturnal image as a photographic negative.

Fig. 5

Contrasting opposing visual modes in “In the Square” by setting the “fixed outdoor silence,” with its emptiness and ghostly glare, against, and seemingly on the same pictorial plane as, the commotion inside the household, Bowen goes on to employ
the technique of reversal as a further means of contrast. By the end of the story, the square, which began as a site of stillness and silent fixity, becomes the site of still-ness – of temporal continuity and movement – with the interior offering a tenuous space of retreat. After a detour through two scenes, one with Magdela and Rupert (possibly former lovers), the other with Gina, both of which are interrupted by Magdela’s visiting nephew, Bennet, the narrative returns to the silence of the square. After speaking with Gina, who occupies the first floor of the house, Bennet walks “away from her through the archway” and looks “out at the square from the end of the dining-room”:

The lampless dusk seemed to fascinate him: “There are quite a lot of people standing about,” he said. “Couples. This must be quite a place. Do you suppose they go into the empty houses?”

“No, they’re all locked up.”

“What’s the good of that, I don’t see?”

“They’re property.”

“I should say they were cracked; I shouldn’t say they’d ever be much use [...]”

(17)

Ostensibly desiring the breakup of the old order, insisting that, “‘Anybody can have it as far as I’m concerned. You can’t get to anywhere from here’” (18), Bennet leaves, stepping “down into the dusk of the square, that lay at the foot of the steps like water.” He hears “voices above his head”:

His aunt and her visitor stood at one of the open windows, looking down, or seeming to look down, at the lovers. Rupert and Magdela for the moment looked quite intimate, as though they had withdrawn from the window from a number of
people in the room behind them – only in that case the room would have been lit up. (18)

Going out “to hunt food,” Bennet keeps “close along under the fronts of the houses with a primitive secretiveness,” eventually finding an outlet from the square where Rupert’s taxi entered, hearing the sound of a bus “in the distance” (18-19). Instead of the empty square offering a contrast to, and respite from, the noise of the interior, it now seems ruled by primitive appetites and desires, populated by couples and haunted by the restless figure of Bennet, while a seemingly intimate couple stands withdrawn at a window, “looking down, or seeming to look down, at the lovers.” The original image here appears to be reversed.

Finally returning to an interior perspective that looks outwards upon the square, the narrative describes Magdela smiling and saying to Rupert, “‘Yes, look. Now the place seems to belong to everyone […]’” Not responding directly, he instead notes, “‘How curious that light is,’” while “looking across at the gap” (19). The story ends with Magdela’s request and unanswered question: “‘Do tell me how things strike you, what you have thought of things – coming back to everything like you have. Do you think we shall all see a great change?’” (19) There is a note of regained intimacy as well as falsity in her question, as the “great change” has evidently already taken place, or is in the process of taking place: we have been told that Gina “had not enough imagination to be surprised by the past – still less, by its end” (15). Yet the question is also genuinely left open and unresolved, as the “great change” may involve a return to, or continuity with, the past, with its primitive appetites, rather than a radical break from it.
The reversal that occurs at the end of “In the Square” involves a shift between an unchanging scene with changed (and changing) characters to a changing (and changed) scene with still changed characters. What has altered and what remains, still, the same, becomes impossibly difficult to determine in this “between-time” story. Heather Bryant Jordan argues that in “In the Square,” “[a]s in so many of the wartime stories, Bowen’s characters find themselves at an impasse” (79). However, while both scenes and characters appear both changed and unchanging, neither cancels the other out, as would be the case in an impasse; both instead are held together in tension, within the capaciousness of a stillness that is largely enabled and underwritten by a Pictorialist aesthetic.

Ultimately, any sense of retreat in the story is not to be found in the illusory intimacy between Magdela and Rupert, standing “as though they had withdrawn from the window from a number of people in the room behind them.” Although the image with which “In the Square” concludes seems to be a reversal of that with which it begins, it is not a complete reversal, and retreat does not fully rest in the square nor in the enclave of the window, in the intimacy between two individuals who have become strangers. The repose of the story instead seems to lie in a shift back and forth between different visual and emotional registers, opening up a space of multiplicity that resists uniform readings that might be marshaled for the purposes of propaganda or myth-making. There is a comfort in the criss-crossing transit through the square -- in its very sense of transitoriness, which in a ghostly way doesn't seem to fully register. Bowen, like Brandt, employs Pictorial techniques to explore the aesthetic and political mobility of stillness,
pursuing in her later stories the ways in which this stillness becomes “a site of desire and
dreaming” (Jeffery 35), both frightening and sustaining.

III. The “Pressure of Reality”

“It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the
imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality. It seems, in the last analysis, to
have something to do with our self-preservation; and that, no doubt, is why the
expression of it, the sound of its words, helps us to live our lives.”
(Wallace Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” 1940, 665)

Brandt’s photograph of two houses in Mayfair, published as part of the “Blackout
in London” series, communicates a sensation of claustrophobia and crowding through its
use of perspective and focus. Seemingly pressed against the houses, the viewer has no
outlet within the scene, whether in the blacked-out houses or in the street which is
entirely cropped from view. The two architectural masses dominate the image,
uncompromisingly and blankly, one overshadowed by the other and nearly merging with
the blackness of the sky, its dimly visible vertical lines contrasting with the round face of
the taller, lighter building. There is a cryptic unreadability in this photograph that is
potentially threatening (what is behind the windows? is anything or anyone there?) as
well as restful, as the eye finds repose in the balance of symmetry and the contrast
between light and dark, with no random details cluttering the scene. The blankness of the
two houses also invites anthropomorphic readings – they could be seen as “mute, stolid
guardians of an abandoned city” (Brooke 124), or else as companions huddling together
for protection against the dark, or, alternately, as antagonists jostling for space, with one
fighting a losing battle. In the photograph’s rigid stillness and quiet duration there is a
pressure – a confrontation – that is highly charged and ambivalent, suggesting the
impossibility of escape while paradoxically providing an escape and retreat within its
very fixity. This irresolvable tension lies at the heart of Bowen’s title story, “The Demon Lover,” which is set in a “space of time” between the bombings of the city.

Like “In the Square” and The Heat of the Day, “The Demon Lover” opens by setting the scene and developing an image of the territory of war. Here, as elsewhere, Bowen “begins in the landscape and then fills in the characters as necessary” (Jordan 78). The scene is the end of a day in “late August; it had been a steamy, showery day: at the moment the trees down the pavement glittered in an escape of humid yellow afternoon sun. Against the next batch of clouds, already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets stood out” (91). Already, there is a play between the scene’s “staticness” and motion, with the “escape” of afternoon sun and “piling up” of clouds, against which chimneys and parapets stand out, the delayed placement of the verb generating a potential energy that accumulates, held in abeyance.

Mrs. Drover, a housewife, has spent the day in London and is returning to her “shut-up house” in Kensington “to look for several things she wanted to take away” to her family, “who were by now used to their country life”:

In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness had silted up; a cat wove itself in and out of the railings, but no human eye watched Mrs. Drover’s return. Shifting some parcels under her arm, she slowly forced round her latchkey in an unwilling lock, then gave the door, which had warped, a push with her knee. (91)

With the opening of the door the pressure of pent up “dead air” is discharged into this nearly empty and wholly silent scene, which recalls Woolf’s description of the dining room in Pointz Hall, inhabited only by two silent paintings, one of which, as we saw,
tempts the reader to wander to a vanishing point: “Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent.” The atmosphere of stillness and “unfamiliar queerness” in the scene is elevated to a frightening pitch when Mrs. Drover suddenly stops dead and stares “at the hall table – on this lay a letter addressed to her” (92). With this momentary arrest, the story shifts to a different register, one that was only hinted at by the sense of her being watched by "no human eye," and which is potentially, but not assuredly, supernatural.

We are informed that, after taking this letter unread up to “what had been her bedroom,” Mrs. Drover’s “reluctance to look again at the letter came from the fact that she felt intruded upon – and by someone contemptuous of her ways. However, in the tenseness preceding the fall of rain she read it: it was a few lines”:

“Dear Kathleen: You will not have forgotten that today is our anniversary, and the day we said. The years have gone by at once slowly and fast. In view of the fact that nothing has changed, I shall rely upon you to keep your promise. I was sorry to see you leave London, but was satisfied that you would be back in time. You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged. Until then...

K.” (93)

This letter sends Mrs. Drover into a controlled panic, prompting in her a desire for flight and escape, dissolving the barriers between past and present as the past “discharges its load of feeling into the anesthetized and bewildered present” (Postscript 221), while throwing into question the status of the future. She vividly recollects her last meeting with her beau twenty-five years earlier – a soldier from the First World War who was later reported missing in action and assumed dead. At their final parting, the young girl had agreed to wait for the soldier’s return, yet immediately felt “that unnatural promise drive down between her and the rest of all human kind. No other way of having given
herself could have made her feel so apart, lost and foresworn. She could not have plighted a more sinister troth” (95). The archaic language (“foresworn,” “plighted,” and “troth”) invokes the ballad tradition that this story is drawing upon and responding to, while adding to the cryptic ambivalence of the narrative, which, as with Brandt’s *Mayfair*, is very difficult to place. With the appearance of the letter, this figure of the past insists, unreasonably and even outrageously, upon the still-ness of the past – “nothing has changed,” so the troth still, in the present, possesses a binding power.

Mrs. Drover’s memory of the past is acute “—but with one white burning blank as where acid has dropped on a photograph: *under no conditions could she remember his face*” (98). “So,” she muses, “wherever he may be waiting, I shall not know him. You have no time to run from a face you do not expect” (98). That blank face of the imagined photograph magnetizes the fear in the story, intensifying the atmosphere of suffocation within the “hollowness of the house this evening” (96). Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent, this blank house has the “air of being a cracked cup from which memory, with its reassuring power, had either evaporated or leaked away,” making a “crisis – and at just this crisis the letter-writer had, knowledgably, struck.” In “The Demon Lover,” the stillness and quiet that are offered as a reprieve from the noise in “In the Square” here become the conditions that the protagonist wishes to find a reprieve from. Unable to make the letter disappear by convincing herself that she is just experiencing a “mood,” Mrs. Drover quickly collects what she came for and lets herself out “by inches from her own front door into the empty street”:

The unoccupied houses opposite continued to meet her look with their damaged stare. Making towards the thoroughfare and the taxi, she tried not to keep looking
behind. Indeed, the silence was so intense – one of those creeks of London silence exaggerated this summer by the damage of war – that no tread could have gained on hers unheard. Where her street debouched on the square where people went on living, she grew conscious of, and checked, her unnatural pace. Across the open end of the square two buses impassively passed each other: women, a perambulator, cyclists, a man wheeling a barrow signalized, once again, the ordinary flow of life. (99)

It is the noise and bustling flow of ordinary life that Mrs. Drover finds a relief from the pressure of her and our mounting fear – this evidence of life beyond the stillness of the house and square, "where people went on living," which seems to dissolve the disquieting supernatural element of the scene with the power of acid “dropped on a photograph.” Correspondingly, it is the unreadability and multivalence that the story builds the effect of through its control of perspective, focus, and cropping, that are what Mrs. Drover seems to want to escape: she not only desires the noise of ordinary life, but also for there to be just one interpretation (that she is merely “in a mood”) of the situation.

Yet as Bowen claimed in her postscript to the collection, “The hallucinations in the stories are not a peril; nor are the stories studies of mental peril. The hallucinations are an unconscious, instinctive, saving resort on the part of the characters: life, mechanized by the controls of war-time, and emotionally torn and impoverished by changes, had to complete itself in some way” (218). While Mrs. Drover’s encounter with her “demon lover” may seem terrifying, ending with her surprised discovery that her means of escape is an escape into what she fears, as her taxi driver turns out to be her faceless and faithful lover returned, driving her off screaming into “into the hinterland of
deserted streets” (99), Bowen insists that “one counteracts fear by fear, stress by stress” (221). Or, in Wallace Stevens’s words, “It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without.” Compared to the desiccation of her life by the routine of war, and the silting up of twenty-five years of married life in her London home, Mrs. Drover’s “resistance-fantasy” might well be an indirect form of escape. Seemingly beyond her rational control, the force of the past as it discharges into the present and imagined future, while frightening, nevertheless offers a retreat and a form of powerful resistance.

In the contrast between the spectre of a photograph that frightens a London housewife and the pictorial photographic techniques that Bowen deploys to create and intensify her effects, there is a charged, fraught atmosphere that expands the photograph and short story to a new capaciousness, that allows the blank of the photograph to remain blank rather than filled in. In this ambivalent and cryptic space that strongly contrasts with the unsettled vision of Woolf’s final novel while sharing its challenge to habitual ways of seeing in its bringing together of violence with repose, escape is both denied and offered within the same frame. Stillness (as fixity and as continuity) becomes both oppressive and productive, an “even so” or “nevertheless” that interjects within the drudgery of a woman’s life during the war, exerting its own force against the routine of war and the relentlessly reductive machinery of myth-making and propaganda. While Brandt’s photograph of houses in Mayfair was taken before the Blitz, it provides evidence for, and powerfully emphasizes, a mounting pressure that “had to complete itself in some way” – with some counter-force that offered the potential for respite, however imperiled. Characters in The Demon Lover and Other Stories do often find this respite in “saving hallucinations,” with their “apparent perceptions” of “an external object
when no such object is actually present” (*OED*), but they also find it in the “space of time” of disturbing reveries, which allow for greater imaginative possibilities.

**IV. Reveries of Repose: the “Irreality Function”**

“Instead of looking for the dream in reverie, people should look for reverie in the dream.”
(Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie* 12)

Bowen’s “The Happy Autumn Fields” is set in two time periods and two locales, beginning in Victorian Ireland (County Cork, although this isn’t made explicit), and switching back and forth to a bombed-out London flat near Regent’s Park during the Blitz. Like “In the Square,” it employs contrast as its dominant formal technique to evoke the “war-climate” of London, while, as in “The Demon Lover,” it explores the desire for escape from the “pressure of reality” – the need for some outlet from an oppressive, desiccated present – through what Gaston Bachelard calls the “irreality function.” This desire “projects” a woman, named Mary, “from flying-bombed London, with its day-and-night eeriness, into the key emotional crisis of a Victorian girlhood” (Postscript 221), as filtered through the consciousness of Sarah, who both is and is not Mary. The story begins with a family party walking through fields that have just yielded a rich harvest:

It was Sarah who saw the others ahead on the blond stubble, who knew them, knew what they were to each other, knew their names and knew her own. It was she who felt the stubble under her feet, and who heard it give beneath the tread of the others a continuous different more distant soft stiff scrunch. (107)

There is a luxuriousness, a density and sensory richness in the description of this scene, which focuses upon Sarah and her sister Henrietta with a high level of saturation that is
reminiscent of early photographs. The brilliant, quiet beauty of the scene forms a stark contrast to the images of wartime London that have been depicted elsewhere in the collection. Its intensity is powerfully evoked in a prospect view -- a sweeping, expansive perspective that, in the wartime works of Bowen and Brandt, as well as of Woolf and Graham Greene, is rarely afforded:

The shorn uplands seemed to float on the distance, which extended dazzling to tiny blue glassy hills. There was no end to the afternoon, whose light went on ripening now they had scythed the corn. Light filled the silence which, now Papa and the others were out of hearing, was complete. Only screens of trees intersected and knolls made islands in the vast fields. The mansion and the home farm had sunk for ever below them in the expanse of woods, so that hardly a ripple showed where the girls dwelled. (111)

The satisfying weight of each word is exquisitely balanced against the others, evoking an atmosphere of plentitude and seclusion as the two girls, Sarah and Henrietta, who share an almost psychic bond, slightly withdraw from the rest of the family.

Eventually this sense of hidden seclusion and safety between the sisters is disrupted by the arrival of two young men on horseback; one, Fitzgeorge, is engaged to the girls’ eldest sister, and the other, Eugene, we later discover, is in love with Sarah. As the subtleties of their emotional drama unfold, almost reaching a consummation in the meeting of glances between Sarah and Eugene, as “each without looking trembled before an image” of the other, the youngest girl, Henrietta, begins to sing, sending a ray of pain into her sister’s heart. The impact of this almost “scientific ray” of pain stills the scene,
which is described and narrated from within, or else by someone attempting to inhabit the image from without:

We surmount the skyline: the family come into our view, we into theirs. They are halted, waiting, on the decline to the quarry. The handsome statuified group in strong yellow sunshine, aligned by Papa and crowned by Fitzgeorge, turn their judging eyes on the laggards, waiting to close their ranks round Henrietta and Sarah and Eugene. One more moment and it will be too late; no further communication will be possible. Stop oh stop Henrietta’s heartbreaking singing! Embrace her close again! Speak the only possible word! Say – oh, say what?

Oh, the word is lost! (114)

As the word, “Henrietta...” is and is not spoken – the word that would restore the sororal bond and displace Eugene from the scene – the scene violently shifts:

A shock of striking pain in the knuckles of the outflung hand – Sarah’s? The eyes, opening, saw that the hand had struck, not been struck: there was a corner of a table. Dust, whitish and gritty, lay on the top of the table and on the telephone. Dull but piercing white light filled the room and what was left of the ceiling; her first thought was that it must have snowed. If so, it was winter now. (114-15)

With this disorienting shift the reader is brought into the dislocated consciousness and body of Mary, who finds herself in the “semi-ruin” (117) of her Regency flat, accosted by a man she deduces is her lover, Travis, who wants her to leave the flat for her own safety. “‘There’ve been alerts, and more than alerts, all day;’” he tells her, “‘one more bang anywhere near, which may happen at any moment, could bring the rest of this down’” (115).
The shock that Bowen creates in the abrupt switch from past to present, rich saturation to stark contrasts, heightened consciousness to bewilderment, can be illustrated visually by juxtaposing two photographs by Brandt. The first is an image of cows in Yorkshire fields in the moonlight, from 1944 [Fig. 6]. An atmosphere of clear calm and restfulness pervades the scene, with its silhouette of one cow grazing as two others hunker down for the night, one by a sliver of water illuminated by the crescent moon and the soft glint of clouds. The gently sloping hill and outlying fields, demarcated as if by a soft piece of charcoal, suggests a pastoral peacefulness and retreat away from the disruptions of war, still raging at the time in its various theatres and on its multiple fronts.

Fig. 6

In City Water-Front [Fig. 7], by contrast, published in the “London by Moonlight” series, the viewer is confronted by the remains of bombed buildings facing the water, with
exposed stairwells, rooms, and crumbling walls that look starkly white and stunned in the moonlight. While there is also an air of serenity, symmetry, and quiet to this damaged scene, it lacks the immediate restfulness of *Yorkshire*, which is legible in its surface, with its evocation of a simpler past rooted in the rhythms of night and day, hunger and satiety, and the turn of the seasons. It isn’t difficult to imagine how one scene may be thought of as providing an escape from the other.

![Figure 7](image)

In “The Happy Autumn Fields,” Mary finds a necessary repose in her dream of the past, and feels a frantic desperation to return to it after she has been jolted away, back into the present moment. She feels that this present reality is “some sort of device or trap,” so she rejoices, “if anything, in its decrepitude” (117). Meanwhile, the man she knows but does not feel she has a connection with insists, “You don’t like it here. Your
self doesn’t like it. Your will keeps driving your self, but it can’t be driven the whole way – it makes its own get-out: sleep”’ (116). While he is correct in his assessment of the situation, it becomes more and more apparent that Mary’s dream is not an ordinary one. Instead, it is a reverie within a dream or an “intrusion of dream and reverie upon each other” (Bachelard 12). As Bachelard notes in his Poetics of Reverie (1960), poetic reverie (as opposed to daydreams or nocturnal dreams) involves an “imagining consciousness” (2), a sense of being awake to a harmony and “polyphony of the senses” (6), even while sleeping:

Poetic reverie gives us the world of worlds. Poetic reverie is a cosmic reverie. It is an opening to a beautiful world, to beautiful worlds. It gives the I a non-I which belongs to the I: my non-I. It is this ‘my non-I’ which enchants the I of the dreamer and which poets can help us share. (13)

Mary’s “non-I,” Sarah, enables such an imaginative projection; Bachelard also notes, “it is perfectly evident that reverie bears witness to a normal, useful irreal function which keeps the human psyche on the fringe of all the brutality of a hostile and foreign non-self” (13). Mary’s reverie also seems to activate this “irreal function,” although her reverie is not incited by, nor does it discover, a sense of “well-being,” which Bachelard deems necessary to poetic reverie, but instead is rooted in conditions of peril, both physical and psychic, and by her perusal of a box of old photographs and private documents belonging to this Victorian family.

The escape that Mary achieves is not a complete one, even though she returns to the day she was torn unwillingly away from, this time finding herself, as Sarah, in the family drawing room along with Henrietta, as well as their youngest brother, mother, and
Eugene. There is a sense of dislocation and unbroachable distance even within the past: the shaft of emotional pain that Sarah feels in the past is reflected in, rather than substantially different from, the piercing light that fills Mary’s blitzed room. And to Sarah, Eugene looks as though, “transfigured by the strange light, [he] were indeed a picture, a picture who could not see her” (121). There is, as Jordan suggests, a “‘formless dread’ [that] hovers on the horizon” of the past (81), just as there are alerts that the London flat occupied by Mary could, at any minute, come down with a crash as she is sleeping and dreaming this most vivid of dreams.

The drawing-room is lavishly described, bringing into relief particular details and an almost hazy atmosphere as a Pictorial photograph would -- conveying a sense that “Nothing would fall or change” (122) -- yet it is also clear that the relations between the two sisters are changing. When Sarah drops a geranium leaf that she had been holding, we are told that,

Eugene rose, brought out his fine white handkerchief and, while they watched, enfolded carefully in it what he had just found, then returning the handkerchief to his breast pocket. This was done so deep in the reverie that accompanies any final act that Mamma instinctively murmured to Henrietta: ‘But you will be my child when Arthur has gone.’ (124)

The finality of Eugene’s act and his deep reverie signal the end of Sarah’s psychic bond with Henrietta, and the termination of this world as experienced by Mary. After promising Sarah that she will never let her out of her sight, to ensure that there will be a tomorrow in which Eugene can return, Henrietta cries out to the hopeful lover, Eugene, “‘You do not even know what you are trying to do. It is you who are making something
terrible happen. – Sarah, tell him that that is true! Sarah---” (126). The house in
bombed-out London rocks, the window splits and a piece of ceiling falls as Mary returns
to the present. As she lies on the bed, alive, Mary looks through the “torn window” at “
the timelessness of an impermeably clouded late summer afternoon”:

There being nothing left, she wished he would come to take her to the hotel. The
one way back to the fields was barred by Mary’s surviving the fall of ceiling.
Sarah was right in doubting that there would be tomorrow: Eugene, Henrietta
were lost in time to the woman weeping there on the bed, no longer reckoning
who she was. (127)

Completely dislocated in time and space, hovering somewhere above the woman’s
weeping body, this consciousness is overwhelmed by a sense of loss for the past, as well
as the present. Afterwards, this escape through reverie is called upon to critique the
desiccation of the present. Mary insists,

“We only know inconvenience now, not sorrow. Everything pulverizes so easily
because it is rot-dry; one can only wonder that it makes so much noise. The
source, the sap must have dried up, or the pulse must have stopped, before you
and I were conceived. So much flowed through people; so little flows through us.
All we can do is imitate love or sorrow.” (127)

Her escape was thus an escape into the very conditions that she sought to avoid – a way
of engaging with it indirectly. This “fragment torn out of a day” was both sustaining and
perilous for her, threatening to take her life while allowing her to re-enter the present,
both “drained by a dream” (127) and able to recognize and critique the effects of war on
day-to-day life, to reckon what she has, in the end, lost.
The story ends with a final still image. Travis returns to the flat with the box of photographs and documents he had taken from the room, thinking it posed a threat to Mary in her unstable condition. He had gone through the contents, sorting them, and admits to her that the “stuff” “gives off something” (128). When Mary looks in the mirror and is struck by her resemblance to Sarah, concluding that she must therefore be a descendent of hers, Travis insists that this is impossible, as, “‘[f]rom all the negative evidence Sarah, like Henrietta, remained unmarried,’” and it is likely that both died young (129). Moreover,

“Fitzgeorge refers, in a letter to Robert written in his old age, to some friend of their youth who was thrown from his horse and killed, riding back after a visit to their home. The young man, whose name doesn’t appear, was alone; and the evening, which was in autumn, was fine though late. Fitzgeorge wonders, and says he will always wonder, what made the horse shy in those empty fields.” (129)

This young man, we are to conclude, was Eugene, and the day, in autumn, “fine though late,” the one lived, in a reverie, by Mary. The final image of a horse shying in empty fields, throwing a man off its back with something (or someone, or nothing at all) potentially hidden in the evening shadows, creates a Pictorial space of stillness, deeply saturated by loss, that invites reverie, just as the old photographs looked at by Mary incited her own reverie. Open to multiple interpretations and refusing to settle into one determination over another, this image, in its capaciousness and absoluteness, offers the potential for an imaginative projection that is less absorbing and more abstract than Mary’s. It suggests the possibility, which becomes central in “Mysterious Kôr,” that “If
you can blow whole places out of existence, you can blow whole places into it” (199) – places that can be occupied if not inhabited.

V. “Bright Fell the Moonlight”: Quiet Exposures of the “Abiding City”

“Court upon dim court, row upon row of mighty pillars – some of them, especially at the gateways, sculptured from pedestal to capital – space upon space of empty chambers that spoke more eloquently to the imagination than any crowded streets. And over all, the dead silence of the dead, the sense of utter loneliness, and the brooding spirit of the Past! How beautiful it was and yet how drear! We did not dare to speak aloud.”

(Rider Haggard, She)

In its fascination with moonlight and the mesmerizing emptiness of a blacked-out city, Bowen’s “Mysterious Kôr” seems, out of the collection of stories in The Demon Lover, the one most closely aligned with Brandt’s moonlit photographs of London during the war. Originating for Bowen in an “all but spell-binding beholding” – a vision of “weird moonlight over bomb-pitted London” (qtd. Jordan 75-76) – this story describes the “siege” of the city by moonlight with searching, meticulous care. Seeming to replace the searchlights of German planes now that the “Germans no longer came by the full moon,” the “[f]ull moonlight” drenches and searches the city and does not leave a “niche” to “stand in”:

The effect was remorseless: London looked like the moon’s capital – shallow, cratered, extinct. It was late, but not yet midnight; now the buses had stopped the polished roads and trees in this region sent for minutes together a ghostly unbroken reflection up. The soaring new flats and the crouching old shops and houses looked equally brittle under the moon, which blazed in windows that looked its way. The futility of the black-out became laughable: from the sky, presumably, you could see every slate in the roofs, every whited kerb, every
contour of the naked winter flowerbeds in the park; and the lake, with its shining
twists and tree-darkened islands would be a landmark for miles, yes, miles,
overhead. (196)
Like the beginning of *The Heat of the Day*, this opening creates the effect of a long
photographic exposure. Within the fixity of the cratered, illuminated scene, there is a
duration and motion that is mirrored in the ordering of words: the roads and trees send
“for minutes together a ghostly unbroken reflection up.” The sky remains “glassy-silent”
and people stay “indoors with a fervour that could be felt: the buildings strained with
battened-down human life, but not a beam, not a voice, not a note from a radio escaped”;
this “day between days, this extra tax, was perhaps more than senses and nerves could bear” (197). One can imagine Brandt, with his camera set on a tripod, out on such a still
night, quietly capturing the glare of the full moon on the blank façades of London
buildings.

Outside of Regent’s Park on this moonlit evening, “three French soldiers, directed
to a hostel they could not find,” stop their singing to “listen derisively to the waterbirds
wakened up by the moon,” while “two wardens coming off duty” emerge “from their
post” and cross the street, turning their faces, “mauve in the moonlight, towards the
Frenchmen with no expression at all” (197). These spectral figures vanish in their
respective directions and we next see two figures, one a tall man, the other a diminutive
woman, heading towards the park. The woman soon steps “to the edge of the pavement”
and intones: “‘Mysterious Kôr’” (198), with the postured solemnity of a Buck Mulligan.
“This,” she insists to her companion, gesturing to the scene around them, is Kôr, the
“completely forsaken city, as high as cliffs and as white as bones, with no history.” She
recites lines from Andrew Lang’s sonnet, “She,” which was dedicated to Rider Haggard, the author who first imagined this city into being:

“Mysterious Kôr thy walls forsaken stand,
Thy lonely towers beneath a lonely moon --”

and,

“Not in the waste beyond the swamps and sand,
The fever-haunted forest and lagoon,
Mysterious Kôr thy walls --- .”

Even though she recites these lines, the young woman, Pepita, claims only to have taken the name of the city from “that book.” She insists, “I knew that must be the right name; it’s like a cry” (199). Speaking as an authority on this deserted city, Pepita imagines that Kôr, after the war finally ends, might be “the one city left: the abiding city. I should laugh” (199). After all, if places can be blown “out of existence, you can blow whole places into it.”

Rather than thinking about people, which she cannot bear to do, Pepita thinks about Kôr, occupying it imaginatively as a place of respite, of solitude and space, where she and her lover, Arthur, can be alone together. She finds repose in its emptiness, in its visual quiet and stark contrasts, which resembles that of a Pictorial photograph, verging on abstraction. Her vision of the city recalls Brandt’s *Houses in Bayswater* [Fig. 8] from 1939, with its air of dereliction, absence, and stillness in the searching illumination of moonlight. Like Atget’s photographs of Paris from the early twentieth century, which are, as Benjamin observes, “all empty,” “swept clean like a house which has not yet found its new tenant” (210), this image is of “a landscape of exclusion and negation, a
landscape of absence” (Jeffrey 35). It is both searing and also restful. Diluting the “strict referentiality” of the photograph and emphasizing the pattern of razor-sharp lines and symmetrically repeating architectural structures, *Houses in Bayswater* suggests, not timelessness, but an antiquity, futurity, and contemporaneity that is difficult to determine. Visually static and temporally mobile, the “space of time” presented to the viewer in this “still” image also invites as it resists occupation.

Like Brandt’s cityscapes, the exact location of Kôr is ambivalent and refuses to settle in one place or one time. Pepita insists to Arthur that they *are* in Kôr, prompting him to ask, confusedly, “‘What, you mean we’re there now, that here’s there and now’s then?... I don’t mind,’ he added, letting out as a laugh the sigh he had been holding in for some time” (200). The illusion of actually inhabiting this city shatters, however, once
Pepita remembers that “they were homeless on this his first night of leave. They were, that was to say, in London without any hope of any place of their own” (201). The spell is broken, that is, with the deflating realization that they are to share a crowded flat with her girl-friend, Callie, for the night. With the spot-light abruptly turned to a car that “hummed like a hornet towards them, veered, showed its scarlet tail-light, streaked away up the road” and a woman who “edged round a front door and along the area railings [and] timidly called her cat,” while a “clock near, then another set further back in the dazzling distance, set about striking midnight” (202), the narrative shifts gears, taking us into the flat itself as seen from Callie’s perspective.

After preparing the partitioned flat for Pepita and Arthur and waiting up for them, as Pepita derisively knew that she would, Callie lays in the bed she is to share with Pepita for the night. “Wanting to savour darkness herself, Callie reached out and put off her bedside lamp”:

At once, she knew that something was happening – outdoors, in the street, the whole of London, the world. An advance, an extraordinary movement was silently taking place; blue-white beams overflowed from it, silting, dropping round the edges of the muffling black-out curtains. When, starting up, she knocked a fold of the curtain, a beam like a mouse ran across her bed. A searchlight, the most powerful of all time, might have been turned full and steady upon her defended window; finding flaws in the black-out stuff, it made veins and stars. (205)
She parts the curtains and looks out “– and was face to face with the moon.” “Below the moon, the houses opposite her window blazed black in transparent shadow,” as do the houses in Brandt’s photograph of Bayswater, in contrast to the “chalk-white street”:

Light marched in past her face, and she turned to see where it went: out stood the curves and garlands of the great white marble Victorian mantel-piece of that lost drawing-room; out stood, in the photographs turned her way, the thoughts with which her parents had faced the camera, and the humble puzzlement of her two dogs at home. Of silver brocade, just faintly purpled with roses, became her house-coat hanging over the chair. And the moon did more: it exonerated and beautified the lateness of the lovers’ return. No wonder, she said to herself, no wonder – if this was the world they walked in, if this was whom they were with.

(205-6)

Bowen’s emphasis on what stands out in the marching moonlight, on what objects become in the glare, creates the effect of mobility within this static scene. In the transformative light of the moon, the lateness of the lovers is “exonerated and beautified.” When the lovers do finally arrive, the awkwardness and crowding of the situation in the small flat is underscored, as the mysterious moonlight is replaced with the glare of artificial illumination.

Pepita’s desire for the empty perspectives of Kôr becomes more understandable in contrast, and it is not surprising that she should, after falling asleep, return to the “abiding city” in an “avid dream, of which Arthur had been the source, of which Arthur was not the end”:
With him she looked this way, that way, down the wide, void, pure streets, between statues, pillars and shadows, through archways and colonnades. With him she went up the stairs down which nothing but moon came; and with him trod the ermine dust of the endless halls, stood on terraces, mounted the extreme tower, looked down on the statued squares, the wide, void, pure streets. He was the password, but not the answer: it was to Kôr’s finality that she turned. (215)

With its incantatory repetitions and intonations that conjure the vision of an empty city that can be explored and temporarily occupied but not inhabited, with its "ermine dust," "endless halls" and "wide, void, pure streets," Bowen’s description of Kôr, as a still image, spot-lit and carefully manipulated to create the effect of wideness, voidness, and purity, provides an escape that, like Mary’s reverie in “The Happy Autumn Fields,” also offers a means of engaging with and resisting the political realities of war.

The question of where people would sleep, what spaces they would occupy, was particularly fraught for Londoners during the war. Not only did people find shelter in Underground tube stations, basements, and church crypts – a phenomenon that Brandt photographed for the Ministry of Information in a well-known series that includes *Elephant and Castle Shelter* [Fig. 9] – but also, when this story was first published in January 1944, France was still occupied by German and Italian forces. This dislocation is reflected in the presence of the three French soldiers who momentarily appear at the beginning of “Mysterious Kôr,” searching for a hostel they cannot find. Indeed, with the enemy so close across the Channel, the potential for German invasion and occupation was a threat from very early on in the war, leading Bowen’s friends, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, to make plans for their suicide in the event of occupation.
The emptiness of Kûr, and of Brandt’s cityscapes, while they invite occupation as a form of retreat through an imaginative projection into their still, void streets, also suggest the transience of any occupation. The “quiet exposures” of their images register a sense of duration and still-ness, but of buildings rather than people, and in the still light of the moon there is a sense of respite in the knowledge that occupation is only temporary.

While not apocalyptic celebrations of the end of human civilization, the images of wartime London presented by Bowen and Brandt, enabled by a Pictorialist aesthetic, offer an escape from noise and crowds, violence and shock, suggesting the political resonances of indeterminacy, at once restless and restful.

One of Bill Brandt’s most well-known and recognizable photographs is of Stonehenge [Fig. 10], taken in the winter of 1947. Positioned between a field of snow
that composes the foreground and a darkly luminous backdrop of clouds that obscure, and are broken up by, the sunlight that mirrors the snow in its brilliancy, the stones seem like black paper cut-outs with a flattened symmetry yet cryptic, solid obduracy that is still unravished. The heavy mass of clouds appears to be impressing its darkness upon the stones as a shadow – paradoxically a result of the light, not dark – that falls against the blank snow. There is an air of serenity, of quiet exposure or “contemplation rather than action” (Delaney 203) to the scene, which is fixed yet seemingly in motion, restless yet restful. The image possesses an atmosphere of stillness, in all the multivalence of that word; as a post-war image it visually states an “as yet,” a “nevertheless,” or “but” in contrast to the violent destruction of war, that opens up, within this empty landscape, a charged political as well as poetic space. In 1949 this photograph was published on the cover of an issue of *Picture Post*, above the monumentally posed question, “Where Stands Britain?” The Britain of *Stonehenge, 1947* stands unoccupied, lyrically resisting yet inviting, like Bowen’s “Mysterious Kôr,” a temporary, imaginative occupation by the viewer.

Delaney suggests that, “London’s mightiness created the need to find a balance for it in the English countryside” and that Brandt’s landscapes may have been empty to “compensate for the city, where people could never be avoided.” While he does make an exception to this dichotomy between country and city – that exception being Brandt’s moonlit photographs of London during the war, where “London appeared as a landscape in its own right” – he goes on to maintain that by “eliminating every trace of present occupation, Brandt showed Stonehenge as the ancient capital of another Britain.”
This mystical realm could be imagined as what had guaranteed the survival of modern Britain in the ordeal it had just endured” (203). As my discussion of Brandt’s moonlit photographs and Bowen’s wartime short stories has revealed, the city itself as depicted by these artists offered sustaining “spaces of time” for contemplation, reverie and repose in between the “stupefying” acts of the World War. Bowen's description of the war, with its “headlines and broadcasts [that] came down and down” in “hammerlike chops, with great impact but, oddly, little reverberation” (Postscript 219), resonates with Woolf's various references to the violence of hammers, whether in her diary or in Between the Acts. We see that what partly, at least, “guaranteed the survival of modern Britain” was to be found
in the non-mystical realm – within the modern capital that Bowen and Brandt considered themselves occupants of and which they claimed a deep allegiance to.

More than “inert physical remnant[s]” that are “servants of the past,” stunning the present “into a deathlike immobility” (North 31), Brandt’s photographs and Bowen’s Pictorial images of wartime London, which claim for themselves the photograph’s evidentiary authority of “having-been-there,” expand the borders of the medium with their multivalent, charged capaciousness. The stillness of their images – fixed, motionless, silent, continuous with the past and leading into the present and future, asserting a “nevertheless” or “as yet” that resists the one-sidedness of propaganda and myth-making – opens up interstitial “spaces of time” for repose that are imperiled both from within and without. These images, with their tensely charged atmospheres -- their intensities of vision -- provide escapes into history and offer access to what Bowen elsewhere refers to as “overflows of livingness,” that refresh and reshape the territory of war, as well as traditional accounts of photography and modernity. In the wartime and post-war "entertainments" of Graham Greene, as we shall see in the next chapter, the challenge to a vision that has become overly mechanized during the war that is evident in these "quiet" exposures gives way to a dynamic vision that deftly manipulates blind spots and sightlines as questions of remembering and forgetting come into play.
Ways of Escape: Graham Greene and the Shelter of Blind Spots

“In and out the two pictures flicker.”
(—The Ministry of Fear, 198)

In the world of the thriller there is a great danger in blind spots; something potentially harmful – whether a hand unexpectedly grabbing a shoulder from behind, a loaded gun pressed silently against a head, or a piece of information that is exposed to the light of day – can emerge and take a character (as well as the reader or viewer) by surprise when he or she is most vulnerable to such menace. The protagonist must navigate within a murky realm where both violence and vital information lie outside of his field of vision, and where blindness can be fatal. While some characters, such as Philip Marlowe in Raymond Chandler’s Farewell, My Lovely, handle their blindness with a hardboiled nonchalance (Edward Dmytryk’s 1944 film adaptation, Murder, My Sweet, begins with Marlowe casually responding to police interrogation with his eyes bandaged), the power of thrillers to provoke anxiety and shock lies to a large extent in their complex negotiation of different visibilities and visual effects. As readers and spectators we are often as startled and taken unawares as the thrillers’ protagonists, or else put on edge by the epistemological imbalance and ocular equality of dramatic irony – in the painful anticipation, on the characters’ behalf, of unexpected sightlines opening up and coming into play. This unease about what lies just out of sight is heightened in works of film noir, where, as Andrew Spicer notes, one often finds “fog or mist [that] obscures the action,” as well as chiaroscuro lighting that creates “hidden and threatening spaces” (4). To discover and illuminate what has hitherto been hidden -- to take things out of the protagonist's or viewer's blind spots -- is the ultimate payoff and teleological goal of the thriller and noir, although some works infamously refuse to clear up the confusion that
they have plunged us into. Even in works where the protagonist is on the run, falsely accused, as in the classic Hitchcock scenario,\(^6\) the aim is less to find shelter from a relentless visibility (we might think here of the famous scene in *North by Northwest* with the swooping airplane) and more to enact the reverse movement, whereby all potential blind spots are finally eradicated.

At times, however, there may be an urgent need for an object, question, or identity to move *into* a space of blindness and thus temporarily outside the line of vision – to be displaced and even obliterated – as is evident in Graham Greene’s wartime and post-war “entertainments,” *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) and his collaboration with Carol Reed, the film *The Third Man* (1949). In both of these works Greene takes the genre of the thriller, which is predicated largely on suspense, speed, exposure, and shock, and destabilizes it by carving out unexpected forms of retreat through a play with sightlines and blind spots. *The Ministry of Fear*, like Elizabeth Bowen’s *Demon Lover and Other Stories* and the photographs by Bill Brandt that I discuss in the previous chapter, is set during the London Blitz. Greene depicts a world so saturated by pain and exhaustion that not only its protagonist, Arthur Rowe, who has a nightmare while sleeping in an underground shelter in which a rat bleeds to death in a trough while “even the ground whined when he pressed it, as if it had learnt the trick of suffering” (56), but also its reader, require a temporary reprieve in order to rejuvenate the plot and see it through to its tender yet crushing end. Ridden with guilt over the mercy killing of his wife years before, Rowe becomes inadvertently caught up in a spy ring involving the Austrian refugees Willi and Anna Hilfe, and manages to stop Willi’s plot of smuggling a microfilm reel of important

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\(^6\) Or we might think of the dramatic use of blind spots in *Rear Window*, where Scottie’s vigilant watching is set off against his and thus our blind spots in the apartment across from his window.
military information out of England. For the first half of the book it seems that there is no clear space of refuge to which one can retreat since physical danger and psychic trauma are relentlessly all-pervasive. The blurring of boundaries evident in Woolf's *Between the Acts* here takes on a more menacing shade, with a deeper sense of exhaustion and emotional distress. Unlike the pulls towards an outside realm indifferent to the human drama set out in Woolf's final novel, or the spaces of stillness in Bowen's or Brandt's work, there is a conviction in Greene's wartime work that, as Rowe is informed in his horrifying dream, “There isn’t anywhere else at all” (56), with even the nostalgic past contaminated by the present. A conversation in a park where Rowe and a stranger attempt to find rest – a potentially Marvellian space where “the trees invited, and the birds” – leads to the contemplation of “black thoughts in a black shade” (79), setting up the unrepresented violence of the bomb (recalling Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*) that detonates at the heart of the novel. The explosion in this instance, however, leads to a case of amnesia that is more in dialogue with Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* than *The Secret Agent*, with Rowe’s loss of memory and recuperation at a shell-shock clinic both full of hidden menace and also, through a kind of irony, crucially enabling the plot to jump-start.

In other words, in the midst of seemingly inescapable disillusionment and violence, Greene depicts a necessary and provisional process of what one might call “illusionment,” precisely through an optical play that resembles a “trick” drawing such as the well-known duck-rabbit image discussed by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* and by E.H. Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* [Fig. 1]. As we shall see,
Greene refers directly to the low-brow mode of the “trick” drawing while more subtly drawing upon its effects in structuring elements of *The Ministry of Fear*.

![Fig. 1 “Duck-Rabbit”](image)

The respite in his wartime “entertainment,” I argue, is not one afforded merely by the fact of invisibility, which the text exposes as a naïve fiction. Rather, it is offered in the act of witnessing the change from one perspective (or what Wittgenstein refers to as an “aspect”) to another. In its play with blind spots, which allows images and identities to flicker back and forth into near-cinematic life, Greene’s thriller as well as *The Third Man* (which this chapter will consider later in relation to its play with stasis, statues, and sightlines) explores the question of what it means to remember and what it means to forget in the midst of a bombed city. Specifically, this chapter reimagines blind spots not only as spaces that generate an intense anxiety in thrillers and noirs from situations akin to navigating a city under aerial attack, with the protagonist and reader or spectator wondering, as Rowe does, “Are they your people or my people?” but as “resorts and resources,” or as “exits that are also entrances,” to borrow the words of Adam Phillips.

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62 Gombrich insists that “we cannot, strictly speaking, watch ourselves having an illusion” (6), yet Wittgenstein argues otherwise.
They enable a shift from what Wittgenstein calls seeing this to seeing as, or from the act of seeing to thinking about seeing. Moreover, it is where one would least expect to find the potential for relief in Greene’s wartime and post-war thrillers that alternative possibilities are imagined and unexpectedly beckon, whether these are offered as plausible or revealed as essentially illusory realities. In The Ministry of Fear, the distanced perspective of dramatic irony is marshaled as a means of relief rather than of pained suspense, while in The Third Man, which engages in an argument with Hitchcock, the documentary and comic modes come together in crafting a new visual vocabulary, elaborated through the use of statues, wherein shallowness is countered by moments of levity that signal some haunting visual absence or excess.

I. Flickering Vision

“I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul.” (Joseph Conrad; used as epigraph to Greene’s The Human Factor)

“The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and providence their guide;
They hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.”
(Milton, Paradise Lost)

Book Two of The Ministry of Fear is entitled “The Happy Man,” and begins after the ellipsis that ended the previous chapter when Rowe, accompanied by Anna Hilfe, is trapped in a hotel room, and after an extended period of nervous waiting, opens the lid of the mysterious suitcase he had been asked to carry in, “as the sirens took up their nightly wail.” The first chapter of this book, called “Conversations in Arcady,” indicates a drastic shift in scene, and indeed the chapter opens with the sun coming “into the room like pale green underwater light. That was because the tree outside was just budding.
The light washed over the clean walls of the room, over the bed with its primrose yellow cover, over the big arm-chair and the couch, and the bookcase which was full of advanced reading.” The quick glimpse of green and the natural world of the budding tree introduce this comfortable room, with the sounds of “a fountain dripping somewhere in the cool out-of-doors and the gentle voice of the earnest young man with rimless glasses. ‘The great thing, you see, is not to worry. You’ve had your share of the war for the time being, Mr Digby, and you can lie back with an easy conscience.’”

The immediate pull of the chapter is towards ease and repose, and the reader, after such intensities of paranoid waiting in the previous pages, can breathe a sigh of relief. All we know so far is that this "Mr. Digby" is resting after his war experience. He responds to the voice by saying, “‘Don’t think I’m not enjoying myself here. I am. You know it’s a great rest. Only sometimes I try to think – who am I?’” (95). Clearly, then, Digby has lost his memory, and there is already a tension between the ease of “great rest” and the needling, restless proddings of the desire for some knowledge and illumination that are out of sight, a tension that is central to the dream of rest (as with the lotus-eaters) and that will be crucial in The Third Man. Only the curiosity about who he is troubles Digby; through the course of the conversation we learn that he is in a shell-shock clinic in the countryside, and that he has no idea about his past life. The man tells him, “‘When the time’s ripe I expect the doctor will give you a course of psycho-analysis, but it’s really much better, you know, that the memory should return of itself – gently and naturally. It’s like a film in a hypo bath,’ he went on, obviously drawing on another man’s patter. ‘The development will come out in patches.’” In response, Digby lays back “smiling lazily in the arm-chair, lean and bearded and middle-aged. The angry scar
on his forehead looked out of place – like duelling cuts on a professor.” This mention of
the scar, along with the abrupt jolt in scene and character that we have been experiencing,
nudge the reader to begin suspecting that this “Digby” may be a more familiar figure than
he appears to be. While he could be any soldier with amnesia or post-traumatic stress
syndrome, recovering at the clinic, there is at least the possibility that he is connected to
Rowe, whom we have to this point been following so closely.

Digby muses on what his past life could have been, and reveals that he can
remember his life clearly only until about the age of eighteen (Chris in The Return of the
Soldier has memories until he is twenty-one). He wonders “which of the people [he]
wanted to become [he] did in fact choose,” brooding “without impatience. It was as if his
happiness were drawn from an infinite fund of tiredness. He didn’t want to exert himself.
He was comfortable exactly as he was. Perhaps that was why his memory was slow in
returning.” He muses on the oddity that despite the doctors knowing his name, none of
his acquaintance have showed up, and worries that if he had been married his wife might
be trying to find him. We dip into his thoughts briefly, which start to recall Rowe for the
reader. He visits the doctor’s office, first passing through a waiting room that he tends to
avoid: “it was disconcerting, in what might have been the lounge of an exclusive hotel, to
see a man quietly weeping in a corner. He felt himself to be so completely normal –
except for the gap of he didn’t know how many years and an inexplicable happiness as if
he had been relieved suddenly of some terrible responsibility – that he was ill at ease in
the company of men who all exhibited some obvious sign of an ordeal, the twitch of an
eyelid, a shrillness of voice, or a melancholy that fitted as completely and inescapably as
the skin.” Digby, while he bears the mark of some violent occurrence on his forehead,
nevertheless feels happy and relieved, which is another hint to his identity. He, too, once wore a melancholy that fitted him as closely as his skin, and, like Chris in West’s novella, the violence of a bomb and the resulting amnesia comes as a release that is clung to rather than experienced as a trauma that must be recovered from. He is too happy for the reader to be at ease with the situation we are presented with. His relief at being unburdened of some “terrible responsibility” (the weight of pity, the guilt over his wife) signal his true identity.

We enter again into Digby’s thoughts as he remembers waking to find himself in the peace of the clinic. “It had been winter then. The trees were black, and sudden squalls of rain broke the peace. Once very far across the fields came a faint wail like a ship signalling departure. He would lie for hours, dreaming confusedly. It was as if then he might have remembered, but he hadn’t got the strength to catch the hints, to fix the sudden pictures, he hadn’t the vitality to connect… He would drink his medicines without complaint and go off into deep sleep which was only occasionally broken by strange nightmares in which a woman played a part” (98). The “sudden squalls” and the “faint wail” strike unsettling notes, as do the strange nightmares dreamt in deep sleep. “The peace” that he experiences jars ironically, and is the beginning of this section’s intricate play with dramatic irony, as Digby is unaware that the world is still at war (“It was a long time before they told him about the war, and that involved an enormous amount of historical explanation […]”), and that the sound reaching across the fields is most likely an air raid siren rather than a ship’s whistle. His loss of memory and inability “to connect” (and fulfill the credo of Forster) is the result of weakness as well as of will.
He finds refuge in his deep, occasionally troubled, sleep (although not in reverie) like the protagonist of Bowen's "Happy Autumn Fields."

The doctor (whom Rowe once met before at a Mrs. Bellair’s house, where he was framed for murder, and who is part of the spy ring) announces that Digby has a guest. Digby fears that this might be his wife, bringing with her years of responsibility, but he is relieved to find that he doesn’t recognize the woman. “She wasn’t, he felt certain, anybody he needed to fear” (100). She notes how much he has changed: “‘Your hair is much greyer. And that scar. And yet you look so much younger… happier.’” She soon introduces herself (as Anna) and the reader who has not already guessed Digby’s true identity is almost certain by now that he is Rowe. Her questioning of whether he would be better off not learning the truth (of the war and the state of the world in general as well as his personal history) becomes the major key of their future life together. She reveals that he saved her life when a bomb went off (again confirming his identity as Rowe) and she muses how strange it is: “‘All these terrible years since 1933 – you’ve just read about them, that’s all. They are history to you. They’re fresh. You aren’t tired like all the rest of us everywhere.’” She is envious of the fact that Rowe is somehow untired, and not encumbered like everyone else (with the sweeping vastness of “everywhere”) by the actual experience of history, of the events that came into play with Hitler’s accession to power. Rowe says that for him, Hitler is just a name in a book – “‘You see I’m untouched.’” In this sense, the scenario lacks dramatic irony; Rowe, as Digby, is mercifully free of pain, and is truly untouched – he has the opportunity to shed his second skin of suffering. Yet, increasingly, as the narrative flickers back and forth between

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63. This questioning of happiness and truth is also the point to which *The Return of the Soldier* builds and upon which it eventually turns.
Digby-as-Digby and Digby-as-Rowe, the irony increases as the figure of Rowe moves into and out of the character’s and the text’s blind spot. We are never fully able to forget that Digby is Rowe, yet in witnessing the movement from one identity (or aspect) to the other, and as Digby/Rowe regains his energy and strength, we, along with the narrative, are able to move forward to the novel’s conclusion. Greene’s use of dramatic irony, as with Woolf’s vanishing points or Bowen's or Brandt's play with stillness, opens up a space for the counterfactual to emerge and glimmer for a while, one in which alternate possibilities, however illusory, beckon invitingly. We are able to see the war through different eyes (Digby’s eyes) and to imagine what it would have been like to live in a world where it hadn’t happened or wasn’t occurring, or at the very least, we can step outside the realities of the war and the Blitz, with its bombed streets and menacing, nihilistic spies out for their own gain, to look at both a wider historical sweep (for Digby, 1933 might as well be 1066, and the war is simply another page in history) and to imagine that twenty years of responsibility and guilt could be obliterated. The novel's sense of exhaustion, we see, is both historical and personal.

Digby insists to Anna that he must have loved her before, with the words again sounding the depths of dramatic irony: “‘I must have loved you. Because directly you came in the other day – there was such a sense of relief, of peace, as if I’d been expecting something different’” (113). She begs him to remain there where he is happy and safe, and promises to visit, enacting with a painfully harsh tenderness a love that they never had but which she brings into existence for him rather than reveal the truth. They kiss and his experience of love is “as new to him as adolescent love: he had the blind passionate innocence of a boy: like a boy he was driven relentlessly towards inevitable
suffering, loss and despair, and called it happiness” (115). In the deeply cynical world of this novel, everything seems driven relentlessly towards suffering, loss and despair, yet only those with the blindness of youth can actually relish it and call it happiness.

Lacking the memory of what precisely he has escaped from, hidden as it is in the blind spot of his amnesia, Rowe expresses a youthful desire to reenter the real world and do some good. He recognizes that his respite is a “holiday after all,” and that one has “got to be of use.” There is a difference, though, between his physical and mental states; he has no problem giving up his body, although he is fearful of giving up the peaceful state of his mind. When he tries to connect the pieces and considers how his past might have determined his career, and how he hates the pain of others, he is “troubled by a slight dizziness,” like one of W.G. Sebald’s characters who suffer from a loss of memory or some gap in historical or personal consciousness. “Any prolonged effort made his head ache. But there were things he had to remember. He could let old friendships and enmities remain in oblivion, but if he were to make something of what was left of his life he had to know of what he was capable” (104). Rowe’s sense of heroic action is working against his mental protection, as he does actively pursue some sense of truth about his life, in a manner that is congruent with an avant-garde modernist aesthetic. If he didn’t have such a sense of heroism or curiosity his peace would be safer, more secure, yet the reader can only watch and feel some of the anxiety that Anna feels in wanting to prevent Rowe from learning the truth: that what he is capable of is a pity so powerful that it can lead to murder. In her eyes, her attempt to prevent him from discovering the truth is a righting of fate or the proper course of his life; she wishes to undo the harm that came about from his decision to poison his suffering wife years before. She wants what Jenny
and Margaret, in *The Return of the Soldier*, at least temporarily, want for Chris; Jenny, the narrator, feels at one point that “Everything was going to be right. Chris was to live in the interminable enjoyment of his youth and love. There was to be a finality about his happiness which usually belongs only to loss and calamity; he was to be as happy as a ring cast into the sea is lost, as a man whose coffin has lain for centuries beneath the sod is dead.” There is a similar sense of maternal vigilance and hope in Anna’s concern for Rowe, although in Greene’s text, the “magic circle” of peace is never secure, and we can be confident, given the world of the novel, that it will be shattered with the same finality as loss and calamity. As Digby behaves in ways that typically enact dramatic irony, our vision becomes increasingly split and we are pulled further and further back from both Digby’s and Rowe’s perspective to occupy a third narrative space that grants a temporary respite from the grinding fatigue of the previous plot.

It is at this clinic for shell-shock victims, run by Dr. Forester, that Rowe gains enough energy to “stand up” again and reenter the world without complete exhaustion. This period in “Arcady,” however much its tranquility is troubled and fractured by fault lines, offers a temporary refuge in a narrative that continually denies repose or consolation. The energy of adolescence, as in *The Return of the Soldier*, refreshes the narrative, which become necessary when, ironically, it is the doctor who violently exposes to Digby the truth of his identity. Dr. Forester tears out a page from the

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64 As defined by M.H. Abrams (in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th Ed. [Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999], 137) as situations in which “the character unknowingly acts in ways we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual circumstances, or expects the opposite of what we know that fate holds in store, or says something that anticipates the actual outcome, but not at all in the way that the character intends.”

65 Helpful here is Maria DiBattista's reading of how *Ulysses* has a second beginning that restarts the potentially becalmed text; the energy of the older Bloom counters the morose meditations and bitter remorse (“agenbite of inwit”) of the younger Stephen Dedalus [lecture on *Ulysses* from March 2006, delivered at Princeton University].
newspaper with Rowe’s picture on it and hands it to him, saying, “That’s you. A murderer. Go and think about that.” Digby insists that it is not him but then runs down the hall and trips, hardly feeling “the shock,” in search of a looking glass. Regarding himself in the mirror, with the pieces not fitting together or connecting, he realizes that he is Arthur Rowe, but adds under his breath, “But I’m not Conway. I shan’t kill myself.”

He was Arthur Rowe with a difference. He was next door to his own youth; he had started again from there. He said, In a moment it’s going to come back, but I’m not Conway – and I won’t be Stone. I’ve escaped for long enough: my brain will stand it. It wasn’t all fear that he felt; he felt also the untired courage and the chivalry of adolescence. He was no longer too old and habit-ridden to start again. […] The memories thickened – a woman’s face came up for a moment with immense sadness and then sank again like someone drowned, out of sight; his head was racked with pain as other memories struggled to get out like a child out of a mother’s body. He put his hands on the dressing-table and held to it; he said to himself over and over again, ‘I must stand up. I must stand up,’ as though there were some healing virtue in simply remaining on his feet while his brain reeled with the horror of returning life. (132)

Rowe’s escape has allowed him to endure the truth, has steeled him to stand up during this painful rebirth, with himself both the one giving birth and the creature being birthed. His amnesia has allowed him to return with a difference, seeing from a different perspective, having moved closer to the energy of youth. As in Woolf’s resistance to habitual vision through moments of still life, the shelter of an alternative vision, however temporary and pressed upon by reality, has been a necessary one for Rowe, the escape
worthwhile, the exit an entrance. Yet the counterfactual realm is essentially a fantastical one, and in the next section we encounter “Bits and Pieces” again, as the man is not yet “Whole.” As in *The Return of the Soldier*, the return of memory means a return to the Front, whether abroad, as in West’s text, to “that flooded trench in Flanders under that sky more full of flying death than clouds, to that No Man’s Land where bullets fall like rain on the rotting faces of the dead,” or to the home-front of war, which is here the shelter and inferno of a men’s lavatory that is shaken as bombs drop overhead.

II. Optical Illusions

Partially “reborn,” with his identity and most of his memory restored, Rowe is able to pursue the Austrian nihilist and spy, Willi Hilfe and the stolen microfilm, a pursuit that ends at the Paddington train station, where Rowe has managed to get Hilfe’s gun and to get him off the train. Hilfe offers, with a cruelty that the reader and not Rowe fully recognizes, to return Rowe’s memory fully to him. As the air raid begins, they exit the train and Hilfe leads the way underground to the lavatories: “there was nobody there at all – even the attendant had taken shelter. The guns cracked: they were alone with the smell of disinfectant, the greyish basins, the little notices about venereal disease. The adventure he had pictured once in such heroic terms had reached its conclusion in the Gentleman’s” (195). This bleak vision of a kind of hell returns us to the realm of Rowe’s earlier nightmare, when he took shelter for the night in an underground station such as the one Brandt and other artists recorded during the Blitz, and when he dreamt of the crushing, unavoidable creaturliness of a dog and bleeding rat. Hilfe, finally trapped, gives up the microfilm and asks for the gun, saying that he wants to kill himself to avoid the torture meted out to spies. He offers again to tell Rowe of his past, and Rowe “felt
fear and an unbearable curiosity. Digby whispered in his ear that now he could be a whole man again: Anna’s voice warned him. He knew that this was the great moment of a lifetime; he was being offered so many forgotten years, the fruit of twenty years’ experience. His breast had to press the ribs apart to make room for so much more; he stared ahead of him and read – ‘Private Treatment Between the Hours of…’ On the far edge of consciousness the barrage thundered” (196). The allusion to Adam and Eve and the fall is here reversed, with Digby desiring the fruit of knowledge and Anna wanting to keep him innocent and happy. Like the biblical story, and as retold by Milton, this situation with the fall is replete with dramatic irony and a sense of inevitability -- which, as we saw, is evident in *Between the Acts*, with its layered sense of time, depicting what has already happened and has yet to happen -- leaving us powerless to protest or urge a different course of action as Willi offers the tempting fruit of knowledge. As Rowe’s identity is on the brink of completely and irrevocably moving out of the blind spot of his patchy amnesia, and as the split figures of Digby and Rowe are about to become one, the pained suspense of the situation is keyed up with great force, and the possibility for relief seems to evaporate in the smell of disinfectant, and amongst notices for venereal disease that recall an earlier war.

When Rowe tells Willi that he won’t give him the gun, Willi laughs with a laughter “edged with hysteria and hate,” and says that he’ll tell him his past for free. After Rowe insists that he doesn’t want to hear and turns away, a “very small man in an ancient brown Homburg came rocking down the steps from above and made for the urinal.” He becomes the unwilling and essentially indifferent witness to this scene, wrapped up in his own misery and trapped along with the other two as the bombs fall
closer and closer above them, and as they wait “in fixed photographic attitudes” to see if they will be destroyed. “Then it too passed, diminished, burst a little farther away” (197). As Rowe moves to leave again, Hilfe stops him by saying that he can’t leave without first hearing about his wife. He tells him that he was married to a woman but poisoned her, while the small man, who “had ears for nothing but the heavy uneven stroke of the bomber overhead,” comments on the awfulness of the night in a “voice filled with tears.” “A bright white light shone through the dust outside and through the glassless roof of the station the glow of the fires came dripping beautifully down” (197). This brief description recalls the disembodied narrative voice that speaks in several of Henry Green’s novels, including his narrative of the Blitz, Caught. The light of the fires shining in the dust and dripping down through the glassless roof, cannot be seen by Rowe or Hilfe, and occupies a third space, briefly transporting us out of the hell of Rowe’s situation, moving that space temporarily into a blind spot as the narrator turns his attention to the one thing of beauty in this blighted, degraded scene. Shifting aspects and sightlines just as the potential for our double vision of Rowe and Digby has been taken away, this fragile moment is held out like a thin thread to the reader before returning to the narrative and to Rowe’s reeling consciousness.

Rowe struggles with his new knowledge, his thoughts returning again to his earlier dream and the linking of both underground spaces as ones in which waking and sleeping, consciousness and unconsciousness, past and future, are strangely mingled. And as the “horrible process of connection went on,” and his brain “rocked with its long journey; it was as if he were advancing down an interminable passage towards a man called Digby – who was so like him and yet had such different memories. He could hear
Digby’s voice saying, ‘Shut your eyes…’ There were rooms full of flowers, the sound of water falling, and Anna sat beside him, strung up, on guard, in defense of his ignorance.” Digby’s memories offer some respite in the midst of Rowe’s mental journey through twenty years of memory, yet now Rowe has the knowledge to recognize that he had been deluded, and that Anna had been vigilantly guarding his ignorance. Set off against the querulous questioning of the little man, Hilfe asks, “What are you going to do?”

It was like one of those trick pictures in a children’s magazine: you stare at it hard and you see one thing – a vase of flowers – and then your focus suddenly changes and you see only the outlined faces of people. In and out the two pictures flicker. Suddenly, quite clearly, he saw Hilfe as he had seen him lying asleep – the graceful shell of a man, all violence quieted. He was Anna’s brother. Rowe crossed the floor to the wash-basins and said in a low voice that the man in the Homburg couldn’t hear, “All right. You can have it. Take it.” (198-99)

This shifting vision is transposed from Rowe/Digby to the figure of Hilfe; the remembered vision of Hilfe asleep reminds Rowe that he is human, vulnerable, and the
brother of the woman he loves. He isn’t just a murderer, but a creature worthy of Rowe's pity, worth slipping the gun to so that he can end his own life, which he does with a retch and no dignity. This explicit reference to the flickering images of a “trick” drawing, which describe the technique that the novel employs with Digby and Rowe, seems to float, temporarily unanchored, with the “It was like.” “It” then refers to the changing aspect of Willi as well as to Rowe’s changed aspect, which has now become stabilized again in the figure of Rowe with a difference.

In the earlier scene where Rowe and Anna find Willi asleep, holding an open book as Bowen does in the portrait taken of her by Brandt, Greene engages in a similar play with blind spots and sightlines. Willi’s sleep seems to move all violence into a blind spot that allows peace to temporarily reign: “It was as if he were the only violence in the world and when he slept there was peace everywhere.” The book that Willi is holding is open to one of the Sonnets to Orpheus by Rilke – there is an ironic play here in that the poem of consolation (“Erect no monument…”) emerges in a situation that doesn’t offer any apart from the illusion of peaceful rest. The flickering back and forth between Willi the nihilist and Willi the sleeping child thus enacts a more sinister process, with his knuckles hiding the rest of a poem that insists upon a kind of eternal life for Orpheus and the lack of any need to mourn or memorialize the god. In other words, even while his sleep seems to dissolve all the violence in the world it also muscles out the possibility of consolation.

Rowe finally returns to Anna, with Greene again playing with the ironic resonances of the word “peace”: “He had hoped that wherever Anna was there would be
peace; coming up the stairs a second time he knew that there would never be peace again while they lived”:

To walk from Paddington to Battersea gives time for thought. He knew what he had to do long before he began to climb the stairs. A phrase of Johns’ came back to mind about a Ministry of Fear. He felt now that he had joined its permanent staff. But it wasn’t the small Ministry to which Johns had referred, with limited aims like winning a war or changing a constitution. It was a Ministry as large as life to which all who loved belonged. If one loved one feared. That was something Digby had forgotten, full of hope among the flowers and Tatlers. (200)

This, then, is the condition of life that the narrative leaves us in – a permanent state of fear and guardedness relieved only here and there by brief moments of beauty or forgetting or simply the awareness that one is hurting oneself rather than another, while that person hurts in order not to inflict pain on you. Rowe lies to Anna, pretending that he lacks the knowledge and memory that he now possesses, and she is relieved of anxiety but with the “air of someone perpetually on guard to shield him.”

They sat for a long while without moving and without speaking; they were on the edge of their ordeal, like two explorers who see at last from the summit of the range the enormous dangerous plain. They had to tread carefully for a lifetime, never speak without thinking twice; they must watch each other like enemies because they loved each other so much. They would never know what it was not to be afraid of being found out. It occurred to him that perhaps after all one could atone to the dead if one suffered for the living enough.
The epigraph to Greene’s *The Human Factor* might as well be that for *The Ministry of Fear*: to form any tie is to be lost. Or, as Colm Toibin aptly notes in his introduction to the former novel, “In Greene’s bleak vision, even heaven itself would have to be disappointing” (xv). The couple is like Adam and Eve at the end of *Paradise Lost*, with Greene turning a wartime entertainment into a narrative about the fallen condition of love and life, using the terms of war, with its network of spies, blackmail, and murder, as the material of a more universal meditation on fallenness. There is a tentativeness and maternal solicitude to the scene as well as a performance of happiness that shields a great deal of suffering, and, in Rowe’s case, a kind of religious atonement to his dead wife.

Relying heavily on colons, semi-colons and ellipses, the choppiness of the prose enacts a need for some hesitating demarcations, an opening up onto an uncertain future. Certainly, any repose or respite in this story is temporary and hemmed in on all sides by pain, yet the thrust of the text as a whole would seem to suggest that there is some comfort in telling and knowing the truth, and in denying the Lie that corrupts the ending of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* – a bitter truth that for Greene, as for West in *The Return of the Soldier*, is held out as some antidote to the suffering world in its “communion with reality.”

Fritz Lang’s adaptation of *The Ministry of Fear* (1944) completely leaves out the episode of Rowe's (named Stephen Neale in the film) amnesia and recovery. In the film, the scene in the underground shelter offers a mirror image of the original. That is, in the text, Rowe’s descent into the underground signals an entrance into a liminal space between sleeping and waking, between the past and future, and between nostalgia and nightmare (whereas the underground is a site of pursuit, capture, and ultimate
disillusionment in *The Third Man*). Rowe is surrounded by other sleepers but eminently alone, lying on a canvas bunk bed, his body present while his mind ranges and the bombs drop overhead. Lang’s version presents the shelter as a space of true respite. Neale descends with Carla (not Anna) Hilfe, and we see people very matter-of-factly descending in their pajamas and with their blankets, one young girl taking a basket of kittens out of a pram before heading down with her mother. What is foregrounded is the stoic acceptance of the citizens, part of what Angus Calder calls the “myth of the Blitz.”

Stephen and Carla lean against a wall and rest while he tells her the truth about his past, with his admission that he is a murderer rendered empty given the way that the narrative removes the moral ambiguity that is so rich in Greene’s text. Here, Stephen confesses that he bought the poison and put it in a drawer, unable to go through with the act that his wife begged of him, yet she finds the poison herself and takes it while he holds her hand and sits by her as she slips into the realm of the dead. This is far different from the original text, which leans on the habit of and need to keep up appearances: Rowe puts the poison into his wife’s drink and gives it to her, while she drinks it, suspecting the truth but not asking, and where he leaves her alone to die since he doesn’t want to act out of the ordinary by sitting with her when he would usually leave the room. In the film, Carla is understanding and sympathetic, and he tells her what a comfort it is to have someone he can trust; they see a sinister-looking man whom Stephen has seen before, trailing him, trimming his nails. The man leaves on the train that pulls up, and Stephen and Carla fall asleep, she resting against him, and when he wakes up, there is a pause when he looks lovingly at her before waking her up. The underground shelter is where they admit their love for each other and share their first kiss.
The screenwriters present the shelter, not a shell-shock clinic and the protagonist’s flickering between amnesia and knowledge of his identity, as a space of respite and rejuvenation. Greene’s novel presents a far more nuanced articulation of the desperate need for rest and the desire to unload the burden of memory, its shifting sightlines helping to render Rowe’s inner world as, if not more, important than the bombed world around him. In *The Third Man*, the tone shifts quite drastically from tragedy to the tragi-comic, the ground no longer whining with pain when pressed, but with the city (Vienna) haunted by ruin and ghosts that press for acknowledgment in a post-war world that would seem to move too quickly, too shallowly, with its upbeat tempo, to acknowledge their presence. Here, the dramatic irony of *The Ministry of Fear* yields to a different kind of irony, one more cued to a modernist sense of comical surprise and disillusionment, with the mode of the “trick” drawing changing to a different register of visual wit and levity that consistently brings the viewer to the brink of something more that lies just beyond or within our sightline.

### III. Tricky Situations

“Who is the third who walks always beside you? […]
—But who is that on the other side of you?”
--from T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

*The Third Man* has been taken as a pinnacle of British film noir and is widely accepted as one of the most successful international thrillers, celebrated for its renowned cast – including Orson Welles as Harry Lime – and its remarkable cinematography, which “produce[s] an unstable, vertiginous setting in which nothing is what it appears to be” (Spicer 188). Yet several critics have noted its marked difference from traditional
Hollywood noir. It has been compared to earlier “comic thrillers” such as Reed’s own *Night Train to Munich* (1940) and, as Judith Adamson interestingly argues in *Graham Greene and Cinema*, the viewer is more “protected in this fairy tale” than in other works of its genre. The film, she claims, has a “leisurely and somewhat sentimental Viennese tempo,” with its violence and disappearances “kept at arm’s length,” controlled by being off-screen (66), and with the famous musical score (Anton Karas’s zither playing) “continually fight[ing] back the reality of postwar Vienna” (67).

Indeed, Greene himself insisted that in *The Third Man* he and Reed had “no desire to move people’s political emotions; we wanted to entertain them, to frighten them a little, to make them laugh” (11). Yet it is precisely, and unexpectedly, through a kind of levity – especially with what might be called visual “tricks” – that this film unexpectedly opens
up a “breathing space” or “interval”\textsuperscript{66} for political emotions to be engaged. Relying on a complex play with sightlines, stasis, and statues, with what is just out of sight or insistently brought into the frame, the film operates not through a distanced third perspective, as in \textit{The Ministry of Fear}, but by limiting the viewer’s visibility as part of its noir aesthetic. Our sightlines are as limited as those of the protagonist, Holly Martins, who arrives in Vienna to work with his childhood friend and idol, Harry Lime, only to be told that his friend is “quite dead,” killed in an accident that comes to seem more and more suspect. Through moments of comic disillusionment that catch us unawares, we are presented not with Benjaminian shock effects, or the revelatory shock that is crucial to Welles’s aesthetic (as in \textit{Citizen Kane}), so much as with a haunting capability; that is, such moments are the gateways through which the film’s phantoms emerge, making the postwar Vienna we see, divided as it is amongst four international powers, which leads to almost farcical and slapstick confusions, a city of ghosts. Indeed, we might think here of T.S. Eliot’s lines from \textit{The Waste Land}, which directly follow those cited as the epigraph to this section: “What is that sound high in the air / Murmur of maternal lamentation / Who are those hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth / Ringed by the flat horizon only / What is the city over the mountains / Cracks and

\textsuperscript{66} Terms Greene uses when discussing the necessary rhythm of a film in "A Film Technique: Rhythms of Space and Time." He insists that, "A producer should plan his picture in the form of a graph, the graph line ascending towards a maximum speed and descending towards a still photograph. He will then plan his picture as one wave, rising and falling according to the type of story and the mood, but never broken" (390). Moreover, "There should be an interval, a breathing space, and the line should curve a little downwards before it moves upwards again. The opponents for a moment should be still, eyeing each other, before they leap into the fight" (391); "The wave of rhythm must be planned [...], to afford variety without breaking the continuity. Variety has hitherto been sought in a multitude of plots. How small is the variety in treatment is only realized when the camera for a moment turns from the restless pace of actions to poetry, perhaps, an empty room, sun-drenched, barred with cool shadows. There is the tip of the rhythmic wave, perhaps of photographic art, and it should break, not once when it is too late to revive the battered eyesight, but at regular intervals -- like the recurrence of the great ninth wave, which leaves its spray the farthest up the shore" (392). [From \textit{The Times}, 12 June 1928, reprinted in \textit{The Graham Greene Reader}, 390-92.]
reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal” (ll.366-76).

The film’s play with amusement in particular is sharpened in Greene’s argument with Hitchcock. In his March 1936 essay, “The Middlebrow Film,” published in The Fortnightly Review, Greene complains that the films of Hitchcock are “simply made up of tricks, in their plots as well as their direction,” offering a “momentary impression of great liveliness, that’s all” (399). “Some of his tricks,” Greene concurs, are “quite good tricks: you remember in his last film [The Thirty-Nine Steps] how the scream of the charwoman finding the murdered woman was cut to the shriek of the Flying Scotsman rushing north.” Yet such instances (which many viewers and critics alike celebrate as part of Hitchcock’s signature style) are ultimately, according to Greene, mere tricks, lacking in imaginative power. He goes on to insist that Hitchcock “amuses, but he doesn’t excite […] He hasn’t enough imagination to excite; he doesn’t convince.”

Linking, in a chain of causality, the ability to convince with the ability to excite, and the ability to excite with the ability to entertain – which he frames as the ultimate aim of fictional films – he dismisses Hitchcock’s work as simply amusing and inventive, made up of caricature and melodrama that never attains the status either of Entertainment or what he elsewhere refers to as “poetic cinema,” representing “Life as it is and as it ought to be” (“Subjects and Stories," 409). This supposed failure of Hitchcock’s films to convince the viewer and move beyond amusement and trickery is grounded in a failure to make us see (echoing Conrad); to open the “documentary eye” (401), as Greene calls it; to capitalize on cinema’s “art of movement” (400); and to captivate our imagination.
Two months later, when reviewing *The Secret Agent* in *The Spectator*, Greene further critiques what he calls “Mr Hitchcock’s inadequate sense of reality”:

His films consist of a series of small “amusing” melodramatic situations: the murderer’s buttons dropped on the baccarat board; the strangled organist’s hands prolonging the notes in the empty church; the fugitives hiding in the bell-tower when the bell begins to swing. Very perfunctorily he builds up to these tricky situations (paying no attention on the way to inconsistencies, loose ends, psychological absurdities) and then drops them; they mean nothing: they lead to nothing. (102)

With an affronted tone, Greene dismisses amusement (further slighting Hitchcock’s use of “amusing” situations by relegating them to the ironic realm of scare quotes) that is not founded in a firm “sense of reality,” and which is not connected to a larger meaning or to some kind of payoff in the work as a whole. In contrast, the various amusing situations in *The Third Man*, he might very well argue, are able to convince with their documentary elements, and thus excite and entertain viewers, both meaning something and leading to something significant. They are not "merely" inventive, but also reflect a scene and story that strike one as accurate and believable.

Filmed on location – the first shot of the film is a high-angle view of the city – *The Third Man* follows the blundering Holly as he attempts to discover the truth about his friend’s death, only to discover that Lime is in fact not dead, and instead staged his death by murdering another man in order to avoid arrest for selling diluted (and thus viciously harmful) penicillin on the city’s thriving black market. In the process, Holly falls in love with Lime’s “girl,” a Czechoslovakian actress named Anna, and eventually agrees to help
the army officials (particularly the British Major Calloway and Sergeant Payne) capture, and finally kill, the charismatic Lime. Part of the film’s documentary aesthetic and realist mode involve recording the presence of statues, with their sense of historical embeddedness, which constitute the given material of the city, or its above-ground panorama, later set against the underground sewers where Lime is shot. The statues already convey a symbolic language, and not only does Reed as the director possess a sense of how statues speak, but Greene as the writer is alert to and interested in the gritty reality of the scene, understanding the important connection between cities and their commemorative, public statues.67

*The Third Man* is a film about postwar Vienna and specifically about ruin, telling as it does the story of a ruined man. Within this destruction statues take the measure of the damage done to a city that has been “bombed about a bit” in the war. The statues are not used dramatically, and never offer the potential to come to life,68 but are instead part of the work’s modernist and realist mode – part of its play with sightlines and visibility. As I will discuss, they prompt us to ask whether, within the postwar order we are presented with, which moves quickly, with the speed of a thriller, there is any place for some "space of time" -- not a moment of still life or even stillness, necessarily, but a blind spot that beckons to another way of thinking. As various statues move into and out of the frame of the screen, our perspective is potentially deepened; our visual field is possibly widened as they mark the site of something, insistently nagging us with the

67 Opening to *The Comedians*: “When I think of all the grey memorials erected in London to equestrian generals, the heroes of old colonial wars, and to frock-coated politicians who are even more deeply forgotten, I can find no reason to mock the modest stone that commemorates Jones on the far side of the international road which he failed to cross in a country far from home, though I am not to this day absolutely sure of where, geographically speaking, Jones’s home lay” (1).

sense of something more: a comic hauntedness that, while harrowing, is in itself a kind of relief to the relentlessness of speed that Duffy's *The Speed Handbook* describes. Their traction lies, I will argue, in their occupation of what Peter Wollen, in his discussion of another film, refers to as “the zone of slowness where mobility runs up against inertia” (273) – a zone that offers a sense of historical consciousness that lies outside of cinematic time.

### IV. The Statues Still Stood

In the opening shots of *The Third Man* we are shown an image of Vienna that is followed in quick succession by three wintery images of statues in the city.69 The intricate details and striking postures of the statues invite the eye and one’s attention to linger, yet the montage is cut so quickly that we only have time to register each image before we are pulled along to the next, not only through the speed of the cutting but also by the quick, nonchalant voice of the narrator (that of Reed himself in the British release), commenting on how he never knew the “old Vienna before the war, with its Strauss music, its glamour and easy charm.” The rhythm of the editing does not allow one to pause or become absorbed in the delicacy of Strauss’s stone bow resting lightly on the strings of his violin, or, beneath the instrument’s delicate scroll, the three human figures that seem to push out in relief from part of an archway; or to fully note the folds of the chiseled robes of the statues standing on the rooftop overlooking the city – one of

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69 The opening sequence changed from screenplay to film: initially it depicted a gradual journey but then becomes a “documentary preface” (Drazin 56). The shots of city were taken by a secondary film unit after Reed returned to England: “The only exception was the documentary preface explaining the four-power occupation of Vienna. It was shot by Hans Schneeberger’s unit after the British crew had returned home. If you look carefully, in these early shots you can see the snow which had finally arrived and is entirely absent from the film proper” (Drazin 56). [Drazin, *In Search of the Third Man* (NY: Proscenium Publishers, 1999).]
them, in profile, winged and commanding a chariot pulled by horses – and all wearing mantles and head-coverings of snow; or to dwell on the severe, imposing figure of Beethoven sitting atop a column with small cherubs and a classical figure grouped at its base, also draped in snow, and set against a backdrop of buildings as well as a network of branches as fine as the spreading cracks in a sheet of ice. These three views of statuary figures, public and commemorative, which stand in for the “old Vienna,” which has become a city of monuments, are followed by visual evidence of, and speedy commentary on, the thriving black market in the new postwar order, quickly leading to a shot of a corpse (an amateur unable to “stay the course”) floating in the river near a sinking boat, amongst ice not cracked, but broken into menacing shards [Fig. 4].
We are also shown the damage to the city caused by bombing, the destruction no worse, the narrator almost blithely remarks, than that undergone by other European cities, and shots that illustrate the four-power occupation of Vienna by the British, American, French, and Russian military forces. This entire opening sequence quickly establishes the context for the story that will follow, plunging the viewer in (as opposed to the gradual build-up originally mapped out in the screenplay to *The Third Man*) with disorienting and “shocking swiftness” (Adamson 60), offering a parallel to Holly Martins’s confusion upon arriving in an unfamiliar city by train, expecting to find his friend, Harry Lime, only to be directed to his funeral.

While these images form a necessary part of the “background” to the “fairy tale” – this “strange, rather sad story” that we will be told, as Greene puts it in his prose treatment of *The Third Man* – there is a tension evident in the film between the quick narrative drive forward and a kind of lingering vision (which we see in *Between the Acts*) in which objects recorded by the camera become subjects in themselves, with a powerful and essentially cinematic sense of their independent physical reality, to use Kracauer’s terms. Indeed, at various moments, the film presses us to linger, bringing the background into the foreground, or, alternately, it refuses to let us pause, keeping the background in the shadows, in each instance nudging our attention with the sense of something more just within or beyond our sightline. We are needled with the awareness that infuses T.S. Eliot’s insistent and almost querulous lines from *The Waste Land*, which

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70 Kracauer describes how “...film is essentially an extension of photography and therefore shares with this medium a marked affinity for the visible world around us. Films come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality” (xliv). Further, "Pictures which strike us as intrinsically photographic seem intended to render nature in the raw, nature as it exists independently of us" (18). Resonating with the play with still life painting in *Between the Acts* is Kracauer's sense that, "In using its freedom to bring the inanimate to the fore and make it a carrier of action, film only protests its peculiar requirement to explore all of physical existence, human or nonhuman" (45).
can be taken as one inspiration for the film’s title: “Who is the third who walks always beside you?” and “—But who is that on the other side of you?” This “third” in the film is someone, or something – often a statue – that marks the site of a visual surplus, investing the play with sightlines that we see in *The Ministry of Fear* with a particular aesthetic and political weight.

At the center of *The Third Man* is an absent statue as well as the elusive figure of Harry Lime. Indeed, the two are intimately connected. According to Baron Kurtz and other witnesses to the so-called accident that killed Lime, the body, after being struck by a vehicle driven by his own driver, is carried to the statue of Emperor Joseph II, and it is here that Lime utters his last requests (to look after Holly and Anna) and breathes his last breath. This statue is repeatedly mentioned and becomes a landmark -- it was there, right over there, that the body was dragged; it was there that he lay -- a sentiment later echoed in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, with Madeleine's eerie, "There I was born, and there I died." Yet, oddly, we never see this statue, and the film seems to go out of its way to hide it from our view. In a photograph taken of Reed and the film crew assembled in the Josefplatz to record the entrance to Lime’s apartment building, the statue looms large -- an imperial caped figure on a prancing horse atop a substantial pedestal that is inset with bronze bas-relief figures. It would have been a simple matter to include this imposing statue in any of the scenes filmed outside of the apartment, when Holly, alone and then accompanied by Anna, attempt to investigate the matter. On a very pragmatic level, showing the looming statue would have demanded attention and detracted somewhat from the flow of the narrative, which is simply that Lime's body was dragged there after being hit by a truck. In the light of day, or even cast in evening shadows, the prancing statue might
have seemed gaudy or overpowering, directing the eye up and away rather than to the ground. It might, that is, have invited the eye to linger, which is precisely what Lime and his associates don't want, and it is as if the camera were on their side.

The excessively friendly and skittish Kurtz takes Holly right to the base of the statue when walking him through the events of the accident. Acting as a kind of guide, Kurtz points out important spots and narrates the sequence of events as the two figures walk towards, across, and away from the camera. Yet their eyes and our attention remain stubbornly focused downwards, to the ground, to the spot where Harry supposedly last lay [Fig. 5].
Later that evening, after this tour has taken place, the porter of Lime's building narrates the events that he partially witnessed from his perspective by the window, standing with Holly and looking down into the now darkened street. “By the Josef… Josef…” stutters the porter, searching for the right English words and coming to a stop [Fig. 6]. Even when Holly looks out the window at the spot where the porter is pointing, what he and we see is a narrow street between buildings, with no trace of the statue we would expect to find there.
One might say that the statue exists out of sight, beyond the frame, and thus outside of cinematic time. In occupying a space that is always out of view, just beyond our sightline, the elusive statue produces an unsettling effect, as does the porter’s insistence that there was a “third man” at the scene of the accident who helped carry the body and then refused to give evidence. These two presences signal alternative perspectives and potential narratives that we are not privy to, contributing to the mystery of this fast-paced thriller.

Similarly, when Anna and Holly later arrive to speak to the porter to get more information, only to learn that he has been murdered, the shots scissor between the group of onlookers crowding outside the building and the view of Holly and Anna approaching, retreating from, and then being chased by them. The camera stubbornly remains anchored to the right view of the street, first showing the group of neighbors and concerned citizens from behind, and then turning 180 degrees to show the backs of the retreating couple, soon followed by the impish boy who draws attention to them as suspects and the crowd who, in their refusal to be passive witnesses to a crime, belies the Romanian Popescu’s assertion that “You’ll never teach these Austrians to be good citizens” [Fig. 7]. The statue's invisibility at this point seems almost perverse; even though the street is shown from both sides here, the scene's quick cuts from one perspective to another again places the statue in a blind spot, keeping it persistently out of view.
As mentioned above, this hidden Joseph statue is connected to the absent figure of the “third man” who didn’t give testimony at the inquest for Lime's death -- the figure whom Holly attempts to discover, only to learn that the elusive figure was Lime himself. With the sudden appearance of Lime, and our discovery that he has faked his death, the statue comes to stand in for the truly enigmatic presence at the scene of the crime: that is, the sixth man (the others are the driver, Popsecu, Kurtz, Dr. Winkel, and Lime), the murdered orderly, Joseph Harbin, whose body is buried instead of Lime’s, and whose information passed to the British police about the penicillin racket helped build up a convincing case against him. Thus, the verbal coincidence of the names “Josef” and “Joseph” become striking. We only catch a glimpse of the latter in a photograph projected onto a screen by Calloway for Holly’s benefit -- he is at this point a missing man, and his projection through a magic lantern renders him even more ghostly [Fig. 8].

The film's refusal to show us a statue that is persistently referred to signals the presence of some figure, some body, that lies outside of our field of vision, hinting that there is more than we can see, some haunting excess. It is curious then which statues we do see
in the film, if we are never permitted a glance of the one next to which the murdered Harbin’s body was laid to rest.

After we discover that Harry Lime is in fact alive, shocked by the revelation of his amused, spot-lit face, illuminated briefly by the light cast from a nearby window as a disgruntled woman shouts at a drunken Holly to be quiet, a desperate chase ensues. The stunned Holly pursues his best friend’s shadow and clattering footfalls through the empty cobbled streets, and when the alleyway he is on opens onto a square, he realizes that Lime has disappeared. The camera is already positioned within the square and records Holly’s entrance into it. At the left side of the frame, forming part of the scenery as it were,71 is a stone fountain adorned with a standing cherub that unobtrusively doubles Holly’s figure, both of their heads turned to the right of the frame (the cherub gazing down while Holly looks off to the side). After Holly has looked around, we are given a sequence of shots showing him resting at the fountain while the cherub’s face, in profile, seems to gaze at him with a surprisingly warm, observing sympathy. Holly dips his hand into the water and gradually becomes aware of the statue’s “presence,” after which he comically and sourly winces, splashing water on the cherub in a gesture that will later be echoed in the final shot of the film, when he discards his match after lighting his cigarette with a similar exasperated, defeated, yet almost amused swing of his arm [Fig. 9]. The camera’s framing of Holly and the cherub nearly side by side for a time animates the stone and creates a silent conversation between observer and observed – one that Holly seems to wryly resent and expose as a fiction of proximity and framing.

71 This fountain was not in the square originally; Drazin cites one of the workers on the film, who recalls that this prop must have come off "Bob Dunbar's truck" during filming (58).
Later, Holly returns with a skeptical Major Calloway and Sgt. Paine, and again the camera is positioned to record their entrance into the square, this time with the cherub and fountain far more prominent at the left of the frame, with the figure’s face now oddly blank and artificial. As Holly turns to his companions, remarking on Lime’s disappearance just there, Calloway and Paine walk towards the camera, with Calloway turning to glance at the cherub and then turning away, while Paine walks right up to the fountain, his attention lingering on it, his elbow coming to rest at the edge of it as he continues to stare at the cherub as if engaged in a silent conversation of his own with it, as Holly continues to talk and Calloway to look around. Paine’s resting at the fountain, looking eventually in the same direction that the cherub is gazing in, allows Calloway to also stop there, and as he does so he steps into and occupies the hitherto empty right side of the frame, his expression indicating a realization that no one else yet shares – namely, that Lime must have disappeared through the nearby kiosk that contains a hidden door leading down into the city’s intricate sewage system [Fig. 10]. In arresting Paine’s and the viewer’s gaze, the statue enables a pause in the narrative’s relentless drive towards revelation, a pause that actually helps enable the revelation by opening up a space for contemplation, wandering vision, and possibility. The statue, while more decorative and playful than monumental or commemorative, seems again a visual marker of an event, whose comic animation by the camera\textsuperscript{72} stalls the narrative while enabling it to move forward with new force and momentum.

\textsuperscript{72} This can be seen as part of a convention of animation that is evident in various films, particularly with the seeming animation of photographs that appear to be smiling or frowning and reflecting the feelings of characters. Such instances reveal a form of visual wit and the fabrications that the framing by a camera can call forth.
What the statue helps direct Calloway to see is that Harry Lime is not dead after all, and that they have therefore buried someone else in his place. After digging up the coffin we are presented with a view of Calloway, Paine, and other officers, from the perspective of the corpse, with the camera positioned in the coffin itself, just as it was placed in the square as they entered it [Fig. 11]. This move, of course, keeps the focus on their reaction rather than on the grisly fact of Harbin’s dead body; keeping this body hidden, like the statue of Emperor Joseph, is also central to the film’s interest in what gets forgotten in the refusal to linger or look beyond the parameters of the frame.
Capitalizing on irritation, exasperation, and frustration more than any kind of moral outrage, the film, in its tragi-comic mode, merging the worlds of the thriller and the documentary, gestures towards the link between the verbs "to amuse" and "to muse."

Both activities, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, involve an intent gazing and a thoughtful, absorbed looking, with this arresting of attention leading to diversion, delusion or entertainment (with amusement) and to surprise and wonder (with musing).

In the film, both actions together hint at a third space that relies on a sense of shock and violence and often humor to be revealed, signaling what has been lost. Whereas in *The Ministry of Fear* part of the reprieve of the novel involves occupying a third space from which we can watch different aspects flickering back and forth, here this realm is only present as a nagging conviction, like a ghost limb, remaining outside our line of vision. While this does keep the viewer "protected" in a kind of "fairy tale," it at the same time refuses to make this protected space comfortable or in any way stable. To take on a more expansive vision with no hidden blind spots is presented in the film as a more violent and ethically disturbing alternative.
The film’s ‘animation’ of statues can be contrasted with two overhead shots that offer a different kind of perspective and engagement with the world. After Holly blurts out to Mr. Popescu that the porter has insisted on the presence of a third man at the scene of the accident, we see Popescu, Kurtz, and Dr. Winkel meeting at a bridge with another person. Filmed from above, with the lines of the bridge’s support beams casting long, sharp shadows, the four men seem to be the size of small insects, so that their identities are indecipherable [Fig. 12]. The bridge appears to be startlingly modern – almost like a streamlined rollercoaster – in the midst of the images of ruin and decadence we have seen previously. Positioning the camera so high up, while it allows the viewer to see more of the scene, is also a technique of concealment (in plain sight) and necessary obfuscation. Later, we are given another overview perspective, this time from the box of a ferris wheel in the famous Prater scene. First shown the criss-crossing lines of the wheel as seen from below, the steel and radiating lines recalling the bridge, we later see the fairgrounds from the position of Lime and Holly in one of the boxes. Lime directs his companion’s attention to the scurrying, insect-like creatures on the ground and asks whether he really wouldn’t extinguish some of them if told that he could get "twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stops," free of income tax -- "Free of income tax, old man." This predatory, dehumanizing perspective permits Lime to think and talk in generalities, largely exonerating himself from any sense of guilt, or any awareness of the damage he is causing – damage that Holly later sees close-up at the children’s hospital, although the sight of the suffering children is also kept off screen and thus in a blind spot for the viewer.
This ingenious move of Calloway’s of taking Holly to the children's hospital, finally convinces Holly to help capture and arrest his best friend and childhood idol. There is a period of intense waiting as the gathered forces wait for Lime to appear. The camera pans slowly across a length of street facing a partly bombed building – a site that was quickly shown to us in the opening few minutes of the film as part of the documentary images of Vienna in ruin, and which are now returned to and lingered over as part of the stage on which Lime’s capture will be played out. This panning shot is precisely what Holly sees from his seat by the window as he waits for his friend in the café. The shot, that is, represents his (and our) vigilant looking. It is followed by shots of soldiers positioned next to statues as if they too were made of stone, and by close-ups of their anonymous faces, as still and vigilant as statues, intercut with Expressionist images of empty cobbled streets, lit with an eerie glow from a light source beyond the frame.

Tension mounts as a shadow appears, looming against a nearby building, with twisting, gaping statues frozen at the right of the screen, and the alternating shots quicken in pace – a tension that is, however, deflated when we realize that the person casting the
shadow isn’t Lime after all, but an aged Viennese man selling balloons as if he were at an amusement park [Fig. 13]. The scene seems oddly cluttered with stone figures, which adds to the need for vigilance, as the eye might be deceived into mistaking a soldier for a statue, while a statue might provide a place behind which to hide. The complete stillness of the statues also allows motion or change to be more quickly detected.73

![Fig. 13](image)

73 Kracauer, in a section on "Nascent Motion" in *Theory of Film*, discusses "movement as contrasted with motionlessness. In focusing upon this contrast, films strikingly demonstrate that objective movement -- any movement, for that matter -- is one of their choice subjects" (44).
When Lime finally appears, it is not on the street, but as a tiny figure that emerges in an illuminated gap atop the very building the scene began with, seen now at a slightly tilted angle, the darkness of his clothing and the brightness of his face offset by the two statues he seems to emerge between, the three of them forming the points of a triangle. After we move in closer to a medium shot of Lime, we are given the 180-degree pan from his viewpoint, which is also partially from the perspective of the statues that face onto the street, sweeping from the buildings and rubble opposite to a building with a café, zooming into the café where Holly sits waiting for him [Fig. 14].
The predatory pan and zoom are associated with Lime: we see them earlier, for instance, when the camera, seemingly of its own volition, departs from Holly’s perspective as he looks outside Anna’s window, and pulls our attention through the window-box of plants and across the street to where a figure (Lime) is walking by only to duck into a darkened doorway. Such shots, in their singleness of intent, along with the sustained sequence of vigilant watching I have been describing above, contrasts with opportunities for wandering vision and attention. They are aligned with the hunt that will soon lead to Holly shooting Lime out of mercy in the echoing, rushing tunnels of the sewage system, where the water smells sweet -- the dénouement that the narrative has been driving towards all along. The sequence ends with the dramatic and memorable image of Lime's stiffening fingers fruitlessly reaching through a grate on the street [Fig. 15], perhaps recalling Bernini’s sculpture of a Daphne fleeing from Apollo, frozen in her metamorphosis from woman to tree, her fingers spread out but with their tips, unlike Lime's, beginning to sprout flowing leaves.
In contrast to such limited overhead or 180-degree panning and zooming views, the film’s more sustained play with sightlines and its insistence on keeping some things persistently out of sight preserves a space of mystery and power by refusing to bring them into the frame and co-opting them into the narrative. They remain outside of cinematic time and representation, somehow sheltered from sight, while conjuring up an unspoken sense of violence and loss. The spectator's or characters' wandering vision confronts barriers and is rebuffed, but renders the world of the film less rather than more claustrophobic.

At the very end of the film, there is a perfect perspective view as Holly stands still, waiting for Anna (who is walking towards the camera) to catch up with him. Although his head moves slightly, his body remains still for a full thirty seconds (1:43:59-1:44:29), as if he were becoming a statue himself; the scene carried by the unforgettable zither music of Karas. After Anna passes Holly and completely ignores his presence, he lights a cigarette and discards the match in a gesture of exasperation or defeat reminiscent of his earlier splashing of water on the cherub statue [Fig. 16]. Dana
Polan, in his audio commentary for the Criterion DVD of *The Third Man*, notes how the film has up until this point been a fast-paced thriller “taking no time for pause,” yet here slows down and goes into "real time," with Anna moving from the background to the foreground. While this is true, and the thriller grinds to a halt here, almost shifting generic modes amongst the beautiful trees that line the road to the cemetery -- the closest the film comes to any kind of natural, living beauty -- the earlier moments of rest by statues also provide slowed-down moments. These, along with this moment in which Holly appears to be "statuified," to use a term from one of Bowen's stories in *The Demon Lover*, mark the site of a loss, a haunting at once comic and full of its own pathos.

As Anna exits the frame, calling attention to the presence of the fixed camera that she moves beyond the sight of, this realm beyond hovers at the edges of our vision with its powerful sense of lost narrative possibility as we realize that the potential love story between her and Holly will never flower. The dynamic interplay between visibility and invisibility apparent throughout the film, between that which is in our sightline and that which is sheltered in a blind spot, like the flickering back and forth between identities in *The Ministry of Fear*, resists habitual vision -- whether a quick, shallow vision that permits an easy forgetting or a pained, cynical vision that makes it nearly impossible to forget. This tactic of nudging one to remember or allowing one to forget is in itself a kind of fulfillment of a dream of rest, opening up or gesturing towards a third space that turns Eliot's irritable questions, “Who is the third who walks always beside you? […] But who is that on the other side of you?” into a resource for discovering "ways of escape," however temporary, and for suggesting the relief of an alternative vision.
Fig. 1
Epilogue: What Tiresias Sees

"Distraction and concentration form polar opposites which may be stated as follows: A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his finished painting. In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art." (Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 239)

In his recent The Speed Handbook, Duffy explores what he calls an "adrenaline aesthetic" of speed that, with its "thrills and excitements," its revitalizing shocks and revolutionary transformation of the experience of space, is "the only new pleasure invented by modernity." In contrast to this "regime of speed" that dissolves distance in a breathtaking velocity that stimulates the senses and body, the "dream of rest" I have been considering (and that I connect with the fatigue of the Lotus-eaters in my introduction) may appear outmoded and archaic -- an "ancient lament"74 -- rather than an integral part of modernism. According to Duffy, speed infiltrated and "took over the texts and images of modernism," with modernist works lamenting the "horrors of slowness" with its "unbearable languor" and "dreary dawdlings" -- resisting, at the same time, the "contemplative (and hence slowed-down) encounter" that critical distance demands. The sense of exhaustion characteristic of late modernism in the years leading up to, during, and after the Second World War also seems a far cry from the exhilaration of the new speed technologies -- the automobile in particular -- that his study considers, drawing as it does upon works like Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto, which claimed, among other things, that "Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal

74 Walter Benjamin: "Clearly, this is at bottom the same ancient lament that the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the spectator. That is a commonplace" (239).
leap, the punch and the slap." The terms "modernism" and "repose" (and its variants, such as respite, relief, reprieve, retreat) sound incompatible, with the newness of the modern shattering the regressive returns of the re-prefix.

In the late modernist works that I have discussed, what Duffy calls the "angst at the idea of static spaces" (10) is transformed into a need rather than a torture that is experienced as dangerous, potentially violent, and inherently dynamic. The drama that The Speed Handbook attributes to speed, with its "dramatic intensities" and shock of the new can also, I suggest, be mapped onto the Keatsian realm of "Silence and slow Time" while resisting heroic narratives about newness, innovation and origins. The drama evident in the wartime works that I have considered can be read as more local, bespeaking a representational agility that undoes dichotomies while it opens up spaces of contestation, virtuosity, beauty, violence, and repose. A dream of rest may seem regressive and transgressive within the context of a modernism cast in terms of an "Odyssean contrast of heroic mission with domestic stasis" (Reed 2), yet when we take away the grand, sweeping narratives of modernist valor, which can be read as part of what Marianne DeKoven calls the "masculinist movement" of modernist "self-imagination" (as well as a critical imagination), with its "advocacy of firm, hard, dry, terse, classical masculinity, over against the messy, soft, vague, flowery, effusive, adjectival femininity of the late Victorians" (176), what we see is the impossibility of maintaining strict boundaries. The discursive move of establishing distraction and absorption, art and technology, the solitary figure and the masses, speed and stasis, shock and repose, or realism and escapism, as polar opposites can no longer hold. As I hope I

75 "Ode on a Grecian Urn," l. 2.
have shown, various artists of the period drew on shock effects, violence, and speed in order to dream of rest and to carve out spaces and moments of repose.

Rather than an Odyssean narrative, we might think of modernism -- and late modernism in particular -- through the lens of Tiresias, a figure caught between two worlds ("throbbing between two lives"), who is both female and male, blind and visionary, ancient and modern [Fig. 1]. In one of his notes to *The Waste Land*, Eliot insists that the figure of Tiresias, "although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest."

Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem.

A "mere spectator," what Tiresias sees at "the violet hour, the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea" (ll. 220-21) is a scene of indifferent love-making, where a "young man carbuncular" makes sexual advances which are not rebuffed while not welcomed by the "typist home at teatime."

I Tiresisas, old man with wrinkled dugs

Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest --

I too awaited the expected guest. (ll. 228-30)

The blind seer has "foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed; / I who have sat by Thebes below the wall / And walked among the lowest of the dead" (ll. 241-46).

What he perceives, foretells, and foresuffers, with the typist's feelings of numbness and exhausted repetition as she "smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record
on the gramophone" after thinking to herself, "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over") is both distinct yet not categorically different from the world of Thebes, with Eliot's poem clearly bridging the classical past and the ravaged present. Tiresias indeed seems to exist between two worlds, at the same time the "I" who has sat (and is sitting) by the wall at Thebes and the "I" who perceives this grim modern encounter.

![Fig. 1 Johann Heinrich Füssli, Tiresias appears to Odysseus, c. 1780-85](image)

To view modernism through the eyes of Tiresias means to challenge the possibility of maintaining the clear divisions that studies such as *The Speed Handbook* rely on. We might see that if one were to move fast enough, a sense of stillness could be achieved, as in the image of an airplane propeller that Woolf at times returns to, spinning
so fast that it appears to be still;\textsuperscript{76} at the same time, we might recognize that stasis does not preclude violent pressure and movement. The twentieth-century dream of rest cannot simply be read as an escape, as what there is to escape from and the means by which escape is imagined are manifold rather than singular. While this removes the distinctiveness of modernism -- its hard edges, its vital claims to newness -- which can be experienced as a loss, in its place we can see, as MacKay accurately notes, a sense of "development and transformation" (15) that can still embrace the theatrical while, as Woolf does in her final novel, rendering that which is between the acts of equal interest and power. What we are enabled to see, that is, in the place of a heroic narrative (itself a consolatory myth) is what, in fact, Tiresias sees -- a state of things that pulses between distinctive yet similar scenes, merging and converging, separating and uniting in a resilient, modernist rhythm of ebbs and flows. In the account of the Lotus-eaters that this project began with, the dream of rest is essentially a false one, waylaying the mariners from their true (although not guaranteed) homecoming. In the works of Woolf, Bowen, and Greene, as well as other modernist writers and artists, that promise of a homecoming is itself the tempting illusion; temporarily framed spaces and moments of repose threaten onward progression, yet the movement between different realms and registers, with its pauses and progressions, its shelters and shocks, becomes both the adventure and the dream.

Raymond Williams, in "When Was Modernism?," notes how the "isolated, estranged images of alienation and loss, the narrative discontinuities" that dominate

\textsuperscript{76} For instance, her diary entry from 16 June 1938: "When one reads the mind is like an aeroplane propeller invisibly quick and unconscious -- a state seldom achieved" (151), or 11 April 1939: "So if I had time [...] I should, if it weren't for the war -- glide my way up & up in to that exciting layer so rarely lived in: where my mind works so quick it seems asleep; like the aeroplane propellers" (214).
accounts of modernism, "have become the easy iconography of the commercials, and the
lonely, bitter, sardonic and sceptical hero takes his ready-made place as star of the
thriller."

These heartless formulae sharply remind us that the innovations of what is called
Modernity have become the new but fixed forms of our present moment. If we
are to break out of the non-historical fixity of post-modernism, then we must
search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected
works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself
not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past but, for
all our sakes, to a modern future in which community may be imagined again.

The work of counterposing alternative traditions to "[t]hese heartless formulae" has been
carried out by several scholars, and in the version of "public modernism" that I have
described in Picturing Repose, we might see as well the glimmerings of an imagination
of community in the more collective dream of rest shared by artists and public alike. Not
utopic or idyllic, it nevertheless replaces the figure of the solitary and sardonic hero with
artists who powerfully tap into the longings of a choric song. To insist that "all things
have rest," however temporary, and to view this state as a necessity is not, in fact, a
betrayal of our world of pain or a politically inappropriate gesture (to refer again to
Trilling's discussion of the idyll), but instead to see beyond the self, moving past the
empty exhaustion of Eliot's typist and even the foreknowledge of Tiresias's vision, exiting
in order to re-enter and more nimbly engage with reality.
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