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*A Postgraduate History
Journal*

Featuring:

Vanessa Longden

Sentiment up in Smoke: Tracing Images of Illusion, Absence and Identity

Gerald Dyson

King, Peasants, and the Restless Dead: Decapitation in Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives

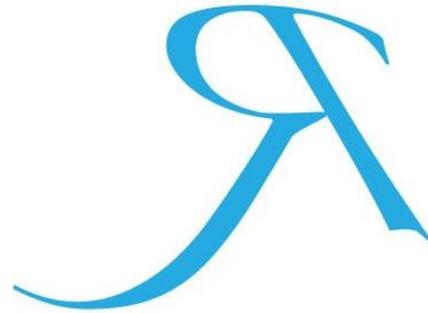
Jade Halbert

Liberating the Slaves of the Needle: The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners 1843-1863

Amanda Phipps

Journey's End: An Account of the Changing Responses Towards the First World War's Representation

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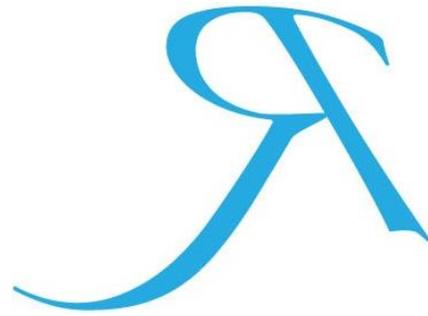
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With thanks to:

Our dedicated group of reviewers; the History Department of the University of Warwick. We would also like to thank Collin Lieberg, the founder of *Retrospectives*, Serena Dyer, Charles Angelo and Elodie Duché.

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Retrospectives is committed to publishing original postgraduate historical research. We encourage submissions from postgraduates of all levels, from first year taught MA students to those who have recently completed their PhD. We aim to publish high quality material by maintaining high standards for author feedback, and are committed to providing full and detailed comments on every article sent to us. Retrospectives is not only a journal, it is a resource for postgraduate students. Alongside our constructive, collaborative review process, we encourage postgraduate students to submit creative and innovative pieces of writing.

From the Editor

Retrospectives has undergone a large series of modifications this year, with a completely new editorial board. With the journal under a fresh grasp, we required guidance and so a huge thank you needs to be said to both Collin Lieberg and John Morgan. Nonetheless, at its roots *Retrospectives* remains the same; we still aim to publish original, high-quality and double peer-reviewed articles. The calibre of articles published this year is a reflection of this. Yet, the journal cannot be operated with just the editorial board and our willing authors at the helm, I am also extremely grateful to our reviewers who have assured that the journal is able to continue to progress.

This year's articles cover a time span of over a millennium, and delve into source bases as diverse as contemporary photography and early medieval hagiographical tales. We begin with Vanessa Longden of the University of Lancaster's examination of imagery in the Post Secret project. This is then followed with Gerald Dyson, PhD Candidate at the University of York's assessment of Anglo-Saxon decapitation. Jade Halbert's subsequent article considers the activities of The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners, before finally Amanda Phipps of the University of Exeter provides an analysis of the changing responses towards depictions of the WWI play *Journey's End* from 1928-2011. We conclude with book reviews from Collin Lieberg, Charles Angelo and Sophie A. Greenway.

Finally, thank you for reading and we hope that you enjoy this volume. If you have any interest in participating in any future capacity, as an author or a reviewer, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Benjamin Redding

Editor, *Retrospectives*

Sentiment up in Smoke: Tracing Images of Illusion, Absence and Identity¹

Vanessa Longden*

This paper addresses the (re)creation of the postmodern individual and the notion of belonging in relation to absence, rituals and the photographic image. The portrayal of time through the photograph is most important; both the physical aging of the subject and the deterioration of the image serve to remind the viewer that the subject only remains eternal within the boundaries of the frame. I examine confessions through the Post Secret project, where images become both a tool of expression and a coping mechanism. This is evident in the face of loss and disaster. Yet the loss of the subject can result in deceptive images, prompting a contested remembrance. By assimilating numerous fragmented ‘paper trails’ this paper intends to trace human limitations and the restrictiveness of the photograph as well as expanding the frame to reveal the truth behind the ink. Themes of absence, identity, fragmentation and death will be touched upon when considering the creation of the individual and their longing for self-preservation.

At the heart of history lies a contested relationship which is threefold: the formation of individual identities, which are rooted in the past and projected into the future; a desire for self-preservation; and finally, an acknowledgement of existence. The desire to be remembered, to leave a trace, is the strongest of all. The value of history, then, is tied to

¹ The author would like to thank Frank Warren, Roberto Miaz, and Renato Miaz for their assistance and permitting the inclusion of their images in the following paper.

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remembrance and forgetting; to express oneself, to record and manipulate events, and to be the author of one's own story. Our ability to remember and recall the past is a unique aspect which makes us human, yet 'history' as a subject is a social construct which is created by many and labelled under one prevailing banner. If history is taken in its broadest sense – as an equation of time – then it can be viewed as the commonality which underlies and interlinks all disciplines. It is of no surprise that not all voices are heard – past events can be misremembered, eclipsed, and coloured by the imagination – thus questioning the notion of 'historical truth' and 'secrecy'.

The article serves as a starting point for historians that deal with images on how to use these materials as historical sources and to take into account the unconventional and speculative nature of these sources. A selection of anonymous metanarratives will be brought into focus – snapshots to be precise. The photograph is integral to my argument, it will be read as a text and consulted as an object of historicity and of (in)stability. The image acts as an anchor, a tangible material to which the latter abstract notions can be tied. The camera records the past and preserves it for future generations, when encountered, the distance between the past and present effectively collapses. Time is suspended and the image is open to interpretation. The image encapsulates what I call a 'positive uncertainty' within the borders of its frame, where past moment can be re-read and history is disputed. This is applicable to Frank Warren's Post Secret project, a confessional website which indicates the decline of the spoken confessional and oral testimony. Its very existence questions the rituals of remembrance, communication, and the ownership of history. The ability to retain secrets is yet another aspect which shapes mankind and laces our personal pasts, these whispers are "unrecognized evidence, from forgotten journeys, unknowingly recovered" at the most unexpected times.²

Jean-François Lyotard brought the metanarrative to prominence in 1979, he claimed that the postmodern condition was characterised by a distrust of the grand narrative which was essential to modernity. It is for this reason that I refer to the postmodern as the spirit of an age – a *zeitgeist* – as opposed to a time period subsequent to Modernity. By rejecting the grand narrative, the notion of a modern 'progressive' outlook is also challenged, thus suggesting time is not a linear

² Frank Warren, 'What is the story behind PostSecret?', in *Post Secret Community*, <<http://www.postsecretcommunity.com/news-faq/postsecret-story>> [accessed 8 May 2013]

process.³ In this sense the postcard can be considered a fragment of a narrative. ‘Consider the form of popular sayings, proverbs and maxims’ Lyotard wrote, ‘they are like little splinters of potential narratives, or moulds of old ones, which have continued to circulate on certain levels of the contemporary social edifice. In their prosody can be recognized the mark of that strange temporalization that jars the golden rules of our knowledge: “never forget.”’ Lyotard goes on to explain that these fragmented narratives may belong to the past, ‘but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation.’ Ultimately, narratives ‘[define] what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do.’⁴ In being sent the postcard serves its purpose, one does not expect a response in return. The same can be said for the sender of secrets.

Warren was prompted by a lucid dream in which he was aware he was dreaming. He opened the drawer of his nightstand and examined the “Little Prince” postcards he had bought in Paris earlier that day. He stated: ‘Each one had been altered with messages on their backs. The first message read: “unrecognized evidence, from forgotten journeys, unknowingly recovered,” the second message was about a “reluctant oracle” postcard art project and the last message I could not understand at the time.’⁵ On awaking, Warren tried to replicate the postcards from his dream. In 2004 Warren started the “reluctant oracle” project. Every Sunday he created and released a new work to be discovered, prompting local, national and international recognition. ‘The last message from the “reluctant oracle” bore the message: “You will find your answers in the secrets of strangers.” The next Sunday the Post Secret began.’⁶ The Post Secret project commenced in November 2004; the distribution of 3000 blank postcards invited America to “send a secret” anonymously. So the floodgates opened, news of Post Secret spread virally, not through the postcards themselves but through word-of-

³ Indeed, Bauman’s notion of ‘fluid modernity’ may be more appropriate. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Manchester, 1984), pp. 22-23.

⁵ Warren, ‘What is the story behind PostSecret?’, in *PostSecret Community*, <<http://www.postsecretcommunity.com/news-faq/postsecret-story>> [accessed 8 May 2013]

⁶ *Ibid.*

mouth and via the internet. Warren has collected over half a million secrets which he has bound like bricks and stacked in his home.

Warren believes secrets “can connect us to our deepest humanity;”⁷ yet the viewer can only immediately access them via the computer screen. This lack of physical interaction creates an estrangement between card and audience. All may be well and good for the senders, who distance themselves from their past once the postcard is out of sight in the bottom of the post-box. But themes of absence continue to plague the postcard through subjects that are missing and dead.⁸ The cards are transformed into testaments and confessions, like witnesses to a crime scene. Benjamin questions: ‘Isn’t every square inch of our cities a crime scene? Every passer-by a culprit? Isn’t the task of the photographer – descendent of the augurs and haruspices – to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in his pictures?’⁹ Perhaps the truly guilty are positioned behind the camera.

Previous works have focussed on the social movement behind Post Secret¹⁰ which acknowledged the cards as sources of inspiration and healing¹¹ whilst also addressing the collapsed distance between cultural production and the everyday.¹² Using Post Secrets as a central thread, this paper sets out to assimilate the fragments of a paper trail. The first section of this paper, *Secrets of the Virtually Absent*, traces the individual through the production of the postcard. The author is bound in a cycle of (re)creation; where making and sending cards is a continual isolated process. The card acts as a space in which past, present, truth, and fiction are unified,

⁷ Warren, ‘Frank Warren: Half a million secrets’, *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, <http://www.ted.com/talks/frank_warren_half_a_million_secrets.html> [accessed 10 April 2012]

⁸ I refer to the ‘subject’ as an entity under scrutiny as opposed to an academic forte.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*, p. 527, <<http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic235120.files/BenjaminPhotography.pdf>> [accessed 24 April 2012]

¹⁰ See, in particular, Maggie MacAulay; Kendra Magnusson; Christopher Schiffmann; Jennifer Hamm; and Arlen Kasdorf, ‘From Souvenir to Social Movement: PostSecret, Art, and Politics’, in *Young Scholars in Writing*, (University of Winnipeg) <<http://cas.umkc.edu/english/publications/youngscholarsinwriting/documents/FromSouvenirtoSocialMovement.pdf>> [accessed 10 April 2012]

¹¹ See Anna Poletti, ‘Intimate Economies: *PostSecret* and the Affect of Confession’, *Biographical Research Center*, 34.1 (2011), pp. 25-36.

¹² See Jean Burgess, ‘Re-mediating Vernacular Creativity: Digital Storytelling’, in *First Person: International Digital Storytelling Conference*, ed. Australian Centre for the Moving Image, (Australia, 2006), pp. 1-4.

reflecting the complexities of identity and everyday life.

Such complexities can be overwhelming; reassurance is sought in the most unlikely of objects. My second section, *The Comfort of Found Objects*, turns away from the individual and addresses the role of the family. Drawing upon the lost family photograph, images come to depict both a trapped time and the fragility of life. In light of collective disasters (like Japan's 2011 tsunami) these personal remnants become increasingly valuable. Not only reflecting a lost time but also providing an area where hypothetical imagining and escapism can wander freely. Taken from its original context the lost photograph assumes a greater flexibility. It is both physically and mentally adaptable, acting as a source of remembrance and comfort.

Yet remembering is ambiguous; images fabricate memory and history, thus tracing the dead subject is not an easy task. Demonstrating this, my third section, *Smoke and Mirrors – The Instability of Images*, addresses the work of the Miaz brothers. Their blurred images are comparable to an out-of-focus camera lens; the subjects are in a process of perpetual becoming.¹³ These distorted images create a 'positive uncertainty' – that mankind has the ability to be anything – yet they are also entities in flux. It seems the only way to stabilise ourselves is to assign our emotions to paper and exile them to another realm. The notion of offerings to other realms is the final exploration of this section, in which I argue the decline of the spoken confessional prompts the development of a hybrid communication. Post Secret's self-assigned sentiment, is contrasted with the Qingming Festival in China, where paper offerings are burnt in an act of closure and to honour the dead. Where the fragments end up is uncertain; the only secure realm is that of the Post Secret destination: Warren's permanent dwelling.

Secrets of the Virtually Absent

If the camera is a defence mechanism and the computer screen an

¹³ Henri Bergson, 'The Cinematographical Mechanism of Thought and the Mechanistic Illusion – A Glance at the History of Systems – Real Becoming and False Evolutionism', Chapter 4 in *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), pp. 272 – 370.

obstruction to our accessibility, who do the postcards truly serve?¹⁴ Frank Warren is ‘the only identity attached to the blog or to any other media forms associated with the project.’¹⁵ Warren has freely admitted that he is a “collector of secrets” even though the collection seems to have turned into obsession.¹⁶ Burgess argues that the secrets ‘constitute their authenticity as individual life narratives by presenting physical traits of the authors.’¹⁷ So if Warren is the collector of secrets he is also the collector of the metanarratives that compose character. Perhaps the secrets’ physical manifestation provides Warren with a foundation on which to build; to construct a new life or another character entirely. Indeed the success of postsecret.com has no doubt served Warren’s reputation, dubbing him as ‘the most trusted stranger in America.’¹⁸

This newly acquired trust has ‘the capacity to inspire epiphanies in readers regardless of whether or not the authors of each card are confessing a secret they truly hold.’¹⁹ Poletti’s use of ‘epiphanies’ suggests the appearance of a divine manifestation. Thus those on the Post Secret website could resemble a religious community, an affiliation founded on confessions and the redemptive word of a preacher. Warren assumes an omnipotent position selecting and publicising the best confessionals to set an example to his followers. Kennedy believes ‘senders possess a degree of symbolic power over recipients’ as they control what is seen.²⁰ Yet it is Warren who holds dualistic power over both sender and viewer, by inviting them to confess and regulating what is seen.

¹⁴ My own comparison. The camera has been compared to a gun which shoots its subject, thus defending the photographer. The computer screen distances us from other users across the virtual plane.

¹⁵ Poletti, ‘Intimate Economies’, pp. 25-36.

¹⁶ Warren, ‘Frank Warren: Half a million secrets’, *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, <http://www.ted.com/talks/frank_warren_half_a_million_secrets.html> [accessed 10 April 2012]

¹⁷ Poletti, ‘Intimate Economies’, p. 31.

¹⁸ Harper Collins Publishers, ‘Frank Warren’, *Harper Collins*, <http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/30756/Frank_Warren/index.aspx> [accessed 13 April 2012]

¹⁹ Poletti, ‘Intimate Economies’, p. 35.

²⁰ Chris Kennedy, “Just Perfect! The Pragmatics of Evaluation in Holiday Postcards”, in *Discourse, Communication and Tourism*, ed. Jaworski, Adam and Annette Pitchard, (Clevedon: Channel Review Publications, 2005), pp. 223-246.

The instructions ‘be brief’ and ‘creative’ ensures that a certain type of secret is produced.²¹ It is clear that negative or scandalous secrets are desired more than those which enforce normality and optimism.²² The only people who do not seem to be controlled or manipulated by Warren’s instructions are the postal workers who observe the secrets first-hand. The fact that Post Secret is spread by hearsay further supports his position of authority. His missionaries dispensed the Secret word while Warren compiled a series of publications; much like a testament of our humanity and an unspoken guidance of self-improvement.

Another striking thing about Poletti’s latter statement is the consideration of the ‘truth’. Turkle states, ‘if people [on PostSecret] are not truthful, these confessions are fiction.’²³ Are we being deceived by believing in something that may or may not be true? Surely this is applicable to every aspect of life, as the dialogues of the everyday are founded upon an ever evolving language. Truth becomes interwoven with fiction, creating a multifaceted social product. Likewise the internet is just another place to create and project an alternative self – a stage set with virtual props, where we can do away with human limitations entirely or bare all and readily admit our shortcomings; both to ourselves and the curious spectators who log on.

Thus the audience adopts the dual persona of voyeur and contributor, while members simultaneously heal themselves and assume others’ secrets which may not be personally applicable to them.²⁴ It is ‘the “I” voice embedded in these narratives [which] encourages audiences to internalize and adopt these secrets as their own.’²⁵ MacAulay is correct, the imposition of language forces subjects to recognise themselves as individuals despite the fact that the ‘I’ can never be attained. The construction of identity is always in reference to the past or the future; it is never present.²⁶

²¹ Frank Warren, ‘What is the story behind PostSecret?’ <<http://www.postsecretcommunity.com/news-faq/postsecret-story>> [accessed 13 April 2012]

²² Poletti, ‘Intimate Economies’, p. 33.

²³ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*, (New York, 2011), p. 230.

²⁴ MacAulay et al., ‘From Souvenir to Social Movement’, p. 91.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁶ This is the poststructuralist notion that language both defines and constrains mankind. Mankind did not choose their language yet they rely on it in order to express themselves.

What Post Secret has highlighted is that sharing and keeping secrets is no longer a symbol of trust. The postcard no longer states: “wish you were here!” but instead warns us of human weakness. The only way we can learn from and avoid these situations is by becoming collectors ourselves. Consequently secrets become a commodity, an object of fetishisation to be collected.²⁷ Here I draw upon Marx’s commodity fetishism, that the subjective economic value of the postcard is transformed into an objective entity of *real* intrinsic value. Sontag argues that ‘Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire.’²⁸ Collecting the picture postcard is akin to collecting the world. These are objects of desire with self-assigned value. The question of ownership then arises, once the secrets pass over Warren’s threshold all previous possession is abandoned.²⁹ Yet as soon as a secret is shared another is required to fill the void; we collect fragmented secrets to fill the space of the ‘empty I’.³⁰

‘These writers hold up a mirror to our complex times.’³¹ Turkle is correct; to put our trust in those who wish to remain anonymous is unnerving to say the least. One might argue that this online community shares the fragmented secrets and distributes evenly the corresponding emotions printed on the card. But the creators of the cards (and of the secrets) wish to dissociate themselves from their past and from others. The website may act as a showcase of secrets but it is also an effective virtual buffer.³² The postcards are not cries for help; they are simply cries for acknowledgement.

While each card requests attention from those who view the site; the audience is powerless to help due to the creator’s ambiguity.³³ Each secret competes against one another just like the holiday postcard

²⁷The collector carves out a niche in his own shape, filling the void with selective objects which make him feel as though he belongs. These ‘belongings’ shape his mental mind-map and leave other areas blank.

²⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 4.

²⁹ Expanding on this point; I had to ask Warren’s permission to use the images in this paper, not the authors of the postcards themselves.

³⁰ Derek Sayer, ‘Incognito Ergo Sum’, *Theory Culture Society*, 21:6 (2004), (67-89), p. 67.

³¹ Turkle, *Alone Together*, p. 230.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 299. The website directs the viewer’s gaze onto others and estranges their own need for self-reflection.

³³ MacAulay et al., ‘From Souvenir to Social Movement’, p. 92.

whose aim is to impress its readers.³⁴ But if no-one is there to see the viewer's reaction it is debatable whether the card actually holds any significance. Empathy becomes merged and indistinguishable; soon viewers find themselves disengaged and numb as they take on the weight of confessions. This generality demonstrates that there is no universal experience of suffering.³⁵ 'Persons A and B may have nothing in common except for the fact, that both send in postcard narratives describing abuse, for instance.'³⁶ MacAulay indicated that the postcards are grouped thematically and lose their sense of individuality as a result. Yet each postcard represents a fragment of an individual. If we continue to externalise our experiences and emotions what will be left of us? With each postcard we transform ourselves into self-confessing kindling.



Figure 1: 'I take comfort in the fact that we're all alone together.' Courtesy of Frank Warren.

Reliance on confessional sites could all go up in smoke as they 'keep us busy with ways to externalize our problems instead of looking at them.'³⁷ Reclining and reading by the oven light, the

³⁴ Kennedy, "Just Perfect!", p. 233.

³⁵ MacAulay et al., 'From Souvenir to Social Movement', p. 95.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³⁷ Turkle, *Alone Together*, p. 240.

subject in Figure 1 appears at ease. The viewer's attention is drawn to the computer screen nestled amongst the unwashed dishes. The computer highlights the subject's isolation as the necessity to log on prevails even whilst doing other activities like reading. The caption states: 'I take comfort in the fact that we are all alone together.' One cannot help but wonder whether the subject of the photograph has encountered or is in fact reading Turkle's *Alone Together*, in which she argues that the rise of technology has distanced us as opposed to uniting us, sat behind the computer screen we have never felt so alone. The fact that the card's creator is reassured by this, however, skews the interpretation of the image. She is happy in her isolation and feels equal to those who are not around her. Seclusion assumes its own online niche and projects it into reality, into the home.

Here isolation manifests as all other priorities are put on hold; the subject's attention may be diverted by her reading yet she is still positioned within easy reach of the screen. Turkle believes more and more of us 'fall in love with twenty-first-century pen pals. Often their appeal is that we don't know who they "really" are. So they might be perfect.'³⁸ The search for a non-existent perfection may be the reason why the subject is logged on. This is presuming the subject of the card is also its creator; she may be the physical embodiment of the isolated individual upon whom the photographer is fixated. It gives 'the comfort of strangers' an entirely new meaning.

So the photographer and the subject may be the same person, nevertheless their identities are still unknown. Burgess believes PostSecret offers everyone the chance to be an artist so 'ordinary people [get] opportunities to see themselves and, importantly, *each other* as creative *authors* with a legitimate claim to a space in the cultural public sphere.'³⁹ But by becoming authors of our own stories we risk turning our lives into fabrications; losing touch with whom we are connected and becoming mere products of creativity. This reduces the distance between cultural production and the everyday,⁴⁰ allowing Breton's desire for the beautiful banal to come into being.⁴¹

³⁸ Turkle, *Alone Together*, p. 230.

³⁹ Burgess, 'Re-mediating Vernacular Creativity', pp. 1-4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴¹ André Breton was the founder of the Parisian Surrealist movement in 1924. He sought to unite the unconscious with reality in order to unleash man's creativity and provide a new 'complete' perspective on life. Breton would often collect the everyday objects he encountered in Parisian flea markets and antique

Yet at the same time our art products become standardized. Contrary to Milne's belief, that the postcard appears to be more immediate and spontaneous⁴² than its predecessor the letter, PostSecret lacks impulsiveness. Creators deliberate and relive past events which are restricted to the postcard's boundaries. The only way the product can become autonomous is by transcending the edges of the card or by discovering the real secret the cards conceal: the creators' identity.⁴³

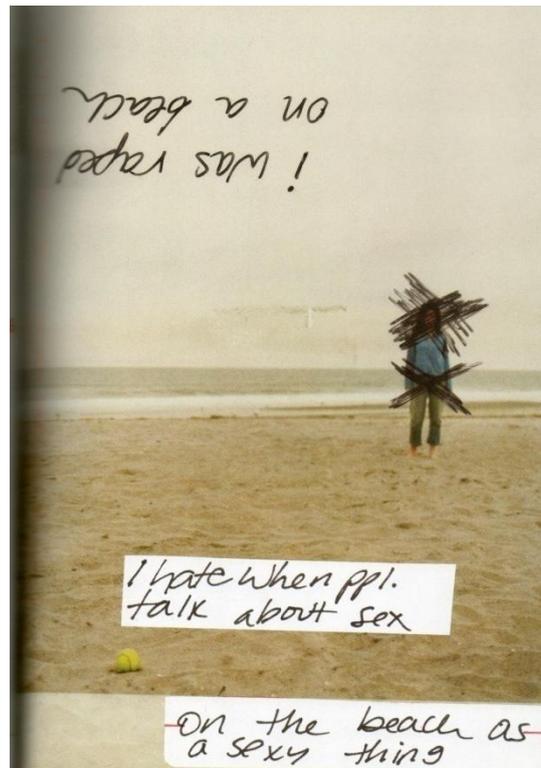


Figure 2: Girl on Beach. Courtesy of Frank Warren, *My Secret*, (London, 2009).

In the words of Cicero: if their name is unobtainable then let us see their face, 'the countenance is the image of the mind, and the eyes are its interpreters.'⁴⁴ Like the latter postcard, the subject's distant presence in Figure 2 and lack of interaction emphasises her isolation.

shops. He assigned them new meanings and used his 'found objects' as sources of inspiration.

⁴² Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Emails: Technologies of Presence*, (London, 2010), p. 110.

⁴³ MacAulay, et al., 'From Souvenir to Social Movement', p. 96.

⁴⁴ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Oratory and Orators*, ed., trans., J. S. Watson, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), p. 258.

She is distanced physically in her remote environment and metaphorically, keeping her secret to herself. Black ink ties the double confession to the subject while defilement of her image makes the secret an actuality. The inverted confession implies that the event turned the subject's world upside-down and simultaneously brands her, the victim. The mute tones of the image reflect the pathetic fallacy of the secret while intentional destruction of *her* image indicates a loss of identity and innocence. The creator no longer feels like the girl in the image, instead she becomes the product of rape.

While the audience may assume the subject is vulnerable, her admission suggests otherwise. Perhaps the image is being read incorrectly. Scratching at the surface, the subject may have returned to the scene to face her demons while staging the photograph. This would explain her open stance, looking straight at the camera from behind the pen. She defiantly breaks the social convention to smile. Though the pen crosses suggests negativity they could also stand for protest, the girl on the beach no longer lets the past or her secret define her. The slight glimpse of her face suggests a hope that she will not always suffer.

Benjamin would argue that the original aura of the secret is destroyed.⁴⁵ The subject has returned to the scene and reproduced her experience in an artistic expression. The postcard has since been duplicated on the internet and within Post Secret books, thus successfully acting as a vehicle that transcends language barriers, distance and time. A prime example where past and present converge in one image is in Figure 3. Like a pane of glass between two worlds the transition is within sight but just out of reach. The montage depicts the passing of time in the palm of the subject's hands; this is verified further by the black and white photograph's deterioration. Her physical aging in addition to the wheelchair also plays a supportive role.

We assume the aged subject is the same person in the photograph as the caption: 'It all passed so quickly' suggests (Figure 3). We may question what was so important about this image from her

⁴⁵ Through mechanical reproduction the image loses its uniqueness due to its duplication and increased accessibility. See Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', in *Selected Writings Volume 4. 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others, (London, 2003), p. 253.

past? She may have been outside her home or on a holiday. Perhaps her mother took the photograph to display it on the mantelpiece or preserve in the family album. Now faded and unkempt, one can assume the image has gathered dust. Somewhere along the line, both the photograph and the past have been neglected. But her face from the past is still intact. Her verve remains inside the confines of the frame and may be the reason why we do not see her current image. Her secret may not be that time passes too quickly, but that she regrets missed chances and even wishes to deny aging altogether.



Figure 3: 'It all passed so quickly.' Courtesy of Frank Warren, *A Lifetime of Secrets*, (New York, 2007).

By tearing up the past from the present she also separates herself.⁴⁶ The photograph is the metaphorical mirror where the subject locates the self in relation to the past.⁴⁷ In Oliver Wendell Holmes's

⁴⁶ In psychoanalytic theory the ego is the 'I' or self which is in contact with the external world through perception. Although the ego is capable of change throughout the subject's lifetime, splitting the ego entirely could result in a loss of behavioural continuity and control subsequently developing into an inferiority (or even a superiority) complex.

⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (5th edn., London, 2006), p. 2.

words the photograph is a “mirror with a memory.”⁴⁸ The subject’s hands are like a timeline which trace her life, the photograph she holds is just one of many moments and by piecing these together she can construct a detailed self-image.⁴⁹ These fragments may not be in the correct order so in a Deleuzian sense her history can be traced from the centre.⁵⁰ The past can be mentally modified and new memories can be created. History is not always recounted and communicated chronologically as it flits across social, cultural and national boundaries. For this reason, History is a truly postmodern concept. By altering the order of her photographs the subject can change the sequence of events and in turn alter her past. Truth is no longer a necessity.

The Comfort of Found Objects

The dismissal of historical truth is an intimidating and overwhelming notion despite the interpretative freedom it provides. Thus stability is sought in material belongings and the stories that we attach to them. Post Secret is a prime example: strangers from past and present are brought together through shared sentiment, an element which intensifies in the face of collective tragedies. As the subjunctive sweeps over history a sea of change literally devastated the lives in Northern Honshu, Japan. On March 11, 2011, a tsunami was triggered by a magnitude 9 earthquake that struck 130 km off the coast of Northern Japan, destroying all in its path.⁵¹ The National Police Agency confirmed 15,854 deaths, 26,992 injured, and 3,155 people missing.⁵² Like the unpredicted popularity of the Post Secret project,

⁴⁸ Oliver Wendell Holmes, ‘The Steroscope and the Sterograph’, *The Atlantic*, (June 1859), <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1859/06/the-steroscope-and-the-sterograph/303361/>> [accessed: 22/03/2014]

⁴⁹ It could be argued that the lines on the subject’s hands resemble routes on a map which can be retraced. The timeline, like the subject can only go in one direction. But the mind can wander through the map’s interconnected passages.

⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze; Félix Guattari, *A Thousand plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (London; New York, 2003), pp. 3-25.

⁵¹ Foreign Policy, ‘Sea Change: Haunting family photos pulled from the wreckage of Japan’s tsunami’ <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/27/Sea_Change> [accessed 11 April 2012]

⁵² National Police Agency of Japan, ‘Damage Situation and Police Countermeasures associated with 2011 Tohoku district - off the Pacific Ocean Earthquake’, April 18 2012, <http://www.npa.go.jp/archive/keibi/biki/higaijokyo_e.pdf> [accessed 11 April 2012]

no one expected the tide to deliver thousands of family photographs to the shores a year later.

At first glance one could mistake the photographs as the production of the Pop Art movement. These photographs are distorted and their colours are unnatural and psychedelic; out of context, they could give the photographs an entirely different meaning. The families in the photographs have not only lost their cherished memories but have presumably lost one another as well. This creates a darker undertone which disturbs viewer. The children staring out from behind the decaying paper are trapped in their childlike state whilst disappearing into antiquity. The images become an informal collection for the viewer as opposed to their original owners. These, once highly, personalised images become estranged yet they retain a sense of innocence. These images have not been touched and destroyed by man but by the forces of nature. The elements serve to remind the audience of life's fragility which turns the photograph's inhabitants into phantasmagorical enchantments.⁵³

All photographs are shadows of past times but these images are literally phantoms and illusory appearances⁵⁴ due to the subject's physical absence. One may rewrite history and imagine what the family would be doing if the tsunami had not occurred. Ouellette believes fantasy is necessary to man, that it is as old as history but it will never die.⁵⁵ Fantasy is used as a coping mechanism just like Post Secret, but the viewer will constantly wonder what the next photograph *might have been*. But is fantasy enough to replace reality, or is it everything and more than we could imagine. 'We can never get close enough [to the past] to breathe its air or touch its life ... Our interpretation of past reality, coloured by imagination, becomes a creative act.'⁵⁶ Ouellette is correct; depicting that the past is a creative re-enactment. Yet he dismisses the notion that postcards are objects of

⁵³ 'Phantasmagoric' refers to the haunting of images. Benjamin applied the Phantasmagoric to the Parisian arcades, linking it to Marx's notion of commodification. Benjamin saw Paris as being a Second Empire, a "modern" space with an amalgamation of façades and an excess of meaning and interpretation. See Walter Benjamin 1892-1940, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge; Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999)

⁵⁴ William Ouellette, *Fantasy Postcards*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Ouellette, *Fantasy Postcards*, p. 13.

history which reflect the time in which they were created. The photograph may provide escapism but distraction is only brief, especially in the Post Secret world where admission is essential. To unlock our true secrets imagination must cease. This is not an easy task, especially for the next confessor.



Figure 4: 'I buy antique pictures because it makes me feel like I have family.'
 Courtesy of Frank Warren, *A Lifetime of Secrets*, (New York, 2007).

'I buy antique pictures because it makes me feel like I have family' (Figure 4). The statement wrenches the heartstrings and is intensified by the portrait's doe-eyed expression. Milne asks, 'To what degree does the card stand for the physical presence of the [person]?'⁵⁷ It appears it can replace her even if she never existed. The mute tones of the antique photograph reflect a tainted nostalgia. Purchase of such

⁵⁷ Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Emails*, p. 97.

photographs may bring comfort to the creator but it also highlights their loneliness.

Is it the aesthetics of the photograph or the familial connections and significance which constitutes a ‘good’ family photograph? The sitter is not a product of the imagination as she once existed; however the portrait has less to do with the past as opposed to the sender’s present.⁵⁸ These family mementos would not be kept in an album for that would be too conventional. ‘*Cartes* of friends and famous visitors could be preserved and displayed later ... as evidence of the family’s prestige and connections;’⁵⁹ yet these are not photos you share with others. The thought of being discovered is too high a risk. Maybe they are stored in a shoebox out of sight but within easy reach, or placed under a bed, nestled in a bottom draw. By assigning familial connotations to the young woman in the portrait she assumes a new identity, function and lease of life. Hers is the one photograph which is not defaced. Instead she is preserved and restored; as a result she is free to assume further significance in the future. She is more than modern, “To be modern means to follow the thread of time, to go straight. To be absolutely present.”⁶⁰ Paradoxically she is not present, yet she *continually exists* through the photograph with the aid of imagination. The past image surpasses the moment into the postmodern.

Nevertheless the viewer still wonders as to whom the photograph originally belonged. Perhaps the portrait was given to the sitter’s mother, or to a husband or lover. Maybe both. She could merely be the model on the front of a calling card but for the sender of the secret she is so much more. Like the online Post Secret community, the sender can imagine the antique photographs are the remnants of a perfect family. It allows the sender to choose their own relatives. So why choose to give up this photograph if it held such significance – imagined or otherwise. Does her confession mean she will no longer collect family members? Perhaps Frank Warren should no longer collect secrets and all can face the brave new world feeling alleviated.

⁵⁸ Ouellette, *Fantasy Postcards*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Emails*, p. 101.

⁶⁰ René Denizot quoted in Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Emails*, p. 110.

The flexibility of the latter image challenges Milne's belief that the photographic postcard 'shrinks reality to the moment.'⁶¹ Everyone is free to go beyond the text and interpret the image differently.⁶² While the postcard has once more become a popular part of consumer culture the card itself assumes multiple meanings. Susan Sontag stated that a photograph will 'fiddle with the scale of the world.'⁶³ This is true on both a literal and a metaphorical level, the images we see are rescaled and edited and subsequently makes us view our surroundings differently. We no longer need the postcard to tell us what we are viewing as geography does not define the image's sole significance.

Rescaling the image is particularly interesting as it requires the photographer to be selective when taking the shot. But what is more striking is when the possessor of the photograph resizes the image for their own use. In an interview Warren said: "After several weeks I stopped passing out postcards but secrets kept coming. Homemade postcards made from cardboard, old photographs, wedding invitations, and *other personal items artfully decorated arrived from all over the world.*"⁶⁴ The customisation of photographs and belongings turns the secret into a special memento which reflects the individuality of the creator. The secret becomes a souvenir like the holiday postcard. Warren maintains, "Like fingerprints, no two secrets are identical, but every secret has a story behind it."⁶⁵ The edges of the photograph and the postcard are worth noting, both are restrictive yet senders of the postcard are more aware of this limitation as it affects the content of their written message.⁶⁶ While this may not be the case for Post Secret, the sender's anonymity may reinforce suppression.⁶⁷ But for the holder of the photograph the edges merely frame the image, what exists beyond them is rarely considered.

⁶¹ Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Emails*, p. 111.

⁶² 'Beyond the text' is a reference to Barber and Peniston-Bird, *History Beyond the Text: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, (London, 2009), pp. 1-14.

⁶³ Sontag, *On Photography*, 3rd edn., (New York, 1977), 4.

⁶⁴ Warren, *PostSecret*, p. 1. [My own emphasis].

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁶⁶ Kennedy, "Just Perfect!", p. 226.

⁶⁷ MacAulay et al., 'From Souvenir to Social Movement', p. 97.

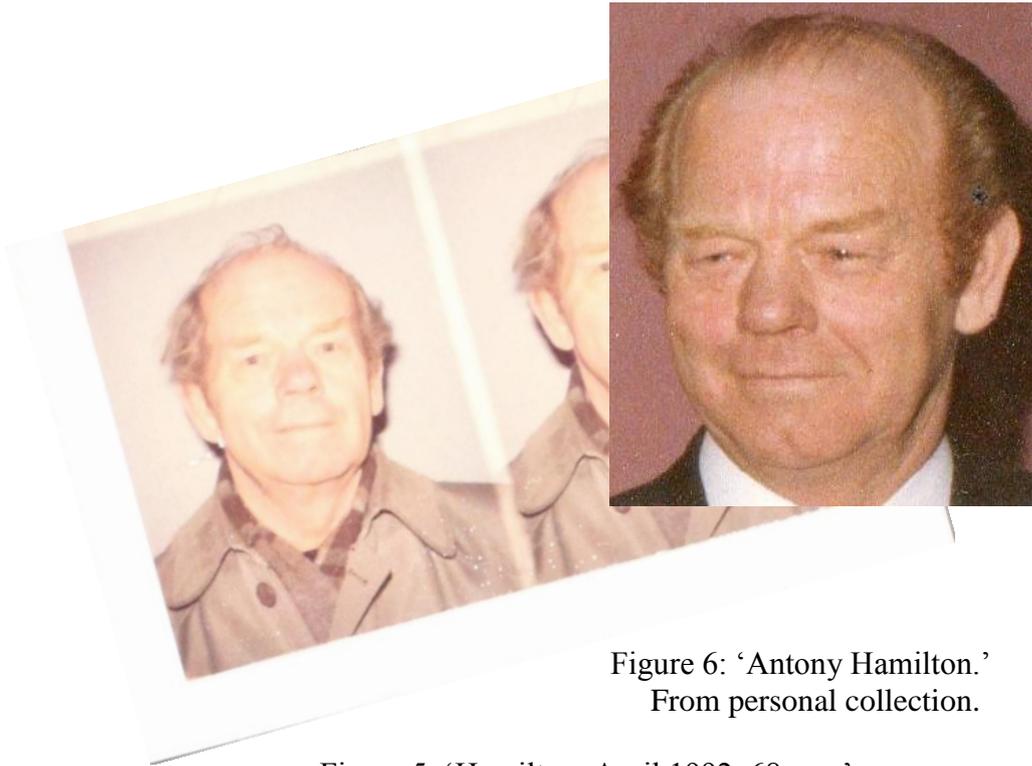


Figure 6: 'Antony Hamilton.'
From personal collection.

Figure 5: 'Hamilton, April 1992, 68 age.'
From personal collection.

Personal selection is seen in Figure 6, the back of the photograph states that the image was manufactured by Kodak. However, it is clear that the image was once larger. Although the image is of the size of a passport photograph, its uneven edges suggest it has been cut by hand. The proud and endearing figure resides in my mother's purse; it is an image of her father attending her first marriage. She informed me that she liked the photograph because he looked healthy, and unlike some others, it was small enough to carry on her person. The rest of the people in the photograph "were not worth keeping." It may be ironic that the camera did not capture the perfect Kodak moment; nevertheless the image has been put to a positive use. The people in the photograph may not last but the preservation of their image helps enforce their memory. In keeping his image close, the dualistic relationship between the protector and the protected transcends between father and daughter despite the distance in between.

The doubled driving license replicates Hamilton's identity in the latter years of his life (Figure 5). The viewer can see by his pale

complexion and fragility that he is unwell. It is understandable why his daughter would not want to remember him in this state. His prior self is a more positive projection yet it begs the question: why have the photographs been kept in the first place? One tends to only keep the ‘good’ photographs while the unflattering ones are immediately discarded. Perhaps the destruction of the photograph would eradicate a small piece of the past which had shaped that individual, a notion which gains value in the subject’s absence and intensifies over time. It could be argued that by destroying the image Hamilton’s illness is figuratively defeated. Yet this does not erase the actuality of events. As Barthes said, the photograph reminds the viewer of their eventual demise.⁶⁸ For this reason the preservation of the image is understandable. However its placement in the photo album is not, especially as it is slotted behind another photograph. Maybe the illness is being denied, though the image is kept out of sight and out of mind it still upholds the subject’s position as a family member through its preservation. All of the deceased feature in the album at some point.

Smoke and Mirrors – The Instability of Images



Figure 7: ‘Ghosts’, *Antimatter Series*. Courtesy of the Miaz Brothers

<http://miazbrothers.com> [accessed 13 April 2012]⁶⁹

Images of the dead also hang on the walls. Levitating above us, their presence decorates our homes and haunts from behind the glass.

⁶⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography*, (London, 1993), p. 79.

⁶⁹ There is no information as to when the photographs of the Miaz brothers’ images were actually taken. The lack of a date adds to the ambiguity of the image and serves to support the notion that reading images as historical sources is a deceptive and often misleading process.

While the self-portrait reflects the individual, images of the departed need to be frequently referred to. Without the photograph there is a risk that the deceased will be forgotten altogether. Their images retain an unspoken authority that force us to remember, thus the dictum ‘a picture speaks a thousand words’ is not far from the truth. Saying this, pictures of the dead tend to assume elements of fabrication. When recounting past events through images one cannot be certain whether the memory accompanies the photograph or whether the image dictates memory. Caution must be taken when reading images as they are inhabited by illusions. Photographs are smoke and mirrors.

The Miaz brothers’ ‘Ghosts’ exemplify the latter as it appears a veil of smoke restricts the viewer’s gaze (Figure 7). The subjects are difficult to make out; the collection of acrylics on canvas captures the essence of the individual like an out of focus camera lens. Roberto and Renato Miaz describe it as *Antimatter*,

Taking their cues from the ‘colour-dot’ technology employed by inkjet printers, they aim to produce paintings that ‘interact with viewers for an indefinite period of time’ while transforming with their surrounding light. As there are no lines whatsoever in their work, it is up to the viewer to perceive their subjects and make images out of them. Thus, with the use of three overlapping primary colours sprayed separately onto canvas, the Miaz brothers in their Antimatter series are able to effectively blur the lines between illusion and reality, and create beautiful, ‘boundless’ experiences.⁷⁰

It seems as though the subject’s souls have been captured in transition, they are neither in this world or the afterlife but somewhere in between. While the canvas projects indefinable persons in limbo the camera tries to establish stability. By photographing the paintings the absent subjects are replicated. It could be argued reproductions expose the complex layers of the individual. Yet the duplicates also fragment the subject further making it impossible to unite the pieces as a whole.

⁷⁰ The Miaz brothers, ‘Unfocussed Portraits’, April 11, 2012, <<http://gatheringmosswhilewandering.com/2012/04/11/unfocused-portraits/>> [accessed 13 April 2012] [Own emphasis].

However uniting the particles would create human limitations. The subjects are already bound within the frames yet the artists' technique creates a free space in which the viewer can read the image. How we perceive the collection is as unique as the images themselves. This creates a 'positive uncertainty' where the viewer can contemplate their own adaptability and on-going development. The Miaz brothers explain,

We have chosen painting as the medium to represent the transitory nature of everything. To represent the fact that we are composed of infinite particles in continuous evolution which interact and change in strong relation with the complex reality that surrounds us. Dematerializing the lines, we gained a substantial in determination of the picture that skips the immediate lecture and forces mnemonic associations ... we look to provide a visual experience that activates our awareness that compels the viewer to recognize, to re-establish the limits of his or her own perception, to regain control of the real. Inviting us to ... take considerable distance to see the whole picture.⁷¹

Distance from ghosts is not seen as a negative factor as the blurred boundaries of the subject enable the viewer to think beyond the frame. Like white noise the photographs are combinations of all that surrounds them, they reflect the complexities of mankind. They are depictions in constant transition of becoming. Their anonymity, like the Post Secret cards, are not hindrances as they support the notion of the intimate public. This is the notion that we are all equal and obscure tied by 'the common experiences [that] *pre-existed* the creation of the public.'⁷² In this sense neither society nor the project are complete, evolution is constant.⁷³

This notion of togetherness and intimacy is what Post Secret tries to enforce. The secrets are the many particles which construct the individual and allow the viewer to assemble a larger sense of society. Whether we should allow these private thoughts to define us is

⁷¹ The Miaz brothers, 'Antimatter series', <<http://miazbrothers.com>> [accessed 13 April 2012]

⁷² Poletti, 'Intimate Economies', p. 28. [Poletti's emphasis].

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

another matter. Foucault proposed that Western society is populated by confessing animals.⁷⁴ Although the ability to speak is known to be a freedom the recipient can choose not to listen. It seems that society diminishes its own privacy in order to come clean, an aspect which originates in man's own narcissism.

Self-absorption is a quality assumed by man alone. "Humans are the only animal that blushes, laughs, has religion, wages war and kisses with lips. So in a way, the more you kiss with lips, the more human you are ... And the more you wage war."⁷⁵ The capacity to love and hate are pasted on the postcard for all to see. MacAulay asserts these are the 'product[s] of the guilt imposed upon artists by social edicts that transform victims into sinners and promise redemption through disclosure.'⁷⁶ But whether self-expression arises purely from man's ability to feel is open to question. As Benjamin stated, "If the theory is correct that feeling is not located in the head, that we sentiently experience a window, a cloud, a tree not in our brains but, rather, in the place where we see it, then we are, in looking at our beloved, too, outside ourselves."⁷⁷ It is that man feels too much and the only way to control these fluctuating emotions is to confine them to cards. Send off your sentiment on the back of the postcard and become less human.

Projecting our emotions to other realms is similar to religious remembrance and worship. In some ways the distribution of Post Secrets resembles the paper offerings at the Qingming Festival in China. During Tomb Sweeping Day, family graves are cleaned and paper replicas of material goods are burnt to honour the dead, thus appeasing them in the afterlife. The notion that a piece of paper can measure individual respect and veneration is astonishing. Yet the Catholic Church sold indulgences as spiritual pardons and Capitalism's circulation of notes continues to retain high value in commodity culture. Post Secret is the reverse as the cards are physically given to Warren for absolution. The only price is the cost of postage and the sender's moral disposition. The sentiment attached

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Part 1*, (London, 1998), p. 60.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, (New York, 2006), p.99.

⁷⁶ MacAulay et al., 'From Souvenir to Social Movement', p. 98.

⁷⁷ Benjamin quoted in Michael Taussig, *Walter Benjamin's Grave*, (Chicago, 2006), p. 15.

to the image is largely self-inflicted through the use of language. Words are powerful tools and the photograph's caption often dictates the way it is interpreted. It would be of no surprise if inscription became the most important part of the photograph. In Benjamin's words, the "illiteracy of the future ... will be ignorance not of reading and writing, but of photography."⁷⁸

Sayer believes 'concreteness is established *by and within language alone*.'⁷⁹ By burning offerings the containment of language is destroyed and the living is brought in to contact with the deceased. Burning Post Secrets as a ritual may be most effective as it would purge the confessor's conscience and lay their secrets to rest. Like the paper offerings, the camera brings the insensible and the dead amongst the living. Reality is captured by the camera and is replaced with a false moment, all that contributed to it are converted into the uncanny.

While Post Secret relieves the creator of their innermost thoughts the project also feeds the morbid curiosity of the wider network who log on. The cards highlight society's vast abnormalities and demonstrate how alienated the public have become. A new hybrid communication has been created where facts, fiction, visuals, annotation and digitization all combine in the process of telling secrets and making history. Verbal communication has no say in the matter. The decline in the spoken confessional could be a result of waning religious adherence. Perhaps the internet's obscurity is more appealing as it blurs social constraints, distance, time and gender, making the subject unidentifiable and infinite.⁸⁰ The cards have the ability to cross gender boundaries not only because the Post Secret community is largely faceless, but that the sex of the card's creators are unknown.

⁷⁸ Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*, p. 527.

⁷⁹ Sayer, 'Incognito Ergo Sum', (2004), pp. 84-85. [Sayer's emphasis].

⁸⁰ Language and meaning are inherently unstable due to the constant alteration of language, linguistic meaning and context. Saussure sought to separate the sign from its corresponding reference, while Derrida further separated the signifier from the signified. He indicated that one word can encapsulate numerous meanings depending on their context. For instance, the word 'chair' may refer to an object on which to sit but it could also refer to an occupation or a position of power and supervision ('to hold a chair'). Simply, the *Signifier* + *Signified* = *the Sign*. The Signifier is the entity which gives the word or image meaning, the Signified is what is evoked when encountering the Signifier. When both are combined they create the Sign, the representation of an object which conveys meaning.

See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford, 2008), pp. 79-109.

Since language and its assigned meaning is in fluctuation then the significance allocated to gender is void. Thus one can become anything through the production of Post Secrets, while online anonymity means consequence and reprimands are unable to be enforced.

Like the computer screen and the faceless Post Secret community, the photograph also distances the viewer. A captured instance transcends time; it can be read in numerous ways and continues to develop as it changes hands. Despite its static status, the combination of photograph and postcard means the image is free to transcend geographical boundaries. The card's destination is the one constant factor senders can depend on. Redemption from their secrets, however, is not. All images share the ability to surpass time making them intrinsically postmodern as the subject is simultaneously present and absent. One cannot know for sure whether the subject still exists.⁸¹ Yet this fragility is perhaps a comforting notion as uncertainty need not be pessimistic. Like the hazy boundaries of the Miaz bothers' portraits, the imagination is limitless and enables us to see the bigger picture.

⁸¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 96.

Kings, Peasants, and the Restless Dead: Decapitation in Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives

Gerald Dyson*

In the *Vita sancte Moduenna uirginis*, a saint's life written in the early twelfth century, a remarkable story can be found.¹ Two peasants from the village of Stapenhill, which was under the authority of the abbot of Burton, desert their apparent duties to the monastery and bring false accusations against the abbot to a local lord. The lord responds by sending knights to plunder and destroy the monastery's crops. The next morning, the two unscrupulous peasants drop dead simultaneously and are buried the following day. Only hours after their burial, the men rise from their graves, carrying their coffins on their shoulders. Taking the form of bears, dogs, and other animals, the men bang on the walls of houses, and call to the townspeople of the neighboring village to 'Move!' and 'Come!' After continuing to terrorize the populace 'every night and every evening for some time', a plague befalls the village, which only ceases after the two peasants are exhumed, decapitated, and have their hearts removed. The peasants are then reburied in the churchyard at Stapenhill, while their hearts are taken to the local diocesan boundary and burned, at which time a raven flies from the fire.² Fittingly, a decapitated corpse was found in the excavations at

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¹ Geoffrey of Burton, *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, ed. and trans. by Robert Bartlett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 193-99.

² The significance and juxtaposition of ravens and doves has been discussed in great detail with reference to Anglo-Saxon literature, the Bible, and classical literature in a PhD thesis by Janina Ramirez. Although the biblical view of ravens in particular is somewhat mixed, the Anglo-Saxons seemed to have a symbolically negative perception of ravens, as does Bede, and in battle poetry particularly they are viewed as a sign of death or impending doom. Conversely, doves, which appear in the *Life and Miracles of St Kenelm*, discussed below, symbolize a wide variety of things, including, but not limited to, the Roman Church, baptism, and the Holy Spirit. See Genesis 8, 1 Kings 17, Matthew 3,

Stapenhill.³ This and other bizarre stories of decapitation from Anglo-Saxon saints' lives often seem to bear more resemblance to a horror film than hagiography. However, these stories can be illuminated and placed in their cultural context through examining their place in text, image, and archaeology.

Decapitation in Anglo-Saxon Hagiography

Decapitation is not a particularly common event, however notable, in the records of Anglo-Saxon history. Edwin and Oswald, both seventh-century monarchs of northern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, were decapitated after military defeats, in a somewhat similar fashion to the way in which Edmund, the mid-ninth century king of East Anglia, was later killed by Scandinavian invaders.⁴ The cult of Oswald began not long after his death, and soon encompassed both sacred and secular sites in Britain and the Continent.⁵ In addition to the above story from the *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, a number of other grim hagiographical stories can be found. An early example occurs in the *Life of St Ecgbwine*, an eleventh-century writing of the life of an eighth-century bishop of Worcester.⁶ In this account, a peasant accidentally cuts off his own head with a scythe immediately after attempting to defraud a monastery of its land. The peasant in question had deceptively claimed that he owned the ground upon which he stood after filling his

and Luke 12:24 for biblical examples; see Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Calvin Kendall (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 193-196; Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels Book One: Advent to Lent*, trans. by Lawrence Martin and David Hurst (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 1991), pp. 122-123.

³ Geoffrey of Burton, *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, pp. xxx.

⁴ Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Judith McClure and Roger Collins, trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 105, 131. Anthony Bale, 'St Edmund's Medieval Lives', in *St Edmund, King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint*, ed. by Anthony Bale (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 1-26 (p. 3).

⁵ Alan Thacker, 'Membra Disjecta: the Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. by Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp. 97-127 (p. 102-03). Annemiek Jansen, 'The Development of the St Oswald Legends', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. by Stancliffe and Cambridge, pp. 230-40 (p. 130).

⁶ Byrhtferth of Ramsey, *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine*, ed. and trans. by Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 297.

shoes with dirt from his own property.⁷ A further, and increasingly strange, account comes from the *Life and Miracles of St Kenelm*.⁸ Kenelm, a ninth-century atheling, is murdered in a plot conceived by his sister. As a young boy, he is led into the forest ostensibly to go hunting, and his companion, at the behest of his sister, cuts off Kenelm's head underneath a thorn tree, after which Kenelm catches his own head as it falls and a white dove flies away from the body.⁹ The dove carries a letter which reveals the whereabouts of Kenelm's hidden body and the bird soon reaches the pope in Rome. Once the news is relayed back to England, the body is recovered and brought back from the forest in procession, during which Kenelm's sister attempts to stop the procession by means of witchcraft, and this results in her eyes falling from their sockets.

The cultural and thematic origins of these unusual hagiographical tales are not immediately apparent. A small number of biblical and early Christian precedents are somewhat similar to the events described above, but most of them differ significantly from these hagiographical accounts in terms of content and context. Of the *vitae* considered here, the *Life of St Kenelm* draws most strongly on biblical precedent. Kenelm is Joseph, his evil sister represents either Jezebel or Herodias, and Kenelm's murderer is Judas Iscariot.¹⁰ In terms of biblical examples, the most well-known decapitation is that of John the Baptist, who was beheaded in prison by Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great.¹¹ Additionally, Ishbosheth, one of King Saul's sons, was killed by decapitation in his bed in II Samuel 4. The early Church also experienced several notable incidents of martyrdom by means of beheading. Tradition holds that Matthias, Paul, and Justin Martyr were

⁷ A very similar miracle story can be found relating to St Mildrith's help in upholding a land claim in favor of St Augustine's Abbey. See David Rollason, 'Goscelin of Canterbury's Account of the Translation and Miracles of St Mildrith (BHL 5961/4): an edition with notes', *Mediaeval Studies*, 48 (1986), 139-210 (pp. 201-02).

⁸ *Three Eleventh Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, ed. and trans. by Rosalind Love (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 61-73.

⁹ Though the *Vita Et Miracula Sancti Kenelmi* portrays Kenelm as quite young, it seems from charter attestations that he lived at least into his twenties. See Catherine Cubitt, 'Folklore and Historiography: Oral stories and the writing of Anglo-Saxon history' in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Elizabeth Tyler and Ross Balzaretta (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 189-223 (p. 191).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹¹ Matthew 14.9-12.

all executed in this fashion.¹² In relation to the history of the British Isles, St Alban, a Romano-British Christian, was beheaded in the third or fourth century both for his faith and for hiding a Christian priest, the story of which was recorded by Bede and other writers. The eyes of the executioner also fell from their sockets after St Alban was executed, similarly to the story of Kenelm's sister, and the writers of Kenelm's *vita* were certainly aware of Bede's account of Alban.¹³ As can be seen from this short list of examples, there are generally few similarities between the biblical and Anglo-Saxon contexts of decapitation. Most of the biblical and early Christian examples are political, quasi-political, or martyrial in nature. In Anglo-Saxon saints' lives, it is more often the antagonist than the protagonist who is beheaded, and the rate of thematic correspondence is generally low. Though cultural surroundings of the decapitation events in these *vitae* differ from those in the Bible, there are similarities in terms of imagery. The zoomorphism of the two peasants of Stapenhill corresponds to some passages in the Psalms and with some aspects of Near Eastern culture. In the ancient Near East, demons were often portrayed as animals, particularly lions, bulls, serpents, and dogs.¹⁴ The equation of evil men with animals underscore that these men do not seek the possessions one has, but the life of an individual—perhaps embodying a more profound type of evil than a thief or brigand.¹⁵

It is important here to take note of some significant distinctions between royal saints associated with decapitation and the other saints dealt with herein. In *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors*, John Damon makes a compelling argument for the method of creation of royal warrior-saints. He argues that the sanctity of the kings in question was not something that they achieved by their conduct in life, but more by the way in which they died, typically at the hand of pagan kings, such as in the cases of Oswald, Edwin, and Edmund.¹⁶ The Christian king was rewarded in life for his personal holiness and righteous deeds, but

¹² Miles Stanford, *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, ed. by William Forbush (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 3-4, 10.

¹³ Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 16-19. See also Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, Book X-XI.

¹⁴ Psalm 22.16, 59.5-6.

¹⁵ Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: ancient Near Eastern iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 85-88.

¹⁶ John Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 28-32.

he could not achieve sainthood without a martyr's death. Furthermore, accounts of post-mortem mutilation could act to further the royal martyr's saintly veneration, or as Alan Thacker has asserted in the case of Oswald, 'The process of sanctification was assisted by the treatment of the remains.'¹⁷ It should also be noted that the hagiographical (and in some cases historical) accounts of the death of these kings are likely not wholly accurate. Certainly these kings did die in battle against pagans, but it would seem that the circumstances surrounding their deaths were often generously embellished. In the case of Edmund, sources universally agree that he died in battle against the Danes, but Anthony Bale notes that both the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Asser's *Life of Alfred* record nothing of his martyrdom, though they both record his death.¹⁸ The gruesome tale of his demise only emerges more than a century after his death, recorded in the *Life of St Edmund* by Abbo of Fleury.¹⁹ On the other hand, most non-royal saints, even if they died a martyr's death, were venerated for their holiness in life. The way in which they died could serve to enhance perceptions of their sanctity, but it did not guarantee cultic veneration in the vein of martyred Anglo-Saxon kings. Texts concerning royal and non-royal saints are both connected with decapitation, but the models of sanctity utilized in reference to these different groups by hagiographers and perpetuators of saints' cults do not necessarily correspond.

The Archaeology of Decapitation

Recent interpretations of both new and old archaeological findings have assisted scholars significantly in understanding what role decapitation played in early medieval England. In the first and second centuries, the most common funerary practice in Roman Britain was cremation, while inhumation gradually increased in popularity until it outstripped cremation, though neither mode of burial was ever used exclusively. Most Roman decapitation burials show little to no evidence of 'spatial segregation' and they typically 'followed the

¹⁷ Alan Thacker, 'Membra Disjecta', p. 97.

¹⁸ Anthony Bale, 'Medieval Lives', p. 2.

¹⁹ *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. by Michael Winterbottom (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972), pp. 4-6, 67-87. David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 155.

alignments of the cemeteries in which they were buried.’²⁰ The bulk of the Anglo-Saxon decapitation burials that have been found date from the sixth or seventh centuries, but they extend into and past the late Anglo-Saxon period as well.²¹ Decapitation burials from the early Anglo-Saxon period most typically occur in community cemeteries, where the only segregated inhumations were those of high-status individuals, not unlike late Roman decapitation burials. In fact, more often than not, early Anglo-Saxon community cemeteries contain at least a few deviant burials.²² This trend seems to have continued until the eighth century, at which point a gradual shift may be noted. Burials dating from after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, excluding deviant burials, can be found in close proximity to ecclesiastical centers. Decapitation and other deviant burials then moved from community cemeteries to what are known as execution cemeteries, in which nearly every burial is nonstandard in terms of the cause of death, orientation, treatment of the remains, or a combination thereof. About twenty of these cemeteries are known, and there are certainly many others which lack identification or excavation.²³ Additionally, burial with grave goods essentially ceased by 730, seemingly indicating the general adoption of Christian burial practices.²⁴ Deviant burials, which are thought to be those of criminals, though not exclusively so, are often found with limbs askew, meaning that these

²⁰ Belinda Crerar, ‘Contextualising Deviancy: a Regional Approach to Decapitated Inhumation in Late Roman Britain’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2014), p. 31. M. Harman, T. Molleson, and J. Price, ‘Burials, bodies and beheadings in Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries’, *Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History)*, 35 (1981), 145-188, (pp. 162-64). I greatly appreciate Ms. Crerar’s willingness to provide me with early access to the relevant sections of her thesis.

²¹ M. Pitts and others, ‘An Anglo-Saxon Decapitation and Burial at Stonehenge’, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 95 (2002), pp. 131-45 (p. 140).

²² Andrew Reynolds, ‘Burials, Boundaries and Charters in Anglo-Saxon England: A Reassessment’, in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (London: The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), pp. 171-194 (p. 186-87).

²³ Sarah Semple, ‘Illustrations of Damnation in late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), pp. 231-45 (p. 238). Andrew Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: life and landscape* (Stroud: Tempus, 1999), p. 105.

²⁴ John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 238. Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 36-37. As Blair has pointed out, in the generations following the conversion of the seventh century, most of the English laity were probably still buried in field cemeteries without a church.

bodies were placed in their graves with little care, if they were not thrown in. There is no standard orientation in which these bodies lay, indicating that they were not laid in their graves in a typical Christian east-west orientation.²⁵ Thus the late Anglo-Saxon cultural understanding of decapitation was defined by its role as a method of execution and a way of putting both physical and spiritual space between the deceased and the communities with which they were formerly associated. An examination of the characteristics of execution cemeteries will serve to clarify these assertions.

Execution cemeteries were usually located near hundred boundaries and away from settlements, as was the case with a decapitation burial at Stonehenge, as well as up to eleven burials at Walkington Wold.²⁶ This seems to correspond to some degree with the story from the *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, in which the two dishonest peasants who were plaguing the town had their hearts removed and taken to the boundary of the diocese to be burned.²⁷ This practice created physical space between settlements and socially unacceptable individuals and it is probable that these cemeteries were spaces allotted by local communities for the burial of criminals. Social exclusion by burial rights can be further seen in Anglo-Saxon law: the royal law code I Edmund, dating from the 940s, admonishes the clergy to celibacy and threatens them with forfeiture of consecrated burial if they do not comply.²⁸ The significance of the hundred boundary points to a burial of the dead in what we might call a 'no man's land', a place that was neither here nor there. Thus the bodies of those buried in execution cemeteries were placed both at the furthest physical distance possible and at a location where neither hundred might claim the land in which they were buried. Charters record a number of execution cemeteries, almost all of which were

²⁵ Annia Cherryson, 'Normal, Deviant, and Atypical: Burial Variation in Late Saxon Wessex, c. 700-1100', in *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*, ed. by Eileen Murphy (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), pp. 115-30 (pp. 116-117, 122). M. Harman, T. Molleson, and J. Price, 'Burials, bodies and beheadings', p. 168.

²⁶ M. Pitts and others, 'An Anglo-Saxon Decapitation and Burial at Stonehenge', p. 142. Jo Buckberry, 'Off With Their Heads: The Anglo-Saxon Execution Cemetery at Walkington Wold, East Yorkshire', in *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*, ed. by Murphy, pp. 148-68 (pp. 149, 165).

²⁷ Geoffrey of Burton, *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, p. 197.

²⁸ *Councils and Synods with other Documents related to the English Church I, A.D. 871-1204*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 62.

located along hundred boundaries. The charters refer to them as *cwealmstowe* (killing places) and *heafod stocca* (head stakes), and roughly fifty separate instances in charters refer to places of *hæþenan byrigelsas*, or heathen burial.²⁹

The recognition of places of heathen burial by the Anglo-Saxons also led them to associate contemporary deviant burials with prehistoric pagan inhumations, often found in tumuli, more commonly known as barrows. Execution cemeteries have typically been found in close proximity to barrows, and some deviant burials even occur on these mounds. Anglo-Saxon decapitation burials at Walkington Wold, Rushton, Wor Barrow, Sutton Hoo, and Dunstable, among others, occur in barrows, most of which are Bronze Age.³⁰ Andrew Reynolds has postulated that prehistoric mounds were fearful places in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons, connected both with their unknown builders and the uncertainty of eternity.³¹ Sarah Semple has brought together archaeological evidence as well as late Anglo-Saxon manuscript evidence to suggest that these barrows were seen as the mouth of hell, consciously or subconsciously. Of the illustrations from BL Harley 603 (an Anglo-Saxon copy of the Utrecht Psalter), Semple writes that ‘hell is clearly shown as a space inside a hill or mound’, which is atypical when compared with continental depictions of hell. These illustrations actually show decapitated and dismembered figures in physical proximity to the mouth of hell, as well as showing other figures buried alive beneath the surface of a barrow.³² These conceptions of hell are certainly extra-biblical, as hell, often referred to as Sheol in the Old Testament, is typically

²⁹ Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, pp. 272-277.

³⁰ M. Harman, T. Molleson, and J. Price, ‘Burials, bodies and beheadings’, p. 164.

³¹ Andrew Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: life and landscape*, p. 33. Not all barrows in England were constructed before the settlement of the Anglo-Saxons in England. Though the majority of them are Bronze and Iron Age, a handful are from the Roman period, and some were constructed by pagan Anglo-Saxons themselves. For example, at Sutton Hoo, where we find burial mounds constructed by pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons and lavish burial for a pagan, we later find two groups of decapitated individuals at the site, one group on Mound 5 and the other on the eastern edge of the cemetery. Martin Carver, ‘Reflections on the Meanings of Monumental Barrows in Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Lucy and Reynolds, pp. 132-3.

³² Sarah Semple, ‘Illustrations of Damnation in late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts’, pp. 237, 240.

portrayed as a pit rather than an area of raised earth.³³ But in Anglo-Saxon culture, it seems that being interred in a barrow would be the practical equivalent of eternal condemnation. From all indications, the Anglo-Saxon idea of hell was significantly influenced by pre-Christian anxieties and superstitions that were incorporated into theological ideas of the nature of damnation. With this in mind, the stories from the non-royal saints' lives discussed above use decapitation to suggest the spiritual fate of those who were decapitated.

Finally, execution cemeteries consisted of the burials of individuals killed in a variety of ways. Hanging and decapitation seem to have been the principal methods of execution in the Anglo-Saxon period, but these punishments were sometimes combined with others. In addition to decapitation, burials associated with dismemberment have been found in some execution cemeteries, as well as bodies exhibiting evidence of post-mortem mutilation.³⁴ The practice may have been a continuation of the theme of disrespect for the bodies of these social outcasts, and it may have been connected with a desire to ensure that the unscrupulous and restless dead did not have the capacity to disturb the communities from which they were estranged in life, as in the case of the rebellious peasants of Stapenhill.³⁵ However, it is difficult to conclusively determine the rationale for post-mortem mutilation.

Punishments prescribing decapitation for offenses are not to be found before the time of King Edgar, but it is quite reasonable to assume that the practice of decapitation in the realm of the Anglo-Saxon judicial system long predated the codification of these laws, as even execution cemeteries significantly predate the reign of Edgar.³⁶ Archaeological evidence affirms that around the time of the Anglo-Saxon conversion, ideas about the sanctity and violability of burial space developed. As a result, burials began to diverge from all-inclusive field cemeteries to well-defined ecclesiastical cemeteries and

³³ Job 11.8, Psalm 86.13, Proverbs 1.12, Isaiah 14.15.

³⁴ Jo Buckberry, 'Off With Their Heads: The Anglo-Saxon Execution Cemetery at Walkington Wold, East Yorkshire', p. 149.

³⁵ John Blair, 'The dangerous dead in early medieval England', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. by Stephen Baxter and others (Ashgate: Farnham, 2009), pp. 539-559 (p. 542).

³⁶ M. Pitts and others, 'An Anglo-Saxon Decapitation and Burial at Stonehenge', p. 141.

execution cemeteries, the latter of which were well outside the boundaries of local communities. Additionally, the proximity of execution cemeteries and individual decapitation burials to both hundred boundaries and barrows, when considered in light of their psychological significance to the Anglo-Saxons, helps to set the tales which are so bizarre to the modern reader in their medieval context.

A number of conclusions are evident from the stories of the Anglo-Saxon *vitae* combined with archaeological and cultural evidence in regards to decapitation. Firstly, the archaeological evidence pertaining to burial distribution strongly correlates with the processes of conversion in the early Anglo-Saxon period. The scenario that seems most likely is that the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons generally buried their dead of relatively equal social status communally, regardless of crimes committed. When the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons took place throughout the seventh century, ideas about burial and the theological security of burying the righteous and the wicked together changed. In the eighth century, most people began to be buried near ecclesiastical centers, and the desire to exclude the socially unacceptable from community burial grounds became strong enough that cemeteries were founded at considerable distances from the communities themselves. These practices continued into and through the late Anglo-Saxon period, including some similar burials occurring in the twelfth century.³⁷

Furthermore, the stories of decapitation in the aforementioned saints' lives find much stronger identification with the themes and motifs of Anglo-Saxon culture and folklore than with biblical or continental hagiographical sources. While the Bible and hagiographical sources both record instances of decapitation, particularly of the early Christian martyrs, the themes and intent that lie behind the stories themselves attest to a very different understanding and rhetorical use of decapitation. The instances of birds flying at pivotal moments in these narratives speaks strongly of the cultural particularity of these stories, as do some of the stranger moments in the *vitae*, such as eyes falling from their sockets and zombie-like humans roaming after dark whilst taking human and animal form. The idea of the reanimation of the dead (in a non-resurrective sense) is certainly not a biblical one, though it appears in a few other

³⁷ Ibid., p. 140.

sources of Anglo-Saxon hagiography.³⁸ So when hagiographers included these grisly and atypical stories, one can see strong cultural reinforcement of the idea that the opponents of churches and monasteries are bound for damnation for their actions.³⁹ David Rollason has argued that hagiography in the tenth and eleventh centuries played an important role in monastic strategies of self-protection and land reclamation. A great deal of land had been alienated from monasteries through the upheaval brought on by the Vikings, and these religious houses were eager to claim what they saw as their historical right, even if their sometimes dubious claims had to be bolstered by saintly intervention, as in the cases of St Modwenna and St Ecgwine. Further Anglo-Saxon hagiographical examples of these strategies can be found in the *Liber Eliensis* and stories of St Mildrith from St Augustine's Abbey.⁴⁰ The portions of the texts that I have discussed particularly concern the saint in question acting as 'an undying defender of his or her community's lands and privileges', including cases in which that defence entailed taking the lives of those who would threaten their holdings.⁴¹

Finally, veneration of decapitated royal saints such as Oswald and Edmund reflects a hagiographical and political use of martyrdom by reversing a degrading method of death so as to reflect sanctity. Decapitation was certainly not seen as an honorable or socially acceptable way for anyone, particularly a king, to die. This was reinforced by the perception of victory as divine blessing and defeat as the judgment of God on the unjust. After the death of Oswald, taking into account his decapitation and the enemies against whom he fought, it was difficult to portray his death in a spiritually positive light. The only way that the king could be seen to have been adhering to the will of God is to have been a holy man who met an unjust end at the hands of

³⁸ Some may object to this assertion on the basis of Samuel's reappearance after his death in 1 Samuel 28. However, the passage makes it clear that Samuel appears in spirit form; he does not seem to be physically present and there is no indication that Endor is near the burial place of Samuel. John Blair, 'The dangerous dead in early medieval England', p. 540.

³⁹ Victoria Thompson, *Death and Dying in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), p. 171-72.

⁴⁰ *Liber Eliensis: a history of the Isle of Ely from the seventh century to the twelfth*, trans. by Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 133-4. David Rollason, 'Goscelin of Canterbury's Account of the Translation and Miracles of St Mildrith', pp. 201-02.

⁴¹ David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 196-97.

heathens and was therefore a martyr. This archetype was reused sometime later when Edmund met his fate in battle with the Danes. After his initial transformation into a saint, Oswald's cult grew significantly, even to the point of veneration in more than a few locations on the Continent and even Iceland in the High and Late Middle Ages. The success and efficacy of this specific political and religious use of decapitation resulted in its adoption within the cult of the saints as time went on.⁴² Every case of decapitation has not been analyzed and placed within its cultural context here; I have addressed only a fraction of the reports of decapitation from early medieval England, but the textual and archaeological evidence examined herein exhibits a clear pattern in the Anglo-Saxon uses of decapitation and their cultural significance.

⁴² Alan Thacker, 'Membra Disjecta', pp. 113-119. Marianne Kalinke, *St Oswald of Northumbria: Continental Metamorphoses* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 4-8.

Liberating the Slaves of the Needle: The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners 1843-1863

Jade Halbert*

Between 1843 and 1863 the welfare of the needlewomen of London became the focus of considerable philanthropic attention. The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners was the first charitable association founded in March 1843, followed by The Distressed Needlewomen's Society (1847), and The Milliners' and Dressmakers' Provident and Benevolent Institution (1849). Regional societies, including The Glasgow Milliners' and Dressmakers' Association (1861) were also established. This paper will focus exclusively on the activities of The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners. It will examine the factors surrounding its inception, and how it worked to combat the hardships faced by needlewomen in London, including long hours of work and inadequate living quarters. It will also examine how the Association was viewed by needlewomen and the public at large, and what successes it achieved within the period. Through close examination and analysis of contemporary literary sources including *The Times*, *The English Woman's Journal* and *All the Year Round*, this study will aim to find a fresh perspective on the lives of nineteenth century needlewomen and how the Association established to help them affected those lives.¹

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¹ *The Times* is the predominant contemporary source used throughout this study, and its digital archive is a rich source for the dress historian seeking

The rise of an urban society - galvanised by the massive social upheaval due to industrialization, and the expanding fortunes of the middle classes, meant that, in business competition was fierce, labour was cheap, and any caprice of fashion could be satisfied quickly and at the lowest price. '[There is] a huge and constantly increasing class who have wide wants and narrow means. Luxury has soaked downwards and raised a standard of living among people with small incomes [which] has created an enormous demand for cheap elegancies...cheap clothes and cheap furniture, produced as they must be by cheap methods.'² The consequences of 'cheap methods' saw many trades, but especially the needle trades, heavily oversubscribed. Needle workers, skilled or otherwise, suffered depreciation of rates, which collapsed under the weight of workers desperate enough to work for almost no remuneration. This problem was amplified in the dressmaking and millinery trades; since workers were almost always young women with little money or family support, there was often no alternative to the needle trades - and certainly very few respectable alternatives. This scarcity of respectable work left young needlewomen vulnerable to abuses from employers who exploited their positions of relative power over them.

Historian Christine Bayles Kortsch writes that the Victorian dressmaker 'must starve by inches, and die over the shirt she makes. We are all perfectly acquainted with this picture.'³ The Victorians in fact, were perfectly acquainted with this picture; if not before 1843, then certainly after December of that year when Thomas Hood anonymously published *The Song of the Shirt* in the Christmas edition of *Punch*.⁴ *The Song of the Shirt* was a response to various 'articles in newspapers and periodicals, encouraged by attention in parliamentary reports.'⁵ It became 'an anthem for reformers,'⁶ and 'an enduring

contemporary views on the problems faced by dressmakers. Although there is bias, in as much as the readership, and therefore those in correspondence with the Editors, generally belong to the middle or upper class, it offers the historian an interesting perspective on philanthropy and the welfare of needlewomen in the period.

² Lou Taylor and Elizabeth Wilson, *Through the Looking Glass* (London: BBC, 1989): 18

³ Christine Bayles Kortsch, *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles, and Activism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009): 105

⁴ *Punch* was a satirical periodical which ran from 1841-2002.

⁵ T.J Edelstein, "They Sang 'The Song of the Shirt': The Visual Iconology of the Seamstress," *Victorian Studies* vol.23 no.2 (1980): 184

symbol for the Victorian populace'.⁷ It is this 'enduring symbol' from which we, as modern scholars, derive our basic understanding of the lives of needlewomen in the mid-nineteenth century. They were physically weak from poverty and overwork, and there was moral concern about the 'vulnerability and powerlessness of dressmakers as women.'⁸ This understanding is reinforced by the cultural material surrounding the figure of the dressmaker. Historian Helen Rogers suggests in her excellent article, "The Good Are Not Always Powerful, nor the Powerful Always Good": The Politics of Women's Needlework in Mid-Victorian London, that 'the distressed needlewoman was a commonplace of early nineteenth century fiction and drama, for she embodied the anxieties that different social groups had concerning the position of single women, women's work, and sexuality.'⁹ Less than six months after Hood published his song, Richard Redgrave's *The Sempstress* was displayed at the annual summer exhibition of The Royal Academy. It was the pioneer of a new genre, one that depicted the 'profoundly unstable' icon of the seamstress.¹⁰ The image of the poor dressmaker was by then engraved on the collective consciousness of the Victorian populace, as confirmed by a review in *The Times* on 8 May 1844: 'The subject of this painting is one peculiarly of our time; viz, the miseries to which the metropolitan needlewomen are subjected, and the motto is taken from Hood's admirable "Song of the Shirt".'¹¹

In addition to the proliferation of visual material representing the dressmaker in the years between 1843 and 1863, there was a significant amount of literary commentary. From journalists, authors, and social campaigners came a new genre of writing focused on the problems faced by the needlewomen of the country. Henry Mayhew's revealing series of interviews for *The Morning Chronicle* were shocking to the Victorian populace; the fictional accounts, including Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's social reform novel, *The Wrongs of Women* (1843), and George W. M. Reynold's *The Seamstress, or The*

⁶ Helen Rogers, "The Good Are Not Always Powerful, nor the Powerful Always Good": The Politics of Women's Needlework in Mid-Victorian London," *Victorian Studies* vol.4 no.4 (1997): 598

⁷ Edlestein, 184

⁸ Rogers, 591

⁹ Rogers, 597

¹⁰ Rogers, 597

¹¹ Edlestein, 185

White Slave of England (1853), were equally outrageous but not so far removed from the truths of the lives of women working in the dressmaking trades. All contributed to the intense public debate surrounding the conditions faced by needlewomen and each new piece of writing or work of art aroused public support for the dressmakers.

This support was manifested early in the period with the founding of The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners (hereafter referred to as ‘the Association’), which hoped to ‘diminish the gulf which absolutely yawned between those who made dresses and those who wore them.’¹² Its president was the noted philanthropist, Lord Ashley (later the Earl of Shaftesbury), and among its patrons was Queen Victoria who donated fifty pounds to the funds of the Association in 1844.¹³ Such distinguished patronage was testament to the deep concern surrounding the plight of dressmakers and milliners at every level of society. The Association was set up in response to the findings of R.D. Grainger’s Children’s Employment Commission of 1842, which exposed the full extent of abuses in the needle trades.¹⁴ At its inception the aims of the Association were:

1. To induce the principals of dressmaking and millinery establishments to limit the hours of actual work to 12 per diem, and to abolish working on Sundays.
2. To promote improved ventilation.
3. To aid in obviating the evils connected with the present system, by inducing ladies to allow sufficient time for the execution of their orders.
4. To afford pecuniary assistance to deserving young persons in temporary distress.
5. To afford to such young persons as require it early and effective medical advice, change of air, and other assistance in sickness.¹⁵

¹² *The Times* (London, England), Monday, May 06, 1844, 8

¹³ *The Times* (London, England), Saturday, Jul 06, 1844, 5

¹⁴ Christina Walkley, “Charity and the Victorian Needlewoman,” *Costume* vol.14 no.1 (1980): 136

¹⁵ Henry Mayhew, *The Unknown Mayhew*. Edited by E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo. (Penguin Books: London, 1973): 526

These aims were ambitious; if each was to be realised it would have constituted a revolution in the structure of the dressmaking and millinery trades. It would be an unprecedented achievement which would have far-reaching implications for all levels of industry. As it was, the Association only had limited means of executing its doctrine. Since it had no legal standing to enforce reduced hours or better conditions it could only hope to influence public opinion. This limitation proved to be its greatest obstacle and the source of much frustration for its members and for those it purported to help.

A letter was published in *The Times* on 25 March 1853, a full decade after the inception of the Association, which exposed the extent of the pressures still placed on needlewomen in ‘first-class’ houses, especially in relation to the hours of work.¹⁶

I have been engaged in this business for 14 years at different “first class houses,” and as my health is now suffering from the “late hour system,” I have been prevailed upon by this medium to give that information which experience has taught me, in the hope that some enterprising and humane individuals will exert themselves to break the chains of that slavery under which so many thousands of their country women are bound.¹⁷

Signed ‘A First Hand’, the letter goes on to mention the Association directly, but expresses disappointment in their progress; ‘The “Association” [...] has done all it could to curtail the hours of labour, but even the houses which it recommends deem from 7am to 10pm “easy hours”.’ In the face of this criticism, Lord Shaftesbury, on behalf of the Association, published his own response to the First Hand’s letter and the surrounding furore:

¹⁶ A mention must be made here of The Early Closing Association, which tried to put pressure on various trades to adopt a less strenuous system of hours, and to abolish working on Sundays. An assessment of The Early Closing Society is beyond the scope of this study, however, please refer to Helen Rogers, “The Good Are Not Always Powerful, nor the Powerful Always Good”: The Politics of Women’s Needlework in Mid-Victorian London,” *Victorian Studies* vol.4 no.4 (1997): 589–623 for a thorough assessment of charities involved in the reduction of working hours in the nineteenth century.

¹⁷ *The Times* (London, England), Friday, March 25, 1853, 5

A great improvement has, by the influence of the society, been accomplished. [...] speaking generally, the hours of work have been considerably curtailed since the Parliamentary inquiry instituted by the Children's Employment Commission; that labour on the Lord's day has been in most, if not in all, instances, entirely abrogated; that the young persons are rarely kept up all night; and that, on the whole, their health has improved.¹⁸

This self-assessment is optimistic in contrast with a leading article published in the same edition offering a more balanced appraisal. 'We doubt not that, to a certain extent, good has been effected by their exertions, yet we cannot refrain from noticing the fact that here we are, just ten years after the association has been instituted, as clamorously assailed by the complaints and groans of the sufferers as though it had not existed at all.'¹⁹

The problems of what the First Hand calls 'the late hours system' were myriad, and the Association's principal aim to reduce the hours of work confirms that long hours were seen as one of the greatest abuses of the trade. The Association made special concession for this by placing importance on using day-workers to assist salaried workers in busy times, for example, during the season. It set out to become an approved agency, where freelance needlewomen of good character and skill would register as day-workers, and when in need, the dressmaking houses could pick their day-workers from the approved register. In October 1850 Mayhew writes that 'there are upwards of 7500 names entered on the books of that establishment.'²⁰ By 1858, 'the number of persons registered [...] is 17,455 - a fact that needs no other recommendation.'²¹ Although some dress and millinery houses did avail themselves of this service, many more resisted citing concern over day-workers' morals. It is more likely, as the First Hand notes, 'for the sordid love of gain,' that salaried workers were required to do the work of several hands, and therefore work more hours, in the busy times.

¹⁸ *The Times* (London, England), Monday, April 11, 1853, 4

¹⁹ *The Times* (London, England), Monday, April 11, 1853, 4

²⁰ Mayhew, 527

²¹ *The Times* (London, England), Saturday, June 05, 1858, 9

Another letter bemoans the lack of regulation and addresses the possible effects of legislative interference in the needle trades:

If the ten hour principle were applied - as it might be by the addition of a few words to an act of Parliament - in the case of millinery and dressmaking establishments, would the seamstresses, whose cause we all of us have at heart, be really benefited by the change? Would not the proprietors of such establishments contrive to evade the vigilance of inspectors, by causing a considerable portion of their work to be done away from home?²²

Two months later a letter signed J.R.F. also makes a point of challenging the Association's stance on the long hours system:

I wish [...] you would ask Lord Shaftesbury whether he considers it quite consistent of The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners, of which he is the president, to extend its countenance to this establishment - which it does - after telling you, as he did a few weeks ago, that to all establishments "which persist in exacting, as a rule, long hours of work, the registration book of the association is closed."²³

J.R.F.'s allegation that the Association 'extends its countenance' to houses enforcing long hours highlights again the boundaries of the Association's influence, and perhaps their naivety in understanding the mechanics of the dressmaking trades. In 1855, two years after these correspondences in *The Times*, Lord Shaftesbury spoke in the House of Lords in support of a bill for the Limitation of the Working Hours of Needlewomen, who were 'among the most helpless and oppressed of Her Majesty's subjects.'²⁴ The Earl of Malmesbury also spoke in support of the motion and 'considered, therefore, that Parliament ought to endeavour to devise some measures to protect the [dressmakers and milliners] from that system of overwork.'²⁵ Lord

²² *The Times* (London, England), Monday, April 11, 1853, 4

²³ *The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, May 18, 1853, 6

²⁴ *The Times* (London, England), Friday, June 15, 1855, 4

²⁵ *The Times* (London, England), Friday, June 15, 1855, 4

Campbell, however, questioned the means of enforcing such a bill and believed that ‘the House ought not to enact a law only to be broken.’²⁶ That the House of Lords recognised the difficulties in enforcing such a law is important, however, no law was passed, and at the 1858 annual meeting of the Association, Lord Shaftesbury expressed a renewed hope for legal interference. ‘The public mind shall be aroused [...] by the power of the public press [and] that power will be binding on the legislature to pass a law which shall strike at the very root of the evil.’²⁷

The abuses and lack of improvement in the dressmaking trades were exposed again ten years later in 1863, when Mary Anne Walkley, a young seamstress employed at the court dressmaker, Madame Elise, died in her sleep.²⁸ The death was revealed in a letter to *The Times*, signed ‘A Tired Dressmaker’:

Sir, - I am a dressmaker living in a large West-end house of business. I work in a crowded room with 28 others. This morning one of my companions was found dead in her bed, and we all of us think that the long hours and close confinement had had a great deal to do with her end.²⁹

The inquest into Mary Anne Walkley’s death on Saturday 20 June 1853 was considered a sham, and the resultant letters to *The Times* expressed dismay. ‘The language of the verdict is not strong enough,’ claimed one letter signed ‘M.D.’, ‘Can any sane man, with the depositions of the inquest before him, doubt the fact that this girl had been murdered?’³⁰ Another letter, published in the same edition, and signed ‘A’, goes further to assert that

The evidence and the verdict are mere tautology. The same horrible and disgraceful story has been repeated over and over again; and to save himself the trouble, the coroner would do well to stereotype the present proceedings, and

²⁶ *The Times* (London, England), Friday, June 15, 1855, 4

²⁷ *The Times* (London, England), Saturday, June 05, 1858, 9

²⁸ For an in-depth analysis of the Mary Anne Walkley case, the author recommends Christina Walkley’s *The Ghost in the Looking Glass: The Victorian Seamstress*. (London: Peter Owen, 1981.)

²⁹ *The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, June 17, 1863, 5

³⁰ *The Times* (London, England), Monday, June 22, 1863, 7

reserve the documents without further inquiry for a large proportion of the young persons engaged in these poisonous workrooms.³¹

Once again the Association made its own contribution to the debate on the letters page of *The Times*, in empathising with the fate of needlewomen and this time expressing sorrow for its own failures. The letter is signed Harriet Ellesmere, and she identifies herself as a member of the Association and a member of the original committee that devised its aims:

The association I refer to was formed, the main object of which was to induce the principals in the millinery and dressmaking businesses to diminish their hours of work, to ventilate their workrooms, to put an end to Sunday work, and to treat their young women well. [...] But, I repeat it, our great and main object was the diminution of the hours of work. I lament to say that our efforts met with little or no success. Difficulties and objections met us on all sides. [...] But let it not be said that the society has not tried its hand. It has tried, and failed.³²

The debate surrounding the stagnant conditions within the needle trades following the death of Mary Anne Walkley was not limited to the letters pages of *The Times*. The weekly periodical, *All the Year Round*, founded and edited by Charles Dickens, published its own anonymous comment on the appalling conditions endured by dressmakers and milliners. The writer of the article is brutal in his assessment of the progress made since 1843 and the formation of the Association, ‘while the talk [of Mary Anne Walkley’s death] lasted, we learnt that, with a few exceptions, all is as it used to be twenty years since, when the evidence taken led to the formation of an “Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners.”’³³ In interview with working dressmakers the article goes on to describe the familiar living conditions within houses, and the

³¹ *The Times* (London, England), Monday, June 22, 1863, 12

³² *The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, June 30, 1863, 14

³³ Anonymous, “The Point of the Needle,” *All the Year Round* September 5, 1863, 36

hours of work extracted by proprietors, including a particularly unsettling account from ‘one who made the plunge into it [dressmaking], and withdrew only half-killed, with a resolve to try no more.’³⁴

Friday, we commenced work, as usual, at eight o’clock, and went on till between four and five on the following morning [...] At midnight we had a cup of coffee brought to us. I am sure something improper was put in it to keep us awake, as when we went to bed none of us could sleep.³⁵

The implication that the West End houses would resort to drugging their workers is shocking, but perhaps unsurprising in light of the abuses documented in the press. The writer goes on to make some suggestions for how conditions could be improved, but these rest on an ideological dismantling of the fashion system, rather than on legislative or practical means:

Who is this tyrant, Mode? The men of England have had their own sensible revolutions; now let us have a revolt of the Englishwomen against French domination. [...] It is no question about trifles of fashion; it is a question of life and happiness to thousands whether we shall submit to all the sudden freaks of very bad French taste, or whether we shall some time set up an honest and reasonable standard of our own.³⁶

Blaming the consumers of fashion for the abuses in the fashion houses was not a new idea. ‘It was fatally easy for the customers to plead ignorance - if they were promised a dress for the next day, how could they know at what cost it would be ready?’³⁷ The customers of these ‘first-class’ houses, it was thought, wilfully ignored the brutality caused by their insatiable lust for clothes. Following the death of Mary Anne Walkley a leading article published in *The Times* is scathing in its criticism of ladies demanding dresses at short notice. ‘A young

³⁴ *All the Year Round*, 37

³⁵ *All the Year Round*, 37

³⁶ *All the Year Round*, 39

³⁷ Walkley 1980, 137

creature sacrificed to the exigencies of fashion - a life wasted because a dress has not been ordered soon enough, or because the owner will have a trifling alteration made at the last moment - a home darkened for the sake of satisfying the caprices of feminine criticism.³⁸ The Association, however, believed that the power held by the aristocratic customers of dress houses could force improvement in conditions under threat of withdrawal of custom. This too, was problematic. ‘A lady ranking very high in our aristocracy once excused herself to me for not doing anything in the matter in these words, - “We cannot unfortunately interfere: we owe our dressmakers too much money, and are, consequently, too much in their hands.”’³⁹

The matter of ladies not paying their bills, or delaying payment ‘to a more convenient season’⁴⁰ is two-fold. It allowed large West End establishments with plenty of retained capital to hold power over their customers, as illustrated above, and to impose interest on late payments at twenty percent.⁴¹ It also proved ruinous for smaller houses, and the matter of late payment of bills is held responsible for the numbers of failed houses, and therefore distressed needlewomen. In a Times editorial of 1859: ‘It is [...] a fair and legitimate business, and one that should afford means of honest livelihood to thousands of women. It would do so but for the downright and lamentable dishonesty of the customers who keep these poor creatures waiting for their money for indefinite periods of time.’⁴²

In the years after 1853, the First Hand, the original writer to The Times, was revealed to be Jane Le Plastrier, ‘a long-standing skilled worker and briefly an unsuccessful but enlightened employer.’⁴³ In 1863 The English Woman’s Journal ran a series written by Le Plastrier entitled A Season with the Dressmakers, or The Experience of a First Hand. It is a compelling series that offers enlightened solutions to the problems faced by women engaged in the needle trades and a generous assessment of the Association’s impact on the lives of needlewomen. In August 1863 she introduces her manifesto, which is dominated by the abuses wrought by long hours:

³⁸ *The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, June 24, 1863, 11

³⁹ “A Season With the Dressmakers” *English Woman’s Journal*, vol.12 December 1863, 276

⁴⁰ *The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, July 23, 1856, 5

⁴¹ *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, December 8, 1859, 6

⁴² *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, December 8, 1859, 6

⁴³ Rogers, 615

The existing system of late hours and working all night, I shall endeavour to illustrate by cases which have come under my own experience, and to this portion of my work I invite special attention, as the horrors attendant upon such barbarous practice can never be too much exposed, or those who are the authors of them too severely punished.⁴⁴

Her years of experience, both as an employee and an employer make her a particularly valuable witness to the realities of conditions throughout the period under examination in this study. She is, by her own definition, educated, and makes reference to her ‘advantages in scholarship’.⁴⁵ Her account, she believes, is an accurate reflection of life within the dressmaking trades; ‘None can speak so correctly as those who can speak from experience, and I have purchased mine at a very dear price.’⁴⁶ She emphasises the importance of her testimony and her desire ‘most forcibly to expose the evils which actually exist.’⁴⁷

In reference to the Association, she claims that she ‘pointed out at the time it was founded that very large sums of money⁴⁸ were being annually subscribed by the ladies of our aristocracy, without those for whom it was subscribed really deriving any benefit.’⁴⁹ She also makes a revealing point about how the Association was duped by some of the establishments:

The before-mentioned Association used to give a Benefit Concert, generally held at the Hanover Square rooms, the price of tickets being from 2s. 6d. upwards. I could mention several houses, who, to blind their wealthy patronesses, would make a great display by taking a certain number of their young people to these concerts, for they liked to be told afterwards that they had been seen there with some of

⁴⁴ *English Woman’s Journal*, vol.11 August 1863, 409

⁴⁵ *English Woman’s Journal*, vol.11 August 1863, 407

⁴⁶ *English Woman’s Journal*, vol.12 September 1863, 10

⁴⁷ *English Woman’s Journal*, vol.12 September 1863, 16

⁴⁸ A critical assessment of the Association’s financial arrangements are beyond the scope of this study, but such an assessment would offer excellent opportunities for further scholarship.

⁴⁹ *English Woman’s Journal*, vol.12 November 1863, 181

their assistants. [...] But their tickets, as with their dress, all had come out of their hard earnings; and though they might be seen at the concert, probably two o'clock the same morning saw them still poring over their needle.⁵⁰

Le Plastrier does not suggest that the Association, or indeed, any charity set up to relieve needlewomen is without merit. She laments their naivety, but praises their energy and is optimistic about their future, urging collaboration between workers and charities with 'God speed them and crown their efforts with success!'⁵¹ What is different about her approach to the issues faced by needlewomen is her belief that in order for improvement to progress, dressmakers and milliners must act for themselves and use the charities as a moderator of relations between workers and proprietors:

"Union is strength;" and as these fashionable houses cannot carry on their business without properly qualified first hands, I would say then, let these unite, and each render monthly [to the Association] an exact return of the hours they, and those under them, have been required to work, and such other little details of their treatment as may be necessary.⁵²

This sentiment is in accord with that of Dr William Ord, who, in his 1863 report on *The Sanitary Circumstances of Dressmakers and Other Needlewomen in London*, cautiously suggests that some form of unionisation could be a solution:

The scarcity of skilled hands suggests that workers have it in their power by combination to fix their own hours of work, but their isolated position and close confinement in houses of business appears on the other hand a bar to associated action; and, at the present time, when the operation of trades' unions are doubtfully regarded by the

⁵⁰ *English Woman's Journal*, vol.12 November 1863, 182

⁵¹ *English Woman's Journal*, vol.12 December 1863, 271

⁵² *English Woman's Journal*, vol.12 December 1863, 272

public, the formation of similar associations among women cannot with propriety be recommended.⁵³

By 1864, and the publication of W.H. Lord's Second Children's Employment Commission, many of the charities and societies set up to help needlewomen had become redundant.⁵⁴ Despite Lord Shaftesbury's efforts in the House of Lords to bring about statutory change, his belief that 'public opinion, when vigorously enforced, is more penetrating, more binding, more fearful and more constant than the most stringent law,'⁵⁵ proved misguided. The reality was that the lack of any legal standing or formal influence crippled their efforts; 'the Association, it must be recollected, have no legal power to interfere; they can only act by force of opinion.'⁵⁶ Harriet Ellesmere summarises the Association's failings eloquently; 'we had been baffled, [...] competition on the one hand, and fashion on the other, had been too strong for us.'⁵⁷

Conditions within dress and millinery establishments remained difficult, and the coming of the mass-market and advances in technology simply amplified the problems and shifted them to department stores and factories, where, until 1871 and the genesis of legally recognised trade unions, abuses of labour were typical. It is true that The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners worked hard to alleviate what it saw as the injustices inflicted on the women of the needle trades, and there is little doubt that their efforts were genuine, but 'it was beyond the power of a benevolent society' to remedy such long-standing abuses.⁵⁸ That they were perceived by contemporaries as ineffectual or impotent is understandable, but unwarranted; without legislative change, or any meaningful unionization of the workforce, their efforts were stunted. From 1843 until 1863 the Association attempted to lift a passive workforce of needlewomen out of the appalling conditions

⁵³ Walkley, 1980, 142

⁵⁴ While the Association continued beyond this date, the regional charities, The Glasgow Milliners and Dressmakers Association, and a similar association in Manchester had ceased to operate.

⁵⁵ "The oppressed dressmakers: speeches delivered at the second great meeting at Exeter Hall, 9th of February, 1857" *LSE Selected Pamphlets* (1857) 18

⁵⁶ *The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, June 30, 1863, 14

⁵⁷ *The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, June 30, 1863, 14

⁵⁸ Walkley 1980, 137

documented in the art, journalism and fiction of the period. By 1863 and after the publication of Ord's report and Le Plastrier's *A Season with the Dressmakers*, the passive workforce was beginning to understand that the power to liberate itself from the slavery of the needle was in its own hands.

Journey's End: An Account of the Changing Responses Towards the First World War's Representation

Amanda Phipps*

This article examines newspaper reviews which highlight changing responses to R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* in three of the play's major runs in 1928-1930, 1972 and 2011. These three productions followed Sherriff's original script surprisingly closely, observing an officers' dugout in the days before a major German attack in 1918. The productions also proved highly successful in attracting large audiences. Yet success was accompanied by different controversies in each period over its portrayal of war, class and leadership. Consequently an examination of the social, cultural and political environments in which the productions were performed is essential to understanding the varied receptions. It will be shown that proximity from the First World War and contemporary events and beliefs caused continuous changes in cultural memory of the conflict that significantly affected audiences' approach to *Journey's End*.

British society's remembrance of and response to the First World War has changed considerably since its conclusion. Dan Todman believes personal distance is essential in explaining how different generations have reacted to the war. He claims in 1918 'the British response' was 'multi-vocal'.¹ However, negative responses that saw the war as futile and misconducted 'were much more difficult to make when they were seen to strike at the hearts of grieving fathers and mothers', and thus public criticism of the conflict was largely avoided. It was not until

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¹ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon & London, 2005), p. 221.

the 1960s and 1970s when these parents began to pass away that the war could be criticised with a guilt-free conscience. A ‘powerful limiting factor’ had been removed, meaning a ‘violently critical assessment’ of the conflict was no longer taboo.² By contrast, Brian Bond believes that perceiving the First World War as a ‘pointless waste of young lives’ was ‘largely shaped in the 1960s’ due to events and concerns in that ‘turbulent decade’.³ Rather than proximity being central, conflict in Vietnam and the Cold War made British society re-interpret the past from an anti-war perspective. Bond also argues reappraisal of class and individuals’ rights during the 1960s made the class-based ranking of soldiers during the First World War seem retrospectively unjust.⁴ Unlike Todman, Bond argues responses to the war were not heavily reliant on the passing of time and people, but had their nucleus in contemporary concerns.

A middle-ground between Todman’s and Bond’s arguments appears most convincing. Definitely, sensitivity weakened as the First World War moved from personal experience to historical memory. However, distance also increases the ability of current concerns to influence responses. With no first-hand experience, individuals would employ their own society’s beliefs to judge the First World War. Arguably, even Todman’s and Bond’s historical perspectives of the war are shaped by twenty-first century attitudes. For example, both believe many criticisms levelled against the war during the 1960s are inaccurate. Todman labels them as ‘myths’, whilst Bond claims the war should be viewed as an ‘unprecedented achievement of the British “nation in arms”’.⁵ As will be shown, these historical evaluations link to recent trends in which the war and the early 1900s are being remembered less harshly than in the 1960s and 1970s. As Jay Winter notes, there has been a ‘consumer boom’ around the period with ‘heritage trades’ presenting it as a bygone era when the nation united in defence of a truly Great Britain.⁶ It will be argued that with the forthcoming centenary of the First World War certain elements of the

² Todman, p. 224.

³ Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain’s Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 51.

⁴ Bond, p. 54.

⁵ Todman, p. 223. Bond, p. 93.

⁶ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 39.

conflict are being forgotten and the scathingly negative attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s are beginning to soften.

A study of newspaper reviews on R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* demonstrates these changing responses to the First World War. The play is set in 1918 and revolves around the occupants of an officers' dugout who are preparing for an expected German attack on their inadequately occupied trenches. The audience gain an insight into the characters' fears, hopes and longings for home as well as the damaging effect of trench warfare on their psyches. The play has been produced numerous times, but only three of its major runs in 1928-1930, 1972 and 2011 will be focused upon in this study.⁷ All three productions have followed Sherriff's original script surprisingly closely. They have also proved highly successful in attracting large audiences.⁸ Yet this success has not been without varying controversies in each period over its portrayal of war, class and leadership which will be explored in detail throughout this article. Reviews of *Journey's End* offer a valuable lens through which responses to its subject-matter have changed over time. The ability of these sources to shed light on cultural memory of the conflict demonstrates that theatrical productions and their reviews deserve more scholarly attention than they have previously been afforded by historians. The play's reviews illustrate the influence contemporary events have had on attitudes towards the conflict and the impact historical distance has had on individuals' ability, and even desire, to judge the First World War.

Approaches to War

Paul Fussell believes 'the British' have a 'tendency towards heroic grandiosity about all their wars'.⁹ This extreme generalisation ignores

⁷ *Journey's End*, dir. James Whale (Incorporated Stage Society, 1928). The play moved to the Savoy Theatre in 1929 where it was presented by Maurice Browne. *Journey's End*, dir. Eric Thompson (69 Theatre Company, 1972). *Journey's End*, dir. David Grindley (Act Productions and Shaftesbury Theatre, 2011). David Grindley first directed the play in 2004, but only the 2011 revival will be focused on in this article.

⁸ Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Providence: Berg, 1993), p. 151, p. 186. *Journey's End* 2011 Tour Website, (2011) <<http://journeysendtheplay.com/about/>> [accessed 16 December 2012].

⁹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 175.

the complex changes that have taken place in society's responses to the First World War. In the 1920s personal grievances meant people avoided judging the war, whereas the strong anti-war sentiment of the 1960s and 1970s meant most reacted negatively towards it. Even as this anger dampens in the twenty-first century the term 'heroic grandiosity' still seems highly inappropriate to describe Britain's attitude. As a study of *Journey's End's* reception will show, responses to its subject matter have been in a constant state of flux as personal proximity and cultural events influence society's outlook towards warfare.

In the decade immediately after the First World War emotions still ran high and many did not want to hear the conflict openly derided. The early 1920s were largely marked by silence in the arts over the war as the nation privately came to terms with its losses.¹⁰ This meant Sherriff had great difficulty in finding a company to produce his play. He explained that the public 'had shown no interest' in the subject, with every previous war play 'without exception' being a 'failure'.¹¹ For Gary Sheffield the performance of *Journey's End* in December 1928 signalled that 'the dam finally burst' on a decade of silent grief.¹² In the late 1920s there was a flood of literature on the subject such as Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* and Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*.¹³ Adrian Gregory argues these texts created an image of the First World War as 'stupid, tragic and futile' in 'popular culture'.¹⁴ Gregory's conjecture misrepresents both the literature and the period's mood. Certainly, memoirs like *Goodbye to All That* discussed war's horror and bloodshed, yet Graves begrudged his work being labelled anti-war and remained extremely proud of his regiment and service.¹⁵ Additionally the publication of this literature did not mean that society instantly consumed and converted their

¹⁰ Ann-Louise Shapiro, 'The Fog of War: Writing the War Story Then and Now', *History and Theory* 44.1 (2005), 91-101 (p. 92) <DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2303.2005.00310.x> [accessed 7 December 2011].

¹¹ R. C. Sherriff, *No Leading Lady: An Autobiography* (London: Gollancz, 1968), p. 42.

¹² Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2002), p. 8.

¹³ Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000). Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000).

¹⁴ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3.

¹⁵ Bond, p. 33.

opinions about a war they had lived through.¹⁶ This is reflected by the fact that it was Rupert Brooke's patriotic poetry, not Wilfred Owen's sombre verses, which the nation still bought.¹⁷ Thus, whilst some did begin to question certain aspects of the conflict in the late 1920s, there was no overriding resentment to the First World War. Many still wanted to feel that loved ones had been sacrificed for a worthwhile cause and were too personally connected to the conflict to accept its failings.

Sherriff wished to portray Captain Stanhope and his officers as experiencing what many soldiers had during the war. The play shows an immensely strained and alcoholic Stanhope interacting with his officers such as the wise and calm Lieutenant Osborne on whom Stanhope heavily relies and the young 2nd Lieutenant Raleigh who hero-worships his captain. The play includes a mix of mundane events and moments of great tension to show the unstable situation many lived through in the trenches. At moments the characters complain about the food provided and try to pass the time through idle chitchat and camaraderie which helps them 'stick it out'.¹⁸ This is juxtaposed with scenes of great anticipation and fear such as the ordered raid Lieutenant Osborne and 2nd Lieutenant Raleigh must carry out; which results in the death of the former. Amongst the turmoil produced by Osborne's death, the play reaches its climax as the much anticipated moment of the German attack arrives. Raleigh is wounded and brought back into the dugout to die poignantly in the arms of Stanhope. The captain then exits the collapsing dugout leaving the audience alone with the dead Raleigh and the noises of the battle taking place outside. *Journey's End* reveals the hardships soldiers suffered in the trenches and how they helped each other to continue performing their roles.

It is possible that *Journey's End*, which sold 500,000 tickets in its first year, would not have reached such success if interpreted as staunchly anti-war.¹⁹ Sherriff himself asserted 'he did not write it with

¹⁶ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), p. 449.

¹⁷ Alisa Miller, 'Rupert Brooke and the Growth of Commercial Patriotism in Great Britain, 1914–1918', *Twentieth Century British History* 21.2 (2010), 141-162 (p. 160) <DOI: 10.1093/tcbh/hwq001> [accessed 14 December 2011].

¹⁸ R. C. Sherriff, *Journey's End* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), I. 1. p. 31.

¹⁹ Bracco, p. 151.

a view to peace propaganda'.²⁰ Instead he simply wanted to 'express' the life of 'some of those men' by putting into art what he had witnessed at the front.²¹ The play was fortunately accepted as such by many reviewers. The *Daily Mail* stated 'every detail of the play rings true of infantry life', whilst the *Daily Chronicle* claimed it presented 'the war as the real fighting man knew it'.²² As many of the male audience members and cast had seen service, the play seemed a site of remembrance rather than grand philosophising about warfare. Perhaps the play provided a cathartic outlet or communicated what many war veterans had been struggling to express since 1918. The play was conceivably a focal point for the strong emotions many still held about the conflict. This is demonstrated by one veteran in the *Daily Telegraph* whose review explained that 'not merely my emotions but my memories were being stirred'.²³ As a result non-combatants also felt they were finally witnessing what friends and family had experienced abroad. The *Daily News and Westminster Gazette* praised the play for 'mak[ing] us understand their minds' and 'the common lot of our soldiers'.²⁴ Such comments provide evidence for why the play was so popular. Veterans felt their experiences were being honestly presented which made the play a source of remembrance for them and knowledge for others. Rather than viewing *Journey's End* as anti-war, reviewers respected Sherriff's work for its truthfulness.

When *Journey's End* was revived in 1972 British attitudes towards the First World War had changed significantly. Firstly, the Second World War had destroyed the compensatory belief, which was held by many, that the 'Great War' would be the war to end all wars.²⁵ Time had proved many initial beliefs about the war were untrue. Secondly, in this period British society was living through the Cold War with its threat of nuclear annihilation and was also witnessing America's conduct in the Vietnam War. The result was mass outrage in Britain with 25,000 anti-war protestors gathering in Grosvenor

²⁰ *The Times*, 25 November 1929.

²¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 23 January 1929.

²² *Daily Mail*, 11 December 1928. *Daily Chronicle*, 22 January 1929.

²³ *Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1929.

²⁴ *Daily News and Westminster Gazette*, 22 January 1929.

²⁵ Belinda Davis, 'Experience, Identity, and Memory: The Legacy of World War One', *Journal of Modern History* 75.1 (2003), 111-131 (p. 112) <DOI: 10.1086/377750> [accessed 18 December 2011].

Square on just one occasion in 1968.²⁶ Tony Howard and John Stokes claim ‘Vietnam transformed’ how many British people ‘regarded wars past and present’.²⁷ A re-evaluation of the First World War appears to have taken place because of these concerns and is reflected in the art and media that gained attention. Wilfred Owen’s despairing war poetry became very popular and was introduced as a standard text on school curriculums.²⁸ The 1963 play (and later film) *Oh What a Lovely War* achieved significant recognition for its scathing depiction of the war as pointlessly begun and disastrously led.²⁹ These popular portrayals helped to formalise and cement a view of the war as the first in a succession of twentieth century conflicts that caused mass slaughter and were ultimately futile. The anti-war sentiment created by the Cold War and Vietnam was being used to retrospectively judge the past.

The anti-war atmosphere of the 1970s led to a distinct change in responses to Eric Thompson’s production of *Journey’s End*. Whereas the play was seen as a painfully truthful depiction of the conflict in the 1920s, many in the 1970s viewed it as a naïve depiction of the realities of warfare and also found its language jingoistic. The play’s dialogue in particular gained the attention of reviewers, especially claims by Captain Stanhope that ‘sticking it’ as a soldier was ‘the only thing a decent man can do’.³⁰ The *Guardian* remarked that it ‘barely questions the necessity of the whole doomed and futile enterprise’, whilst *What’s On* argued there was ‘no suggestion that the barbarism is not justified’.³¹ Rather than being seen as a saddening but truthful portrayal, the play was viewed as not judgemental enough. Society’s negativity towards all warfare meant anything short of complete condemnation drew attention.

²⁶ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 635.

²⁷ Tony Howard and John Stokes, ‘Introduction’, in *Acts of War: The Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television since 1945*, ed. by Tony Howard and John Stokes (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), pp. 1-26 (p. 21).

²⁸ Barbara Korte, ‘The Grandfathers’ War: Re-imagining World War One in British Novels and Films of the 1990s’, in *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*, ed. by Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto Press, 2001), pp. 120-134 (p. 122).

²⁹ *Oh What a Lovely War*, dir. Joan Littlewood (Theatre Workshop, 1963).

³⁰ *Journey’s End*, II. 2. p. 58.

³¹ *Guardian*, 19 May 1972. *What’s On*, 26 May 1972.

Audiences in 1972 did not automatically dislike *Journey's End* because it did not correlate with the anti-war sentiment of society. Instead it was seen as something of a historical document that provided evidence of society's mentality during the 1920s. Sherriff by shrouding the conflict in language of national honour and the 'disgrace' of not fighting seemed to represent archaic attitudes.³² Distance meant that not only the subject matter, but the play itself was historicised. This is demonstrated by the *Spectator's* review which claimed Sherriff clearly remembered his war service 'romantically' leading him to present the original audience with a play that 'told it as those who were there wanted to believe it was'.³³ Rather than being viewed as a 'real' portrayal, reviewers saw Sherriff's play as an artefact from a time when people could not accept the 'truth' about warfare. Here it is perhaps useful to see the play as part of the wider theatrical scene of the period. Audience's felt that *Oh What a Lovely War* showed the true horror and futility of 1914-1918 which had been hidden from the public for so long. It is arguably the case that *Journey's End* supplemented this view. It shed light on how previous social attitudes allowed the war to happen and even prevented Britons from condemning it in the 1920s. Although the war appeared undoubtedly wrong to many during the 1960s and 1970s, the play showed how the British convinced themselves to keep fighting and supporting the war.

Todman believes the anti-war spirit that dominated the 1960s and 1970s created 'modern myths' about the First World War which continue to hold sway in the twenty-first century.³⁴ Although Britons still have strong anti-war feelings, shown by the Iraq war demonstrations, Todman is wrong to present opinions as stabilised. Arguably, anger over modern conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan is changing modern perspectives on the First World War. A journalist writing in the *New Statesman* believes disquiet over the war in Afghanistan is based around the military tactics of 'firing missiles and dropping explosives from a safe distance' which risks civilian lives 'rather than those of their own professional soldiers'.³⁵ Instead of being heroically fought for a cause the country believes in, the war in

³² *Journey's End*, II. 2. p. 56.

³³ *Spectator*, 27 May 1972.

³⁴ Todman, p. 221.

³⁵ *New Statesman*, 15 November 2001.

Afghanistan is at times perceived as being carried out in distant lands for dubious reasons with lethal modern technology.³⁶ Thus archaic wars, in which men voluntarily served their country for a national cause, may face less criticism by comparison. This is reinforced by popular media such as *Downton Abbey* that presents the early 1900s as a quaint time of old-fashioned British morals and behaviour. The show depicts men eager to fight for their country with only the villainous Thomas character trying to get a 'blighty'.³⁷ This storyline in itself connotes that only 'baddies' did not defend their country and stand by their fellow men in combat. Modern warfare can be seen as one of the key factors in changing cultural and social beliefs about the First World War and those who fought in and supported it.

Remembrance of the First World War has also assumed a high level of importance in society. Arguably, it is the very passing of time that is increasing concern with the war. Winter claims that when it comes to warfare 'Remembrance is an act of symbolic exchange between those who remain and those who suffered and died'. Furthermore the nature of the First World War in which men died in terrible conditions and in extraordinary numbers means society still feels a need to show 'acknowledgement' for what they endured.³⁸ In recent years this acknowledgement has been more reverent than in the 1960s and 1970s. For instance Armistice Day greatly declined in national significance during the 1960s and 1970s because of resentment towards the war, but in recent decades it has been growing in status.³⁹ Now large remembrance ceremonies are held on November 11th rather than the nearest Sunday. The centenary will also focus attention on the war and the British government has shrouded the event in a solemn and respectful atmosphere with Prime Minister David Cameron claiming it is the country's 'duty' to 'honour those

³⁶ Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate, 'The Soldier as Victim: Peering through the Looking Glass', *British Journal of Criminology* 51.6 (2011), 900-917 (p. 900) <DOI: 10.1093/bjc/azr057> [accessed 25 November 2012].

³⁷ *Downton Abbey*, dir. Brian Percival (Carnival Films, 2010-2011).

³⁸ Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 279.

³⁹ Matthew Richardson, 'A Changing Meaning for Armistice Day', in *At the Eleventh Hour: Reflections, Hopes and Anxieties at the Closing of the Great War, 1918*, ed. by Peter Liddle and Hugh Cecil (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), pp. 347-364 (pp. 356-360).

who served'.⁴⁰ It seems greater distance from the First World War and the unpopularity of recent conflicts is making some sections of society reflect less critically and more solemnly than before. Although Todman is right that Britain is not a pro-war nation, it is naïve to believe responses to the war have not changed since the anti-war spirit of the 1960s and 1970s.

Modern changes in attitudes towards the First World War are noticeable in reviews of *Journey's End's* recent tour and West End run. The play largely followed Sherriff's original script until a few moments from the end when the actors stood frozen in front of a memorial wall after a huge barrage of gunfire. This suggests all the characters died during the attack whereas Sherriff left it slightly more open-ended as to their survival. The presence of the characters created a bodily representation of the memorial which was undoubtedly meant to increase the emotional intensity of the play's closing moments. However, such an ending did not lead to reviewers claiming the play had an anti-war message. The *Birmingham Post* praised the play for being 'neither screechy nor preachy' and the *Guardian* claimed it was 'all the more powerful... because it comes with no agenda'.⁴¹ These comments suggest not 'preaching' against the war was desirable as such an 'agenda' would be unwelcome in 2011. If anything reviewers saw *Journey's End* as a positive portrayal of the British spirit. The *Mail on Sunday* described it as 'an eloquent celebration of heroism' and the *Guardian* reported it is 'a terrific old-fashioned treat'.⁴² Much like *Downton Abbey*, reviewers saw the play as presenting a bygone British character that no longer exists. The certain death of the characters did not lead to a discussion about the play being anti-war; instead reviewers focused on the bravery and heroism of the British soldiers.

The changing responses to the First World War and *Journey's End* demonstrate the need to combine Todman's and Bond's arguments about the influence of distance and surrounding cultural events. In the 1920s the war was so fresh in people's minds that reactions were often overshadowed by personal connection. By the

⁴⁰ *Gov.uk*, (28 November 2012) <<http://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-government-plans-to-mark-first-world-war-centenary>> [accessed 21 February 2014].

⁴¹ *Birmingham Post*, 28 October 2011. *Guardian*, 16 March 2011.

⁴² *Mail on Sunday*, 10 April 2011. *Guardian*, 16 March 2011.

1960s people knew the ‘Great’ War would not be the last which led to disenchantment and anger. And recently, resentment has subsided as current events have caused further re-assessment of the past. Such alterations have been reflected in the arts and media which have often represented the nation’s fluctuating responses towards the First World War.

The Officer Class and Captain Stanhope

Jay Winter and Antoine Prost believe literature created after the First World War formed ‘a history of the war... without trench soldiers’.⁴³ *Journey’s End’s* dugout setting and concern with the officer’s perspective provides good evidence for this claim. Originally reviewers did not find this problematic as their main concern was how the officers and especially Captain Stanhope reflected on the British army. However, as the war moved from living to historical memory, Britons realised the incomplete history that was being left behind. Throughout the twentieth century public attention was drawn towards the ‘common’ soldier. This changing focus directly impacted how reviewers approached *Journey’s End’s* characters and whether they were seen to truly portray the soldiers’ experience.

During the war and into the 1920s class was largely seen as a set determiner of a soldier’s rank. Some veterans such as Siegfried Sassoon bemoaned the inadequacy of upper-class generals, claiming in his memoir that ‘they must be cleverer than they looked’ because ‘they’d all got plenty of medal ribbons’.⁴⁴ Yet, Todman claims this was not the general consensus and to say in the 1920s that the war was ‘incompetently run’ could get you ‘chased from the street’.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Sassoon fails to mention that he only became an officer because of class privileges. Men with public school backgrounds were deemed more equipped to lead soldiers and therefore automatically became officers. Sherriff also received such an upgrade and as late as 1968 believed this class promotion was just because ‘without conceit or

⁴³ Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 83.

⁴⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 9.

⁴⁵ Todman, p. 222.

snobbery, they were conscious of a personal superiority that placed on their shoulders an obligation towards those less privileged'.⁴⁶ Arguably Sassoon's and Sherriff's privileged background also helped them publish their war accounts in the 1920s.⁴⁷ As a result it was the officers' viewpoint which dominated literature and meant their perspective influenced many non-combatants' understanding of the trenches. Class bias not only influenced how the war was fought, but how it was remembered in this period.

The normalcy of class distinctions in the 1920s meant reviews of *Journey's End* did not question the play being set in a dugout. Nor was attention raised by the fact that privates were only represented in the minor role of Mason the cook. The *Daily Mirror* saw it as an all-encompassing portrayal of the British army in France, the reviewer simply claiming 'It shows life at the front'.⁴⁸ Even the *Manchester Guardian*, one of the more liberal newspapers of the period, described them as 'a handful of ordinary men' who lived 'forty-eight hours as millions lived during the war'.⁴⁹ This was despite the fact 'millions' did not enjoy a dugout's relative safety or have champagne available after a raid as the officers do in the play. Such reviews demonstrate how engrained the class system was in the period. It is likely that these reviewers knew a private's experience would be very different. Indeed, many reviewers were themselves veterans. It must therefore be concluded that the private's experience of war was never expected to be placed on stage or to gain the attention of a mass audience. In the 1920s the officers' world had come to stand for the whole.

The original production did spark mass controversy for portraying officers as having weaknesses. At a time when the army and its leaders received deep public respect it was deemed problematic for *Journey's End* to show officers struggling with the realities of warfare. For example, the character of 2nd Lieutenant Hibbert attempts to 'wriggle off before the attack' by claiming he is ill, although Captain Stanhope soon puts a stop to this behaviour.⁵⁰ In particular, concerns were raised over the unstable character of Captain Stanhope

⁴⁶ R. C. Sherriff, 'The English Public Schools in the War', in *Promise of Greatness: The War of 1914-1918*, ed. by George Panichas (London: Cassell, 1968), pp. 133-154 (p. 137).

⁴⁷ Sheffield, p. 9.

⁴⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 23 January 1929.

⁴⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1928.

⁵⁰ *Journey's End*, I. 1. p. 29.

who relied on whisky to cope as a company's commander. R. V. Dawson of the *English Review* was appalled at the character's portrayal. He claimed the British army was at 'the centre of the greatest empire' so to present it as having such a captain was 'the worst exhibition of bad taste that this century has ever seen'.⁵¹ Similarly when the play toured in Singapore the actor playing Stanhope was publically confronted by a woman accusing him of being 'a vile libel' on the British army.⁵² In the 1920s audiences were not only shocked by the presentation of an alcoholic captain, but also perceived the character as highly damaging to the military's image. Thus *Journey's End*, although praised in parts for its 'realism', was rebuked by some for presenting members of the British army as struggling under the pressure of war.

By 1972 many believed that class boundaries should be broken. It was a period in which individual rights on numerous issues were being hotly discussed and fought for.⁵³ Furthermore Arthur Marwick believes the Cold War's ideological battle between Capitalism and Communism meant Britain's class system was under heavy attack. He claims in Britain arguments over 'existing social structures' had gained the 'familiarity and comfort of a battered old armchair'.⁵⁴ This led to a re-evaluation of the army's class privileges during the First World War. Popular history books were published such as Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* and A. J. P. Taylor's *The First World War: An Illustrated History*. These books heavily criticised upper class generals for avoiding the trenches and blamed their incompetence for the heavy number of casualties.⁵⁵ With many of the generals now deceased such literature was rarely contradicted. From the vantage point of the 1960s, class privileges were seen as unjust and disastrous during the First World War.

Re-evaluation of the war in the second half of the twentieth century also caused many to become interested in the 'common'

⁵¹ D. V. Dawson, 'Journey's End: A Supplementary Estimate', *English Review* (Nov. 1929), p. 621.

⁵² Robert Gore-Langton, 'R. C. Sherriff and *Journey's End*', in *The Lowry's Journey's End Programme* (Salford, 2011).

⁵³ Ken Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 94-95.

⁵⁴ Marwick, p. 634.

⁵⁵ Alan Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), p. 183. A. J. P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 148.

soldier's experience. The lack of published personal testimonies from privates was seen as another example of unfair class discrimination. Additionally, the passing away of many veterans meant their experiences could be lost forever. Consequently media which portrayed their stories became extremely popular. This is exemplified by the 1964 BBC Two series *The Great War*, which had an average of eight million viewers per programme.⁵⁶ *The Great War* included extensive footage of the trenches, photographs of the conditions privates lived in and letters written by them for family and loved ones. Emma Hanna believes the series 'cemented' the public's anger over the ordinary soldier's treatment.⁵⁷ It was now the working class and those who had endured the worst that captured society's imagination. A desire to know what the working man had suffered overshadowed previous focus on the officer's experience.

Attitudes towards class in the 1960s and 1970s influenced responses to *Journey's End's* characters. Unlike recent literature and programmes that presented rancid trenches occupied by privates, the play was seen to focus unfairly on privileged officers. The *Guardian* saw the play as showing 'trench life [for] the officer class' was primarily concerned with 'complaints over porridge and cutlets'.⁵⁸ For the *Spectator* the play's public school language of 'topping' and 'ripping' created 'a touch of unreality about it'.⁵⁹ This review suggests that portrayals of the war in 1972 were seen as untruthful unless they revealed the suffering of the working-class in their own language. It was also felt that Private Mason was not taken seriously enough. The *Evening Standard* accused Sherriff of presenting 'caricatures' in which Mason was simply 'the lovable comic relief cockney'.⁶⁰ And dialogue such as 'Osborne: What kind of soup is this, Mason? / Mason: It's yellow soup, sir' does place Mason as the comic interlude to the officers' grave drama.⁶¹ Thus *The Times* seems justified in highlighting that 'in 1928, it was still the job of the lower orders to

⁵⁶ *The Great War*, pro. Tony Essex (BBC, 1964). Bond, p. 68.

⁵⁷ Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 32.

⁵⁸ *Guardian*, 21 December 1972.

⁵⁹ *Spectator*, 27 May 1972.

⁶⁰ *Evening Standard*, 24 October 1972.

⁶¹ *Journey's End*, I. 1. p. 24.

provide the laughs in a serious play'.⁶² The class-consciousness of the period meant Sherriff's stereotyping was seen as another example of officer favouritism. The recent exposure of the private's story meant audiences were no longer satisfied with such a narrow perspective of the First World War.

Unhappiness about the exclusivity of *Journey's End's* dugout did not prevent audiences sympathising with the characters altogether. In contrast to earlier reactions to Stanhope, reviewers now saw him as suffering from 'shattered nerves'.⁶³ It appears that by the 1970s society had a greater appreciation for the psychological effects of warfare. For example, Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate argue that the Vietnam War was a fundamental 'turning point' in 'the recognition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder'.⁶⁴ As a result reviewers often adopted a diagnostic approach to Stanhope and felt the character deserved pity and help. Rather than being seen as a slur on the British army, *Punch* described the 'war-tortured Stanhope' as having 'schizophrenia hallucinations'.⁶⁵ The *Spectator* theorised that he was 'anaesthetising his fear in whisky'.⁶⁶ Furthermore some reviewers blamed Stanhope's superiors for placing him under such immense pressure. Benedict Nightingale from the *New Statesman* believed Stanhope created 'the real pathos of the evening' because his 'decency... was exploited and abused by the smug, crassly incompetent Kitcheners and Haigs'.⁶⁷ This statement highlights that the period reserved its most scathing resentment for generals not captains. At least Stanhope was in a dugout supporting his men and not in a château. Although reviewers did resent Sherriff's exclusive portrayal of officers, Stanhope did receive sympathy for suffering whilst supporting his men.

By 2011 Stanhope was not only seen as a character deserving sympathy, but a hero. The *Telegraph* described him as a 'brilliant leader of men' and a representation of 'old-fashioned English decency'.⁶⁸ This change in response from the 1920s is even more interesting when considering how the different actors played Stanhope. Colin Clive who played Stanhope in 1929 was rather

⁶² *The Times*, 21 July 1972.

⁶³ *Daily Express*, 21 July 1972.

⁶⁴ McGarry and Walklate, p. 903.

⁶⁵ *Punch*, 31 May 1972.

⁶⁶ *Spectator*, 27 May 1972.

⁶⁷ *New Statesman*, 26 May 1972.

⁶⁸ *Telegraph*, 25 July 2011.

reserved throughout the play and only became climatically uncontrollable when he discussed the death of his friend Lieutenant Osborne.⁶⁹ By comparison James Norton and Nick Hendrix who played the part in 2011 continuously shouted and paced the dugout. This did make 2011 reviewers like Julie Carpenter of the *Express* highlight Stanhope's 'nerve-shredded' state, yet unlike previous reviewers she emphasised that he was a very 'capable leader'.⁷⁰ And this line was followed by the *Mail on Sunday* reviewer who concluded 'his company adores and respects him'.⁷¹ Of course it must be appreciated that theatrical styles have changed over time. Nevertheless, it is still notable that the 2011 actors' volatile behaviour did not hinder modern reviewers seeing Stanhope as a heroic leader. Modern attitudes prevented other factors overshadowing Stanhope's 'decency' and commitment to his men.

This appraisal of Stanhope's 'decency' in 2011 seems inextricably linked to concerns over the modern soldier. In recent years public responses to soldiers have been complex. McGarry and Walklate believe they are seen simultaneously as 'victims' and 'criminals'.⁷² Certainly charities like 'Help for Heroes' and popular television shows such as *Harry's Artic Heroes* present soldiers as victims of war's brutality who pay a high price for bravely protecting Britain.⁷³ Yet, whilst this image creates respect and sympathy it is juxtaposed with revelations of the less than 'decent' conduct of some soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, Noel Whitty claims the 'vividness' of footage depicting Iraqi Baha Mousa being tortured by British soldiers has made the military face 'scrutiny' in Britain.⁷⁴ Viewed against this backdrop an alcoholic Stanhope who was worshipped by his men and followed orders to the letter seems much less of a disgrace to the British army. Stanhope's constant emphasis on doing the 'decent' thing has gained increasing importance in recent

⁶⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1929.

⁷⁰ *Express*, 27 July 2011.

⁷¹ *Mail on Sunday*, 10 April 2011.

⁷² McGarry and Walklate, p. 900.

⁷³ *Help for Heroes*, (2011) <<http://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/>> [accessed 1 December 2011]. *Harry's Artic Heroes*, dir. Alexis Girardet (BBC, 2011).

⁷⁴ Noel Whitty, 'Soldier Photography of Detainee Abuse in Iraq: Digital Technology, Human Rights and the Death of Baha Mousa', *Human Rights Law Review* 10.4 (2010), 689-714 (pp. 695-696) <DOI:10.1093/hrlr/ngq041> [accessed 11 January 2012].

years.⁷⁵ His ‘old-fashioned English decency’ appears reassuring in light of some recent soldierly conduct and places him securely in the role of hero-victim.

Another reason why Stanhope’s likability may have grown is that the issue of class has become less controversial in recent decades. This is not to suggest class distinctions are no longer a problem in Britain, but as Derek Paget explains, ‘the oppositional moment’ of the 1960s and 1970s ‘has gone’.⁷⁶ It seems Todman’s emphasis on distance is not just applicable between the war and a given period, but also between the 1960s and now. The previous outcry over class and subsequent resentment of the First World War’s military hierarchy is no longer radical. In fact programmes like *Blackadder Goes Forth* have made the subject humorous, turning serious denouncement of military leaders into laughter over their buffoonery.⁷⁷ In addition presenting the ‘common’ soldier’s perspective has lost the novel edge it once had in *Oh What a Lovely War* and the BBC’s *The Great War*. It is now commonplace for First World War accounts to include privates. For example *Regeneration* and *Birdsong* use working-class soldiers to focalise their war stories.⁷⁸ *Downton Abbey* divides attention between the upper-class worlds of the Crawley family and their servants with men from both realms going to France together. Thus in the twenty-first century it is difficult to appreciate fully that the war was once predominately told from the perspective of officers. The arts and media have corrected this unfair bias by almost inventing ‘common’ soldiers’ stories which has caused the anger felt in the 1960s and 1970s to dampen.

In 2011 reviewers of *Journey’s End* rarely criticised the social backgrounds and military positions of the characters. Indeed the theatre company created the tag line ‘ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances’ for the play.⁷⁹ Arguably this promotional language was an attempt to make the play fit with contemporary representations of the war. Such a tag line minimises the social status of officers, perhaps as the theatre company knew audiences would expect the portrayal of

⁷⁵ *Journey’s End*, II. 2. p. 58.

⁷⁶ Derek Paget, ‘Remembrance Play: *Oh What a Lovely War* and History’, in *Acts of War*, ed. by Tony Howard and John Stokes, p. 87.

⁷⁷ *Blackadder Goes Forth*, dir. Richard Boden (BBC, 1989).

⁷⁸ Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (London: Vintage, 1994).

⁷⁹ *Journey’s End* 2011 Tour Website.

‘ordinary’ men. Some newspapers like the *Herald Scotland* did suggest the dugout ‘resembles an extension of a public school dormitory’, but this response was in the minority.⁸⁰ Most reviewers, rather than being irritated by officer favouritism, searched for the ‘common soldiers’ in the play as they assumed some must be there. The *Hounslow Chronicle* emphasised that ‘the appalling death toll of the previous four years’ meant in 1918 ‘officers were no longer exclusively public school-educated’. The newspaper highlighted characters like 2nd Lieutenant Trotter who was only an officer through promotion and so in reality was ‘a private made good’.⁸¹ Reviewers appear so used to finding diversity in representations of the First World War that they sought out examples of ‘ordinariness’ in the play.

Sheffield claims ‘Upper class ex-public schoolboys have come to symbolise the British army in the First World War’.⁸² Sheffield’s statement ignores the dramatic changes in public focus over the last century. Certainly, in the decade following the war a narrow perspective prevailed due to the prevalence of officers’ literary accounts. Yet the changing concerns of society and distance from the conflict revealed gaps in First World War historical records. Consequently, focus was re-directed onto the ‘common’ soldier in the second half of the twentieth century. By the twenty-first century an all-inclusive approach to the war had become extremely normal. Responses to *Journey’s End* clearly chart these developments in class-consciousness and the changing attitudes towards soldiers of the First World War.

Concluding Remarks

Sherriff saw *Journey’s End* as a time-capsule, stating ‘I wanted to perpetuate the memory of some of those men’.⁸³ This study has shown that ‘those men’ have been remembered and interpreted in numerous ways. One of the reasons for varying responses has been the passing of time. For example, the original controversy sparked by Captain Stanhope’s portrayal suggests that society had refused to recognise there were weaknesses in an army that their family and friends had

⁸⁰ *Harold Scotland*, 17 March 2011.

⁸¹ *Hounslow Chronicle*, 09 March 2011.

⁸² Sheffield, p. 147.

⁸³ *Daily Express*, 23 January 1929.

served in. Distance has also permitted aspects like old-fashioned English decency to gain greater admiration and has endeared reviewers to Stanhope in 2011. This gives weight to Todman's claim that the 'deeper-lying' reason for changing responses to the First World War is personal proximity.⁸⁴ Clearly reception of the play has changed as the characters and events of *Journey's End* have moved from living to historical memory.

The impact of distance is inextricably linked to the influence of contemporary events and beliefs on remembrance of the war. This is best demonstrated by responses to *Journey's End* during the 1970s. As Bond notes interpretations of the war underwent a 'revolutionary inversion' in the 1960s with popular responses to the conflict 'reflecting the very different concerns and political issues of that turbulent decade'.⁸⁵ These concerns would not have been publically voiced in the 1920s, however, distance made criticising the war less of a personal grievance and more socially acceptable in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, reviewers of *Journey's End* in 1972 openly questioned the play's failure to denounce war's barbarism. The passing of time had stopped personal memories of the conflict influencing reviewers, whilst simultaneously making them more receptive to current beliefs about warfare. It is therefore essential to combine Todman's and Bond's arguments to gain a complete understanding of why attitudes towards the First World War and *Journey's End* have changed.

The above examination has also shown that the arts and media have played a significant role in influencing reviewers' responses to *Journey's End*. As Deborah Cartmell and I. Q. Hunter explain 'representation in film and fiction' is vital for 'the understanding of the past by non-historians- "ordinary people" if you like'.⁸⁶ Consequently productions of the play have been continuously measured against and re-interpreted to fit with other popular depictions of the war. Reviewers either assumed the play's message was similar to current representations of the conflict or were astonished that it was not. This reveals the importance of the arts and media in the formation of cultural memory about the First World War. Without these artistic forms to encapsulate

⁸⁴ Todman, p. 222.

⁸⁵ Bond, p. 65, p. 51.

⁸⁶ Deborah Cartmell and I. Q. Hunter, 'Introduction: Retrovisions: Historical Makeovers in Film and Literature', in *Retrovisions*, ed. by Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan, pp. 1-7 (p. 1).

changing attitudes, it is unlikely that there would have been such divergent responses to *Journey's End*.

Laurie Stras (ed.), *She's So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in 1960s Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). 266 pp. ISBN 9781409436652.

Collin Lieberg*

In the canon of 1960s popular music, the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and the Beach Boys are probably among the names that first come to mind. But in the superb collection *She's So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in 1960s Music* edited by Laurie Stras, the eight essays bring women to the forefront. Dealing with girl groups such as the Shirelles, the Chantels, the Ronettes and the Bobbettes and individuals such as Dusty Springfield, Marianne Faithful, Sandie Shaw, Mary Hopkin and Tina Turner, amongst others, this anthology rightly shows that 'girl singers still matter' (29) and have mattered all along.

The collaboration began as a conference panel in 2002 and continued in further email correspondences over the following years. This close partnership amongst the contributors shows up in the connections of the essays. The authors explore the subject from perspectives as different as cultural studies, musicology, biography, women's studies and others, but they each incorporate aspects of femininity and adolescence.

Laurie Stras begins by discussing voice as the key aspect of the girl sound. She notes that almost all girl singers were adolescent or younger, which highlighted the not-always-in-tune sound. Whilst few singers had good 'technique', most had an innocent quality to their voices. Robynn J Stilwell continues this theory by examining Brenda Lee. Recognised as child prodigy, she often sounded older than she

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was. Stilwell points out the dichotomy of a voice that can sound both innocent and knowing, white and black, young and mature. Later, Sarah Hill explored the voice of Mary Hopkin as a Welsh voice, an ‘Other’ among the Anglo-American voices popular at the time. Similarly, Susan Fast examined the qualities of Tina Turner’s voice, highlighting the qualities that go about ‘signifyin(g)’ her as black. Implicit throughout all these essays is the predominant social ideal of white, middle-class women as the target to which to aspire. Fast recognises this in underlining Tina Turner’s transformation as her career progressed from an outrageous black woman to a blond bombshell-type performer, even having a nose job to appear whiter.

Visual appearance was also a major theme throughout *She’s So Fine*. Annie J Randall dealt with Dusty Springfield’s change from folk singer Mary O’Brien to the mod icon ‘White Queen of Soul’ and how her visual representation paralleled her rise in popularity. Jacqueline Warwick noted how the girl groups were expected to fit a certain artistic style, often employing wigs and matching dresses, as well as choreographed dance moves. The Supremes’ performed ‘Stop In the Name of Love’ with hand gestures and dancing that was often considered the epitome of this style. Similarly, Patricia Julian Smith noted the sartorial styles and visual appeal of the ‘female “Fab Four”’ of Britain – Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Sandie Shaw, and Lulu. The four women were variously wholesome, fashionable, fun, vulnerable and adolescent. Yet despite these images, or perhaps because of them, Smith claims these women were ‘pivotal figures in a transition of female pop stars from girls to women’ (138). The tension inherent in appearing both vulnerable and strong, wholesome and sexy, girlish and womanly all at the same time is considered aptly in Norma Coates’ essay on Marianne Faithful. Using Faithful’s autobiography as a main source for recollections into her image as an ethereal beauty, angelic and the height of English class, Coates deftly argues how the image of the artist was often more important than the actuality. These themes were mined in each essay of the collection, pinpointing the often precarious knife’s edge on which these women singers had to balance to be successful.

Despite these laudable tactics and the ambitious scope of the book to fill a gaping hole in the canon of popular music, its audience could be limited by two issues. The first revolves around some of the rather technical aspects of music theory, especially in Stras’ work.

For all but the musicologically inclined some phrases will sound incomprehensible. For example, Stras discusses the differences in vocal performances and uses musical scores to elucidate musical qualities associated with the singing. The second issue, in a way, ties directly into the first. Having a companion CD would enhance the experience of the reader, not only to follow along with the songs presented, but also to make the whole project *more* fun, rather than having to resort to finding the songs on the internet or hidden away on old albums.

These two minor critiques do not take away from the extraordinary work *She's So Fine* accomplishes. It skilfully lays down the groundwork for a new field of inquiry, and it manages to touch upon issues of femininity, class and adolescence, whilst the racial aspects could fill volumes. In her introduction, Stras points the way to future research, but the list is (sadly) incomplete. There is still much to discuss, not only in more depth on the singers raised in *She's So Fine*, but also other aspects of female musicianship. The book challenges the prevailing myths of a 1960s feminine ideal (especially in music) and provides the first step towards what will hopefully become a wider discourse on the subject.

**Sean F. McEnroe, *From Colony to Nationhood in Mexico: Laying the Foundations, 1560-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
x+252 pp.
ISBN 9781107006300.**

Charles Angelo*

From the time frame of this study alone, one can discern Sean McEnroe's 'primordialist' approach to the question of nationalism in

his intriguing work on the Mexican northeast.¹ McEnroe does not portray the emergence of a Mexican nation as a fundamentally modern act of creation, but rather a gradual course of development which stemmed from the start of the Tlaxcalan-Spanish alliance during the conquest. *From Colony to Nationhood in Mexico* investigates the colonial processes by which diverse ethnic and cultural groups (the northern Chichimecs, the Tlaxcalans, and the Spanish) were integrated into a larger network of citizenship, processes which made Mexico a plausible political unit by the early nineteenth century. McEnroe concludes that the Mexican national story is one of continuity, rather than a sharp break with the past: indeed, ‘...the new nation of Mexico was as much a fulfilment of colonial ambitions as a repudiation of them’ (220). This surprisingly ambitious conclusion is reached through a rigorous historical grounding in the local experience of state formation in Nuevo León.

From Bernal Diaz onwards, historians have emphasised the essential contribution of native groups to the conquest and colonization of the Americas. The attempt to create settlements north of the former Aztec Empire required a Tlaxcalan colonising effort, which worked independently and alongside the Spanish one. McEnroe devotes the first two-thirds of his book to an analysis of the ‘Tlaxcalan model’ for establishing societies in and around Nuevo León from the 1590s onwards. These communities, or *pueblos de indios*, were organised voluntarily (with encouragement from the viceregal authorities), and acted on the one hand as a font of Tlaxcalan political power, and on the other as a site of ‘settlement and acculturation for Chichimecs’, a broadly-named group of unsettled Indians in the north (37-49, quote 43). Indians outside the colonial structure were a pressing and violent problem, looting and impeding the development of towns on the frontier of New Spain. Through a series of negotiations and military

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¹ This is meant in a more nuanced sense than the suggestion of a simple search for what one could label proto-national identity at some point in the early-modern period (or before). For a useful background to the study of Mexican nationalism and nation-building see Knight, Alan, ‘Peasants into Patriots: Thoughts on the Making of the Mexican Nation’, *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (Winter, 1994), pp. 135-161, and for the ‘primordialist’ vs. ‘instrumentalist’ debate see pp. 139-149 specifically. See also Jacobson, Stephen, ‘The Head and the Heart of Spain’: New Perspectives on Nationalism and Nationhood’, *Social History*, Vol. 29, No. 3, (Aug., 2004), 393-407.

efforts (81-83), these Chichimecs increasingly settled in *pueblos de indios*, where they would be baptised, given plots of land, and taught farming and labouring methods by Tlaxcalans.

More than agricultural skills however, Indians developed an (imperial) cultural and political awareness in these *pueblos*. Chichimecs aped Tlaxcalan methods of representing themselves to the authorities, in order to gain some (or indeed, all) of the same political weight in the structures of the colony. In one of the best chapters of this work, McEnroe outlines this practice of ‘Becoming Tlaxcalan’ by examining lexicons of citizenship in official reports, correspondence and court records. The terms of settlement in Tlaxcalan-Chichimec towns were continually shifting as different groups of Indians sought to improve their land and water rights, as well as their taxation and political status. To do this, as Tlaxcalans had before them (33-55), more recent settlers articulated their value as faithful subjects (or vassals) to the Spanish crown. Indians utilised ‘Tlaxcalan political practices and legal discourse’ (116) to describe themselves in disputes over rights, emphasising their possession of desirable colonial traits and/or history of co-operation with the colonising mission. For instance, we learn that in 1750 when a group of Alasapas used litigation to defend a part of their estate, their testimony highlighted ‘the literacy of its leaders, the antiquity of its land claims, the religious orthodoxy of its population, and the military service of its men’ (100). From numerous testimonials like this, McEnroe argues that the long-term result of the *pueblos de indios* system was an increasing multi-ethnic participation in a common *civic* identity, based on shared interests (within local communities) in the formation of a colonial state.

That, in Nuevo León, state-formation was hindered by conditions of ‘near-continuous warfare’ (92) gave great significance to the issue of defence. The responsibility for securing the frontier fell primarily on the independent local militias that both Spanish towns and *pueblos de indios* could raise. McEnroe posits this military participation as one of the most important cultural features of colonial citizenship: not only did Chichimecs appeal to it in further differentiating themselves from the violent exterior (112-116), but service in the militias incorporated *both* the Spanish and Indian citizenry into organisations for a common civic cause. Militias grew along with the frontier towns, and their size and number increased rapidly during the period of the Bourbon reforms. As these organisations incorporated more and more people from wider

regions, individuals gained an awareness of themselves as part of a large community of citizen-soldiers. It is this consciousness, we are told, that helped pave the way for the imagined community of the Mexican nation.

However, McEnroe's chapter devoted to militias is a little unsatisfying in places. One desires more on exactly *how* membership of a militia shaped the subjectivities of the participants. An investigation into the day-to-day lives of these militiamen would make clearer the role their military service played in forging the identities and imagined communities that McEnroe convincingly demonstrates were created. Furthermore, it would have been interesting to see the author link his work to earlier studies of militias in nineteenth century Mexico, which highlight the struggles between the central and local authorities over the maintenance of an armed public force and what kind of shape it should take.²

This issue aside, the core of McEnroe's structural story of the 'Tlaxcalan model' of settlement with economic, political and military participation is a persuasive one. In spite of its name, the 'Tlaxcalan model' is presented as a *civic* system rather than an *ethnic* one, taking account of the cultural diversity which still existed in Mexican society in the 1800s, and still exists today. While groups of Chichimecs wanted to take up Tlaxcalan responsibilities and enjoy their privileges, they maintained their own ethnic identity within *pueblo de indios* to a large degree (108-111). This system thus transcended the Tlaxcalans themselves, first creating colonial identities, which later came to be expressed as Mexican ones. This is also an explanation of Mexican national development from the bottom-up, even though the *pueblo de indios* model was the type of settlement championed by the viceregal authorities (over the Spanish colonists' preferred *encomienda*-style *congregacion*, a form of pseudo-slavery). McEnroe interprets the efforts of central-government reformers like Francisco Barbardillo (86-87) as a process of recognition and codification of a system which had already been produced and re-produced, of its own volition, at the local level.

² See, for instance, Santoni, Pedro, 'A Fear of the People: the Civic Militia of Mexico in 1845', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 68, No. 2, (May, 1988), pp. 269-288 and Thomson, Guy P. C., 'Bulwarks of Patriotic Liberalism: The National Guard, Philharmonic Corps and Patriotic Juntas in Mexico, 1847-88', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (Feb., 1990), pp. 31-68.

This work is an excellent contribution to both the fields of Mexican history and, more broadly, studies of nationalism. McEnroe paints a detailed, vivid picture of the early-modern, colonial imagined community as an antecedent of, and a foundation to, the modern nation.

**Geof Rayner and Tim Lang,
*Ecological Public Health: Reshaping
the conditions for good health,*
(Abingdon and New York: Routledge,
2012). 432 pp.
ISBN 9781844078325.**

Sophie A. Greenway*

Interdisciplinarity in academia can be fraught, often richer in claim than substance. Having recently reviewed work by historians on communicating with public health practitioners, I was interested to note the extent to which history has been deployed by two social scientists in setting out their understanding of ecological public health. This award winning volume raises important questions for historians on the nature of interdisciplinary exchange and the extent of involvement in policy.¹ This review will concentrate on Rayner and Lang's handling of history. Their treatment of current political issues and alternative ecological systems of public health are the subject of reviews of a related essay by the same authors in the B.M.J.²

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¹ BMA Medical Book and Patient Information Awards 2013, Highly Commended in Public Health Category.

² Simon A. Reid, 'Re Ecological Public Health: The 21st Century's Big Idea?' *BMJ* 31st August 2012, Justin Varney, 'Re Ecological Public Health: The 21st

The standard model of history as background to public health practice can be seen in Christopher Hamlin's initial chapter in the *Oxford Textbook of Public Health*.³ Virginia Berridge has worked to improve links between history and public health, founding the Centre for History in Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 2003, publishing in medical journals on benefits and problems of communication between historians and public health practitioners and with Martin Gorsky and Alex Mold, *Public Health in History*.⁴ Presented as a textbook, this latter volume gives an accessible introduction for practitioners to historical methods such as interpretation and use of sources, and proposes that the methodological gulf between historians and public health practitioners can be traversed through clear presentation by historians. In an article written for historians, Berridge is rather dismissive of social scientists: 'Historical facts are thrown into analyses as "context" or background'.⁵ In this article, Berridge discusses social policy researchers as 'outside' the 'historical field' and speaks of the need for historians to remain in control of historical interpretation. In my opinion, Rayner and Lang have shown in *Ecological Public Health* that social scientists can possess and utilise a thorough understanding of history.

Rayner and Lang include interdisciplinarity as an ideal for public health, in contrast to multidisciplinary, which they see as allowing old medical hierarchies to persist. 'Ecological Public Health' is not presented as a textbook, but more an argument for a new public health that, by definition, involves everyone. The publisher's classifications are 'health and nutrition, ecology, sociology/ geography and politics'. History is not mentioned despite its being fundamental to the argument of the book. The use of history within 'Ecological Public Health' could be described as integrative, in that it crops up in virtually all their explanations of public health definitions and systems. Further, the use of history is fundamental to their argument

Century's Big Idea?' *BMJ* 1st September 2012, Piyush Pushkar, 'Re: Ecological Public Health: The 21st Century's Big Idea?' *BMJ* 5th September 2012.

³ Roger Detels et. al. *Oxford Textbook of Public Health* (Oxford, 2004) 4th ed.

⁴ Virginia Berridge and Martin Gorsky, 'The Importance of the past in Public Health', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 2004, Vol. 58, pp. 728-729. Virginia Berridge, Martin Gorsky, and Alex Mold, *Public Health in History*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2011).

⁵ Virginia Berridge, 'Public or Policy Understanding of History?' in *Social History of Medicine*, 16(3), (2003), pp. 511-523.

that public health needs to be viewed in the long term, in terms of ‘sustainable solutions’ rather than ‘quick fixes’.⁶ In this sense, history is deployed as a political tool, the argument being that an understanding of the long term past of public health will foster an appreciation of the need to secure a sustainable future.

There are moments of weakness in the handling of historical argument, where Rayner and Lang demonstrate a misapprehension of the role of the historian. They explain Hamlin’s point that Chadwick’s ‘Sanitary-Environmental model’ had attended to the ‘remedial conditions of the environment’ but ignored the ‘crumbling constitutions of poor persons’.⁷ Rayner and Lang claim Hamlin implies that a ‘more individually oriented, medically based approach might have provided a better solution’. I couldn’t follow up Hamlin’s exact quotation, as Rayner and Lang’s page reference appears to be incorrect, however, given their awareness of the McKeown thesis shown elsewhere in the volume, I was surprised by their suggestion that the only solution was medical rather than economic, or indeed that Hamlin was suggesting any solution at all.⁸

Apart from isolated exceptions, Rayner and Lang have used history very effectively, but for a specific purpose. Their early chapters deal with images, definitions and models of public health, all building towards the proposal of their vision of ecological public health. The authors’ historical understanding contributes to their case, such as their awareness of historians’ possible over-caution at ‘heroisation’ of public health achievements and of George Rosen’s omission of the accommodation of the US public health system to racial oppression in ‘A History of Public Health’. The persistent message is of the complexity of history and therefore of life. Does the fact that this use of history is contributing to a political argument make it a wrong use of history?

As an historian, I am pleased to see a social science book using history in such a multi-layered and thoughtful way, but I find the switches into the present rather jarring, such as the discussion of the 1920’s definition of public health by Edward Winslow (1877-1957): ‘Compared to these modern attempts to define public health,

⁶ Geof Rayner and Tim Lang, *Ecological Public Health : Reshaping the Conditions for Good Health*, (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 100.

⁷ Geof Rayner and Tim Lang, *Ecological Public Health*, (Abingdon, 2012) p. 73.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.89-90.

Winslow's 1920's definition appears the more satisfying. It has content, it draws upon his own working situation and knowledge'.⁹ This is a difficult issue for historians, seen in Franklin Ginn's objection to the 'partial and selective' use of the history of the Dig for Victory campaign of World War Two by both environmentalists and the Conservative Party.¹⁰ Does the discussion of the present jar simply because no historian would overtly attempt it without qualifications and the urging of caution? If we accept that all historical writing is subjective, is there anything wrong with using historical examples as a basis for action? Perhaps the evidence of this book supports greater involvement by historians in policy, as they are best placed to secure the past against misinterpretation. I would like to suggest that we celebrate Rayner and Lang's work which proves that other disciplines are engaging with history, and that, if historians in turn engage with them, there are fruitful debates to be had on the nature both of history and of progress.

⁹ Ibid., p.47.

¹⁰ Franklin Ginn, 'Dig for Victory! New Histories of Wartime Gardening in Britain', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 38 (2012).

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