Enchanted and Disenchanted Violence

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter develops one of the central ideas of *At the Violet Hour*: that conceptualizing and writing about violence has for the last century been organized around the dichotomous paradigms of “enchanted” and “disenchanted” violence. Enchanted violence is defined as an approach to violence that stresses its transformative value; disenchanted violence insists on its unredeemability. Taking especially powerful form in the early twentieth century, these opposed principles are perhaps most resonant when they come close to one another (around the image of blood, for instance, or in the prospect of the drowned body). The first half of the chapter offers a cultural and literary history of these principles, discussing such diverse discourses and writers as Anthropology, Classicism, Photography, Georges Sorel, Rene Girard, Franz Fanon, Virginia Woolf, English WWI poets, Ernest Friedrich, and Jean Norman Cru. The second half offers a reading of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* as perhaps the most elaborate and exquisite example of a literary work shaped around the double (and irreconcilable) motifs of enchanted and disenchanted violence.

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There is magic in death. But there is also emptiness and finality in death. When death is violent, both its awesomeness and its meaninglessness increase. And if it is viewed as undeserved, it is asked to signify even more powerfully—or to admit its radical lack of significance. Thus, the ultimate story of magical transformation in Christian culture is the crucifixion/resurrection story, where unmerited, violent death yields nothing less than the promise of an afterlife and the salvation of mankind, while the ultimate expression of bleak emptiness comes in the extermination camp, where death is indiscriminate and the possibility of apotheosis foreclosed. These polarizing perceptions of violent death as either the fuel for generativity or the emblem of grotesque loss reach far and wide across Western culture, and they interfuse the literary field. I will call these modes “enchanted” and “disenchanted,” and I offer them as central principles around which literary engagements with violence have tended to cluster. Historically, it has been war that most powerfully calls forth these dichotomized understandings of violent death: as a sign and precipitator of sublimity (in a person, community, or nation) or, conversely, as a sign and precipitator of total degeneration and waste. This dichotomy carried special urgency in the first decades of the twentieth century, in part because of the power of the First World War in shaping the aesthetic consciousness, and writers of all political tendencies tended to filter expressions of violence through the enchanted-disenchanted lens.

Enchantment and disenchantment can be read as theories of violence that helped to structure the literary output of the modernist years, and as such they are the locus for a potent political imaginary, including feminist and antimilitarist stances, as well as nationalist ideals and a language of elevated militarism. Yet we need to be clear in demarcating politics from enchanted or disenchanted violence. These are overlapping but not coterminous categories; to create an artifice of enchanted violence is as basic to revolution as it is to conservative or fascist militancy and can contribute to radical left as well as to radical right programs. Moreover, much in the literary project of enchantment elaborates a very basic and important writerly function, which is not inherently politicized: to provide beauty and imaginative release where there is brutality and suffering. Healing, enriching, creating memorable visual forms to capture terrible realities—such operations have always helped to define the literary mission. Literature stands right in the center of the cultural history of violence; enchantment and disenchantment, as dominant binary categories that guide this important and complex relationship, are perhaps most compelling when least explicitly political.
I have two primary goals for this chapter. One is to set up a basic imaginative structure around violence, providing a vocabulary and usage to which I will return throughout the book; the other is to suggest that war incites this structure of thinking in especially polarizing terms, and that this has significant consequences for how the literary output of modernity (riven by wars) has been read. Of all the literary works that swivel on the axis of enchanted and disenchanted violence, none is more fully invested in these principles than T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. A complex iteration of the paradigm, the poem showcases, too, how spectacularly war creates a fertile field for imagining art as a legacy of enchanted and disenchanted violence. *The Waste Land* reaches deeply into both traditions; indeed, its mixture and merger of the two modes demonstrates how subtly their aesthetic strategies can interpenetrate, even as they profess to stand, defiantly, as firm ideological antagonists. In fact, as *The Waste Land* indicates, the aesthetic slips easily across enemy lines—something like Isaac Rosenberg’s queer sardonic rat—touching, as it were, both enchanted and disenchanted bodies.
Max Weber provides a touchstone for these concepts, with his compelling assertion that the modern world had, by the nineteenth century, become thoroughly disenchanted. The disenchantment of the world, a concept loosely borrowed from Friedrich Schiller and articulated in a variety of lectures and essays, refers to the large-scale diminishment of sacredness that, for Weber, was a product of industrial modernity. As scientific rationalism and commodity materialism take the place of spiritual vibrancy, the organization of life across a range of institutions and practices squeezes out even the residue of any living spiritual presence. The rationalizations enacted by capitalism, the ascendancy of mass culture, bureaucracy, the rise (p.41) of professionalism, and the scientific episteme—all contribute to this denuding of the magical, spiritual, and divine from modern existence. Ironically, the disenchantment of the world is in part a result of organized religion itself (Judeo-Christianity), which Weber sees as fundamentally aligned with a modernity it might seem to counter. Weber’s idea, which has recently enjoyed a resurgence of interest and lively debate across scholarly disciplines, represents an early iteration of what has become, in the last fifty years, a more sustained attack on the Enlightenment, in this case on its consequences for spiritual fulfillment. Weber need not be right; as Akeel Bilgrami has recently shown, the Weberian notion that the Enlightenment at some necessary level involved a disanimation of the natural world might in fact represent a misreading of the history. Bilgrami argues that at the center of the Enlightenment itself, there was a dissenting empirical consensus that saw no need to prescribe an incompatibility between scientific principles and the presence of enchanting value in the natural world. Nevertheless, the idea that for the last two hundred years an ongoing battle has raged between a world understood in terms of potential incarnation and one whose logic is imagined in purely rationalist terms, succinctly captured in Weber’s language of disenchantment, has held abiding explanatory power.
In this iteration of modernity, literary history has an important part to play. Since the end of the eighteenth century, literature has been tenaciously engaged with the whole question of what kind of intangible, inspiring potency inheres in the world, often filtering these questions through the aesthetic consciousness, and often setting up implicit or explicit binaries between spiritual richness and that which is bereft. It should be clear, however, that literature works both sides of the line; it can register and promulgate both enchanted and disenchanted visions of the modern world. Thus, a whole swath of literary forms might be said to perpetuate the secular individualism that Weber called disenchantment—in the form, for instance, of the novelistic realism critiqued by Lukács in his famous attack on the modern novel. Equally clearly, the literary impulse would seem to stand against modernity’s large-scale disenchantments, doing its part to reanimate the world through, for instance, the artist’s special sensibility or the power imputed to the work of art to transcend the material world, figured as diminished, deadening and mechanical. As Paul Fry proclaims, “the history of lyric and of defense of poetry is one long proclamation that poetry is verbal magic.” In this latter (Neoplatonic) narrative of art reaching beyond the ordinary world to a sphere radiating with the spark of the divine, there are two obvious high points in England: the Romanticism of the early nineteenth century (“Be thou, Spirit fierce/My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!” sings Shelley) and the early twentieth century, when, under the sign of modernism, the “natural supernaturalism” of the English lake poets took residence among the cosmopolitan spirit-seekers of London, Paris, and other metropolises.
Modernism, in particular, has seemed especially amenable to a narrative of (re)enchantment, well represented by such varied phenomena as Yeats’s occultism; Eliot’s celebration of Frazer, Weston, et al.; E. M. Forster’s Eastern idealizations; D. H. Lawrence’s theories of primal sexuality; and surrealism’s investigation of the unconscious mind as source of creativity and transgression. Historians have pointed, moreover, to the fact that the unorthodox fantasies of reanimation often associated with modernism were not limited to an eccentric and elite sphere of aesthetes and intellectuals but spread across a wide public spectrum. In her study of the occult at the turn of the century, Alex Owen claims that “the new ‘spiritual movement’ of which occultism was such a salient part was itself indicative of the continued relevance of spirituality for many thousands of people,” and, even more forcefully, that “occultism was constitutive of modern culture at the fin de siècle.” In the case of the First World War period, when novel forms of spiritualism again became faddish, historians such as Jay Winter have persuasively argued that these attempts to make otherworldly connections with the dead, like the broader commemorative activities developing in those years, represented a genuinely widespread desire, felt across the culture and in all the warring nations, to find new and satisfying religious practices to allay and assuage the grief of war. Highbrow and mainstream, occultish and cultish, literary and popular: it seems that reenchantment was a burgeoning enterprise in the first decades of the century.
When we add violence to this story, the idea of enchantment becomes especially animating, productive, and surprising, but we need to change the meanings to a certain degree. In the ordinary dichotomy, disenchantment is an emblem of secular modernization and is almost always presented as a negative, a signifier for loss. What “disenchantment” will mean, in my configuration, is not a passive recognition of spiritual flatness, but the active stripping away of idealizing principles, an insistence that the violated body is not a magic site for the production of culture. “Enchantment” will refer, most succinctly, to the tendency to see in violence some kind of transformative power. If we return momentarily to the pattern that emerged in the pandying episode in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, we recall that the beating caused a dual action, a simultaneous contracting inward, revealing a dynamic of bodily pain and developing shame, and a movement outwards to the extensive and abstract, revealing shapes of power. In the language of enchantment, a similar pattern can be discerned. On one hand, there is a strong impulse, in literary accounts of violence, to strip language down to its most bodily and elemental forms, to insist on the resonant presence of bodily experience: disenchantment. On the other hand, when the desire for spiritual plenitude meets the facts of historical violence, there is an equal and opposite tendency to enchant violence, to see it as the germinating core of rich, symbolic structures. To enchant, in this sense, is to imbue the violent experience with symbolic and cultural potency; to disenchant is to refuse that structure, to insist on the bare, forked existence of the violated being, bereft of symbol, and expressing only a regretful beauty. Enchantment, in this account, might sound like myth, but there are important differences. Myth, even in its loosest usage, requires some kind of developed iteration; in order to find myth, one must have at least the suggestion of narrative structures that can be reproduced and developed. While enchanted violence often comes encased in mythic structures and stories, it is different in that it can be the product of a mere moment, of a fleeting impression or sense.

Enchantment would seem exuberantly aesthetic, disenchantment only unwillingly so, but as we look closely at them, we find, instead, that each draws on long literary traditions, and each demonstrates ambivalence about its own status in relation to violence. Enchanted violence relies primarily on metaphors of growth and germination; it steers as clear of the violated body as it can. And yet its attachment to the metaphor of blood—to give just one example—draws it back toward the warmth of physicality. Indeed, blood is perhaps the central metaphor for both enchanted and disenchanted modes; they come together via its associative magnetism. Elaine Scarry has commented forcefully on the status of blood and the injured body in transforming violence into meaning. War, Scarry argues, relies for its power on:
... the mining of the ultimate substance, the ultimate source of substantiation, the extraction of the physical basis of reality from its dark hiding place in the body out into the light of day, the making available of the precious ore of confirmation, the interior content of human bodies, lungs, arteries, blood, brains, the mother lode that will eventually be reconected to the winning issue....

Whether or not one agrees with Scarry’s claim that war gains its exceptional status from the mysterious properties of the body’s displayed interior, her idea that the injured body represents “the precious ore of confirmation”—that which allows for deeply held beliefs to be developed and changed—resonates for both enchanted and disenchanted models of violence. If death, or killing, or even the gruesomely injured flesh does carry the radical power to confer meaning, neither enchantment nor disenchantment can be expected to forego it. Enchantment loves the (p.44) metaphor of blood; disenchantment calls upon the hurt body, with its signal fluid, to remind us of its reality and frightfulness. Flesh, wounds, penetration: these provide the core figures for disenchantment, which resists the temptation to see transformation in death. Yet beauty it does find, and, as with blood, it is not always possible to separate a disenchanted state of awe at these terrors from an enchanted desire to make that awe culturally productive. In short, there are two proud positions, enchanted and disenchanted violence—both of which found exemplary articulations in the modernist period, both of which spoke to and for the culture in influential and significant terms—but there is an overlapping field of literary figures and cultural value, and the possibility of some arresting forms of miscegenation. Modernism, when put to the test, exemplifies this miscegenational idea, its very essence profoundly shaped by the mixing of the two systems of imagining violence.

In its most stark and direct guise, the notion of enchantment, understood as a form of generative violence, underlies nearly all forms of militarism. Weber himself seems to make an exception to his disenchantment theory when it comes to war:

As the consummated threat of violence among modern polities, war creates a pathos and a sentiment of community. War thereby makes for an unconditionally devoted and sacrificial community among the combatants and releases an active mass compassion and love for those who are in need. And, as a mass phenomenon, these feelings break down all the naturally given barriers of association. In general, religions can show comparable achievements only in heroic communities professing an ethic of brotherliness.
Moreover, war does something to the warrior which, in its concrete meaning, is unique: it makes him experience a consecrated meaning of death which is characteristic only of death in war ... Death on the field of battle differs from this merely avoidable dying in that in war, and in this massiveness only in war, the individual can believe that he knows he is dying “for” something. The why and the wherefore of his facing death can, as a rule, be so indubitable for him that the problem of the “meaning” of death does not even occur to him. (Weber, 335, emphasis in original)

These lines are striking only insofar as they come from Weber. In other respects, they virtually codify the general premise of war enchantment: that in the peculiar conditions of war, violent death is transformed into something positive, communal, perhaps even sacred. Indeed, it has never been possible in the West to imagine war without some promise of transcendence developing out of bodily privation. Thus the task for war’s supporters—given the pronounced fact of its gruesome attack on the body—cannot be to evade violence; it must be to find terms for revaluing it.

Instead of denying its often hideous bodily ramifications, champions of war in the twentieth century have often made the destroyed body itself the fulcrum for militarist and nationalist appeals. Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier” (1914), with its metaphorics of a germinative body both constituting and enlarging the national reach, offers a canonical, English case in point:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed...¹⁶
The poem could galvanize the national consciousness in part because it drew very poignantly on the generative ideal—the “rich” dust of France made “richer” by the inseminating English body—at a time when the country was perhaps looking not just for an icon (Brooke certainly filled that role) but also for a language that would frame the war’s oncoming violence in terms of fruitfulness. Brooke’s poem is complex and melancholy rather than simplistic and brutal (as it is sometimes misrepresented to be), yet it nevertheless manifests a wider pattern that sees the dead soldier as, in effect, the germination for a renewed nation. Victorian and Edwardian culture had always imagined war as a testing ground for masculinity and heroic character. During and after the war, the dead body became increasingly central to that story. In Germany, most notably, the construct took on new life in the 1920s, with the figure of the dead soldier providing a centerpiece in the iconography of sacrifice and revival that underwrote the fascist appeal. More broadly, one central lesson from the years of both Nazi and Soviet rule is how skillfully the most violent regimes can manipulate and expand the cult of generative violence, as the creation of an aesthetics of mass violence is put into the service of ever more violence and control. The model of the dead body as fuel for regeneration has thus often been marshaled for destructive political and nationalist ends. At the same time, in the modernist period, it also overlapped with other, less aggressive theories of culture and violence, such as those emerging under the rubric of anthropology.
Both Sigmund Freud and James Frazer, to name two important figures, argued that to understand the beginnings of religion, social hierarchy, and (for Freud) psychic processes, one must return to scenes of violence, which function as the foundation stones for cultural development. For Freud, in such works as Totem (p.46) and Taboo (1913) and Moses and Monotheism (1937), what is perhaps most surprising is the sense of immediacy he lends to these imagined origins. Thus he writes that “the Christian communion,” which he depicts as a pantomimic reiteration of an initial patricide, “is essentially a fresh elimination of the father, a repetition of the guilty deed.”

Past violence is both dead and alive, forgotten and relived, as Freud sees a strong affective connection between a violent past shrouded in centuries of myth and denial and a ritualized present that brings these buried deeds into flourishing presence. Moses and Monotheism, a quite outlandish text, makes its case for a reinterpretation of the Exodus narrative by imagining that the Moses of the Bible is really an amalgamation of two Moses figures, the first of whom was killed by the Jews. In their act of violent revolt, they threw off the Mosaic tyranny, but later, feeling remorse, they reinstated their former leader via the Exodus tradition. Even at the precise moment when communal, national, and religious identity is being solidified, Freud thus argues, what lies beneath these formations is an old murder. The fact that cultures deliberately erase their most shameful violent acts, even as they construct themselves out of the residue of such violence, forms a basic premise of Freud’s argument about the dramatic creation of robust religious and cultural traditions.

Totem and Taboo has a similar, if more generalized, story line. Here Freud claims that the totem represents a developed iteration of an absolutely primal, formative act, the ceremonial meal in which the brothers eat the father whom they have banded together to kill. The primitive brothers rebel against the authority of the father, making the decision to murder and consume him in order to absorb and appropriate his power:

The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind’s earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things—of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion. (Freud, TT, 176)
Of course, such accrual of power cannot be achieved without a price; the murder and its ritualized aftermath become the fuel not only for a whole system of clan organization but also for guilt, and this guilt, in turn, yields a wealth of cultural consequences. In sum, “Society was now based on complicity in the common crime; religion was based on the sense of guilt and the remorse attaching to it; (p.47) while morality was based partly on the exigencies of this society and partly on the penance demanded by the sense of guilt” (TT, 181).

As if this were not enough by way of residue, Freud also argues that the originary murder and its ritual meal left artistic legacies. For Freud, no deep, important event of a traumatizing nature can occur without becoming buried in layers of transformative repression, and this process of embedding and sublimating becomes the fuel for multiple aesthetic outcomes. Most notable as an artistic retelling of the primal murder is Greek tragedy, especially its preclassical manifestations. Freud’s account of the earliest Greek tragedies, and of the evolution of the form, leaves the primal murder as a dark burial ground on top of which the players operate, themselves enacting often terrible crimes which stand in for the original patricide. Even in archaic drama, that is, Freud sees a dynamic exchange between a sense of horrified guilt and a payoff in the form of aesthetic sublimity. For all the murderousness, guilt, pain, and urgent retelling involved in these transactions, that is, Freud argues that joy plays an equal part in the legacy of the primal horde. The ritual feast is a celebration as much as a memorial, a sign of death regretted but also of rejoicing in the tyrant’s fall, and this quality of “ambivalence,” to use Freud’s term, marks the many examples he believes can be discovered in modern culture.
However eccentric Freud’s fiction of the brothers killing and consuming the
father is, not to mention his retelling of the Exodus saga, these notions
nevertheless accord with those of more established cultural anthropologists, like
Frazer, whom Freud and others of the modernist period treated as authorities. For Frazer in The Golden Bough (1890), the resurrection becomes one example of what he argues is a worldwide and historically extensive phenomenon of spring rites that ingrain and ritualize narratives of past killing. When translated into human, cultural terms, such ceremonies tend to generate recognizable patterns, elaborate, often pantomimic practices that resemble one another, despite local particularities. These narratives—the crucifixion and resurrection story; the rituals Frazer associates with Adonis and other analogous god figures; the father and the horde—are tales not only of cyclical death and rebirth but, more concisely, of murder. Given the wealth of detail that Frazer accumulates in The Golden Bough, it is easy to overlook the rather startling fact that his study is an argument, at its core, for murder as the primary cultural deed. And in Jesse Weston’s Frazerian work From Ritual to Romance (1920), famous today because of the noisy reference Eliot made to it in The Waste Land, she argues that the Grail legend derives from archaic practices of life-worship. Weston, like Frazer, emphasizes the bodily quality of the injured king, the blood from his wound leaking into the ground, and the way the structure of the Grail enacts and makes symbolic the often harsh, physical features of the ancient vegetative myths. Georges Bataille, too, contributes to the enchanting tradition in anthropology, in a career-long investigation of the interpenetration and mutuality of death and sexual desire. In his final work, The Tears of Eros, he returns (inevitably, even compulsively) to origins, finding in the strange wall drawings in the prehistoric Lascaux caves in France a story that, for him, will never really change over the millennia, that death and violence are the partners of sex and ecstasy, a conjunction that he sees unfurling, for instance, in a large swath of Christian painting and sculpture. These are all stories of a primal violence, very striking first for the physicality with which they are endlessly renarrated, and second for the vivid forms of compensatory ceremony that attend them. Whether in figurations of Jesus slowly dying as he hangs on the cross, a trenchant feature of Western iconography (to be supplemented by martyrs like Saint Sebastian); in songs and sculptures of Adonis’s body pierced and bleeding; or in Freud’s fiction of the father being ingested by his sons, these images emphasize a suspended bodily torture and/or a reabsorption of the murdered body into a new body politic.
If comparative anthropologists like Frazer, Weston, and Freud establish their world theories as a ground soaked in blood, many of the classical scholars of the period were equally interested in excavating a violent subtext to the familiar classical tradition. Greek drama, as even the most cursory familiarity will suggest, is utterly consumed with hyperbolically violent deeds and consequences, and it is not coincidental that a number of the most influential theorists of generative violence in the twentieth century (such as Bataille and René Girard) took Greek drama as its purest expressive form. From Homer to Euripides, the literary history of Greece manifestly tells a tale of the most brutal physical and psychic limits to which humans can be pressed. Thus it is surprising that in the nineteenth century, the Greeks were often imagined as cool and refined, representatives of the pinnacle of civilization—in aesthetics, emblems of symmetry and grace; in politics, of democracy and rationality; in philosophy, of idealism and the quest for perfection. It was, in a sense, the goal of early-twentieth-century classicists to unsettle this benign image by bringing into focus a more confused, archaic picture of Greek religion and art as a legacy of far older, murkier traditions. Jane Harrison and her colleague Gilbert Murray at Cambridge, for instance, helped to reignite interest in Greek culture and history precisely because they offered up a picture of the Greeks as a product of Asiatic and Egyptian influences, matrilineal traditions, chthonic gods, and a certain strange otherness in conflict with the Olympian order that, in their view, would only belatedly (and tenuously) come to dominate the Greek consciousness. Over the course of several volumes on Greek religion and art, Harrison in particular created an image of the Olympian pantheon as a messy amalgamation of earlier, often foreign influences, a kind of temporary hold on the sprawling, changing, and mysterious terrain of divine/human interaction. And we might note that Nietzsche, too, a very different kind of classicist, stressed the power of Dionysian excess over controlled aesthetic effects, of violence and brute reckonings over perfection and tranquility. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), where he makes his case against the values that the nineteenth century had ascribed to Greek culture—the Apollonian virtues, as he dubs them—Nietzsche elevates instead the sheer terror of the human reckoning with violence and death. Nietzschean theory was, for all its eccentricity, of its moment, tending toward the revelation of violence as the critical ingredient in understanding and appreciating the aesthetic sublimity of the ancient world.
Occupying a rather different place in the cultural landscape from late-nineteenth-century classicists and anthropologists—but indebted to similar theoretical models of violence—are a host of revolutionary thinkers, from anarchists (see chapter 2) to Irish insurrectionists (see chapter 3) to syndicalists. Here, we might consider just one emblematic case. Georges Sorel wrote on a variety of political topics throughout his life, but particularly germane here is his book-length *Reflections on Violence* (1908, first English translation 1914), a work which has recently experienced a critical revival, in part for its newly appreciated influence on English modernism. Mobilized, like many French socialists, during the Dreyfus Affair, Sorel was an activist in a range of causes, and one of the foremost voices for the syndicalist movement in France in the early years of the century. Above all, Sorel is remembered for promoting, as one intellectual biographer puts it, a “cult of violence.” Sorel believed in the power of myth in guiding and ennobling the violent overthrow of the oppressive state. Above all, in the first decade of the century, when *Reflections on Violence* was written, it was the general strike that Sorel most effusively championed. The strike held mythic connotations and powers for Sorel—indeed it was itself a form of myth, “a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by Socialism against modern society”—portending the first jolt that would inaugurate the destruction of the capitalist state. As he puts it in his “Apology for Violence,” a coda to *Reflections on Violence*, added in 1913:

> The conception of the general strike, engendered by the practice of violent strikes, admits the conception of an irrevocable overthrow. There is something terrifying in this which will appear more and more terrifying as violence takes a greater place in the mind of the proletariat. But, in undertaking a serious, formidable, and sublime work, Socialists raise themselves above our frivolous society and make themselves worthy of pointing out new roads to the world. (Sorel, 298-99)

Sorel is especially revealing here for his use of terms like “sublime” and “make themselves worthy,” notions that align him with the Enlightenment history against which his work would seem to stand, but, more to the point, suggest a spirit of enchanting. It is violence that will render the overthrow sublime, transforming its participants.
Yet all forms of violence are not equal in Sorel’s estimation; specifically, Sorel defines a type of oppressive action that comes from the top, which he calls “force,” and which he distinguishes from working-class violence. Sorelian force differs from Weil’s, though both writers want to convey by it a sense of the enormous power the governing few can wield to terrify the citizenry. For Sorel, force belongs to the state—it is the pure power of modern governments, backed by the police, the military, the press, wealth—while violence belongs to those who rebel, the workers, the people, the strikers. “I think it would be better,” he writes, “to adopt a terminology which would give rise to no ambiguity, and that the term violence should be employed only for acts of revolt; we should say, therefore, that the object of force is to impose a certain social order in which the minority governs, while violence tends to the destruction of that order” (Sorel 195, italics in original). Sorel’s notion of a malign force emanating from the state stands uneasily next to his contemporary Max Weber’s view, which is that the state is founded upon its entitlement to violence. As Weber wrote in 1915, “The state is an association that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, and cannot be defined in any other manner” (italics in original). Sorel’s dichotomizing of violence and force provides an interesting counterposition to this seemingly neutral, descriptive claim, insofar as it represents a contemporary theory for imbuing violence—in its very essence—with positive attributes, the resort of the disempowered in the face of power; it is necessarily defensible, even heroic. This is a generalized violence, an essential element in the revolutionary process. In this sense, Sorel downplays the role of the individual, concentrating on the broad scope of the general strike and the struggle between force and violence; this is the action of the galvanized masses. Even without the individually lauded or martyred figure, violence itself can be framed as heroic; it is not only a method but also a symbol for the empowerment of the oppressed and the seismic social and economic changes that radical movements of the period sought to manifest. We might think of Sorel’s distinction between the force of the state and the violence of its rebels as a way of encoding, within the context of class struggle, a measure of enchantment into the very concept of violence. (p.51) At the same time, Sorel’s eventual move in the direction of fascism, and the very easy absorption of his ideas into fascist rhetoric in the 1920s and ’30s, demonstrates how smooth the move from left to right can be, without significantly altering the adherence to a generative violence defined in mystified terms.
Even this brief overview should, I hope, give a sense of the varied nature of the modernist-era investment in the principle of generative violence, an appeal that has not been limited to the early twentieth century. If later scholars have tended to distance themselves from predecessors like Frazer and Freud (at least in his anthropological guise), and also from the rhetoric of figures like Sorel, we can nevertheless detect close convergences, in the conviction, especially, that cultures cannot do without violence. For critics late and early in the century, what makes violence generative, rather than purely destructive or utilitarian, is the form in which it becomes symbolic. In *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), indeed, Girard argues that cultures depend on violence for their defining narratives and structures. Cultures do not banish violence so much as attempt to control it—to direct it away, via ritual, from their own inner workings and toward specified and containable targets. “The function of ritual,” Girard writes, “is to ‘purify’ violence; that is, to ‘trick’ violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals,” or, in slightly different terms, “Ritual is nothing more than the regular exercise of ‘good’ violence” (Girard, 36, 37). The concept of reprisal is at the center of Girard’s argument, since what for him defines a stable, living community is its ability to cut off reprisal, to stem the otherwise overwhelming flow of vengeance. Yet such redirecting of dangerous and potentially endless acts of violence is always precarious; “the sacrificial crisis,” as Girard names the moment when the distinction between controlled and uncontrolled violence becomes blurred, is always proximate. In reprisal, then, the dichotomies dividing Sorelian enchanted violence from a nonenchantable idea of force disappear.
We might envision the situation Girard describes as a shaky balance between a culture on the brink of limitless bloodshed—as all ordering forces and principles break down, the flood of vicious reprisal unable to be stemmed—and a culture holding back these waves of destruction, creating bulwarks through narrative, ritual, and other ordering forms. So myth, for instance, is born: “Myths are the retrospective transfiguration of sacrificial crises, the reinterpretation of these crises in the light of the cultural order that has arisen from them” (Girard, 64). Tragedy, which mimes and dissects the sacrificial crisis, is another product, its formal structures of antagonism enfolding the back-and-forth nature of reciprocal violence, a dramatization in language of the overwhelming trouble of nondifferentiable violence. And especially, sacredness itself, as it accrues precisely to a violence that (p.52) remains both hidden and, in redirected form, lavishly on view: “violence,” Girard writes, “is the heart and secret soul of the sacred” (Girard, 31). Indeed, he goes so far as to assert the converse—“Any phenomenon associated with the acts of remembering, commemorating, and perpetuating a unanimity that springs from the murder of a surrogate victim can be termed ‘religious’” (Girard, 315)—arguing, in essence, that it is only in the connection to primal violence that we can find religion’s defining features. Girard frames his argument around premodern cultures, yet parallel claims with an overtly political cast would also be made by revolutionary theorists like Frantz Fanon. Fanon’s account of colonial and anticolonial violence—though very much of its moment in the 1950s and early 1960s—nevertheless reflects on the power of enchanting violence more generally. It points backward as insightfully as it points forward.
In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon’s most influential and celebrated work, violence is the catalyst for the imagined postcolonial order in many important respects—not only practically (“for the colonized, violence represents the absolute praxis”), but also imaginatively and psychologically. As he writes at the outset of his polemic “On Violence,” which opens *The Wretched of the Earth*, “decolonization is always a violent event,” because colonization itself is a matter of absolute violence from its initial encounter, and is “continued at the point of the bayonet and under cannon fire” (note the bayonet again, here in one of most frequently quoted lines in *The Wretched of the Earth* [Fanon, 1, 2]). Violence spawns violence: this is the law of colonial history, and it is this symmetry of mimetic violence that most consistently characterizes Fanon’s analysis. The law of the colonial structure, built on the Manichean divide, is a logic of division and of usurpation; hence it engenders a similar mode in its counterforms, as the colonized draws close, in his aspirations and in his methods, to the colonizer. Fanon repeatedly addresses this Hegelian scheme of parallelism: “The violence of the colonial regime and the counterviolence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity” (Fanon, 46). Fanon creates his own prose rhythm out of this oscillating and dialectical structure, in a sense encoding into its cadences the essence of reprisal (a stylistics also employed by Yeats, forty years earlier).
Of course, Fanon’s emphasis on violence at the crux of revolution seems nearly tautological;\(^29\) what I want to stress here is the way the theory of anticolonial violence is linked with a more psychological, or even spiritual, image of generativity. Problematically embedded in a masculinist perspective, Fanon places anticolonial violence at the crux of colonial selfhood, or, more properly, colonial masculinity.\(^30\) “[T]he dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams,” he writes, “dreams of (p.53) action, dreams of aggressive vitality” (Fanon, 15). Throughout his writings, Fanon was interested in desire, agony, and fantasy, indeed in all things that make one a fully realized person, formed in many cases by the distorting political conditions of empire.\(^31\) Here, he moves quickly past dreaming, as the former victim of violence regains his autonomy and dignity through the infliction of violence against his oppressors: “The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence”; and, again, “At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence” (Fanon, 44, 51). It is this claim about how violence restores and rejuvenates the humanity of the oppressed that represents one of Fanon’s most exuberant convictions. Indeed, the infectious, celebratory quality of his rhetoric about the power of violence to remake history, culture, and the individual might be viewed as a signature not only for Fanon but for any theory of generative violence.\(^32\) The fact that there is something deeply paradoxical in all of this—only violence allows for the undoing of the cycle of violence; one finds one’s humanity in antihuman acts—is not actually all that surprising (though for Woolf in the 1930s, its logic is devastating). As Bataille renders it, back to the caves: “… in these closed depths a paradoxical accord is signed…”\(^33\)
The move from Frazer to Fanon marks a broad sweep across the spectrum of enchanted violence, but the terms are elastic. War, especially, calls up the model of enchantment—though, as the above examples suggest, generative violence tends, perhaps inexorably, in universalizing directions. It is a sensibility whose strength and resilience comes from this ability to traverse discrepant events and circumstances. Can the same be said for disenchanted violence? Is there also a persistent idea or cultural crux around the attempt to strip away from the violated body all forms of symbolic valorization? I believe there is. The general principle is this: that violence—especially the rampaging violence of war—demands a style or technology of representation that pinpoints its experience and consequences without justifying or celebrating it. To oppose the mystification and mythologization of violence, texts with such a goal often focus on a moment of bodily injury (and the consequences that ensue from that violation), drawing the reader or viewer back to the moment of destruction, rejecting the thematics of metamorphosis and the idea of a purifying or cathartic violence. Instead, disenchantment looks in the direction of what we might, taking a cue from Hortense Spillers, call “the flesh.” In an account of the slave woman’s body, Spillers has this to say:

But I would make a distinction in this case between “body” and “flesh” and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the “body” there is the “flesh,” that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography. Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies—some of them female—out of West African communities in concert with the African “middleman,” we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the flesh, as the person of African females and males registered the wounding. If we think of the “flesh” as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or “escaped” overboard.34 (italics in original).

Flesh, in these terms, effectively comes into narrative only when the body is ruthlessly travestied, as in slavery. Even in less extreme situations, however, the effort to demystify violence often conjures something like Spillers’s zero-degree of flesh, which, in its terrible sadness and unmitigated materiality, blots out the rest of human civilization.

We might take as axiomatic, in establishing a thematics of disenchanted violence, a passage from Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas, a polemic written in the late 1930s against war and fascism, and also, of equal import for Woolf, against the deep-rooted practice in Western patriarchal culture of aestheticizing and valorizing many forms of cruelty and suppression:
Here then on the table before us are photographs. The Spanish Government sends them with patient pertinacity about twice a week. They are not pleasant photographs to look upon. They are photographs of dead bodies for the most part. This morning’s collection contains the photograph of what might be a man’s body, or a woman’s; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house. A bomb has torn open the side; there is still a bird-cage hanging in what was presumably the sitting-room, but the rest of the house looks like nothing so much as a bunch of spilikins suspended in mid-air:

Those photographs are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye ... When we look at those photographs some fusion takes place within us; however different the education, the traditions behind us, our sensations are the same; and they are violent. You, Sir, call them “horror and disgust.” We also call them horror and disgust. And the same words rise to our lips. War, you say, is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost. And we echo your words. (p.55) War is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped. For now at last we are looking at the same picture; we are seeing with you the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses.35

Woolf’s (apparent) assumptions in this passage are manifold: that photography provides unmediated access to truth and reality (“a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye”); that war is a special category of horror against which photography might effectively be marshaled; that the effects generated by this kind of photograph in a viewer will always be consistent with those of Woolf herself (condemning war rather than, say, encouraging the thirst for revenge); and that there are no interesting aesthetics at issue in the photograph, in the viewing of it, or in its depiction in her own prose (but then why the emphasis on the birdcage, an object that seems to call attention to its own incongruity and symbolic value? And why the simile?).
The passage, in other words, invokes the core contradictions that virtually define the medium of photography: realism versus artifice, transparency versus manipulation, objectivity versus ideology. Woolf may want, at one level, to treat the photographs as direct transfusions of violent reality, free of form (as of politics), yet even in the case of photographs like these, which fall at the far end of the aesthetic spectrum, she cannot avoid calling up a welter of questions about photography and truth that have stalked the photographic image from its inception in the mid-nineteenth century. One thinks, for instance, of the controversy surrounding James Fenton’s shifting of the cannonballs in the “valley of death” that gave his famous Crimean War photographs their name. Are they merely props, subject to manipulation to suit the needs of the photograph? Or is the haunting reality of war, which gives the pictures their power, belied by such artistic maneuvers? These are serious provocations, especially when the subject is photographs of war and other human crises. Susan Sontag raised them throughout her writing, as in her final work, the ruminative and partially self-corrective Regarding the Pain of Others (2003), which comes back over and over to the notion that it is deeply suspect to imagine photography as a direct and value-free conduit to the truth of war and suffering. For Sontag, there are always two fundamental problems in thinking that photography can provide the Western, liberal viewer unmediated and benign access to the horrors saturating much of the world: the inevitable subjectivity of the photographic process (including not only its creation and development, but the settings and forms through which it is viewed) and the equally problematic situation of the person looking (including the voyeuristic satisfactions that might inhere in the desire to witness other people’s painful experiences). Sontag is impatient, for instance, with the idea that there could or should be a form of war photography that eschews aesthetics. 

(p.56) But is there really an insuperable contradiction between recognizing beauty and being privy to the display of other people’s suffering? In the passage from Three Guineas, Woolf seems to be aware of an aesthetic sensibility even in these pictures. The parallels she suggests between human bodies and houses (both with sides ripped off) suggest as much, as does her focus on the birdcage; and if we move deeper into Three Guineas, we find quite a complex and knowing treatment of photography. What distinguishes the Spanish photographs in Three Guineas is not that they are free of aesthetics but that their form of realist, shock-inducing representation elicits a distinct response: “our sensations are the same, and they are violent.” Awful violence (war) creates desirable violence (outrage), a process that begins with two people—not necessarily known to one another—“looking at the same picture,” or, we might add, reading the same account. Disenchantment relies on an aesthetic that forces violence into a certain kind of view. Its claim on horror and also on form is neither contradictory nor expendable.
For Woolf, photography does what other kinds of representation can perhaps only dimly emulate: it gives violence its due. Pictures like this one, in Woolf’s view, encourage a response appropriate to the destruction they depict. Their power is in direct proportion to their attempted transparency—we might call it their “realism,” or their identity as “reportage,” considering the new resonance of photojournalism in the Spanish Civil War. Such faith in the realist enterprise has of course been fundamentally challenged, all the more in our own era of endless digital manipulation, yet for Woolf, in the desperate situation of the mid-1930s, they are the best available resource for bringing disenchanted war into people’s consciousness. At this moment of crisis, photography is given a special role to play in denouncing and resisting war, as its seeming transparency of medium thrusts the sheer visuality of violence in front of the viewer, who is instantly pressed to respond. To describe these in prose, moreover, is to partake of that power. Ripped and mutilated bodies, in this account, have a presence and authority that belie any efforts to make them culturally regenerative, mythic, or symbolically extensive. And yet, the more Woolf stresses that precious ore of injured bodily presence—which, if we believe Scarry, confers powerful meaning—the more she invites the camel of enchantment under the tent of disenchantment, since, after all, her own sense of those bodies is itself transformative (it makes for political activism). Even more centrally, Woolf’s depiction of the photographs’ genuine and perhaps irreproducible power raises the beguiling question of why she did not reproduce them herself in *Three Guineas*. In the original edition, she included a raft of other photographs, so we can assume that the idea must have crossed her mind. Part of the concern, surely, is authorial control; in presenting them solely as verbal descriptions Woolf remains in charge (p.57) of their power—leaving uncertain, for instance, the exact nature of their aesthetics, as well as ensuring that her readers will share her response to them. We are guided by Woolf to feel the outrage of war in her terms, to see the pictures, almost literally, through her eyes. They become literary, rather than visual, testaments, and hence their form of disenchantment can be marshaled in the direction Woolf’s polemic demands. At the moment of the text’s publication, indeed, such visual statements might actually have raised a feeling of fury (rallying the English to help in the fight against the fascists), which, of course, is what the Spanish government hoped to encourage. Given what Woolf believes to be the disenchanting power of the photographs, to include them risks turning the text’s argument over to them. This risk becomes more acute if we consider Woolf’s own formal eccentricity in *Three Guineas*, which is anything but realist. *Three Guineas* can claim to form part of the campaign to expose and condemn the violence of war, but it does not belong to the documentary mode of the Spanish photographs, and hence, in a certain way, competes against them. In the end, the question may be one of medium; Woolf attributes an insistently disenchanting style to the photographs, which can then be contained within her own, more unevenly patterned text.
Woolf takes the Spanish photographs as her springboard, but photography had been marshaled in the antiwar cause well before Franco began bombing civilians and had formed part, in earlier contexts too, of a larger political and representational project. In considering the wholesale effort to disenchant violence, for instance, we might consider the figure of Ernst Friedrich, who deployed the power of the photographed flesh in the interwar period toward a complete condemnation of war. Born to a working-class family in 1894, Friedrich became radicalized largely in response to the war, which sickened and horrified him, and in which he refused to serve. A sometime socialist, communist, and anarchist, in trouble with the authorities from his early years and eventually a refugee from the Nazis, Friedrich was politically engaged in diverse radical causes over several decades. The principle he upheld most consistently throughout his political life was an adamant opposition to war and militarism, a position displayed in the most notable artifact of his career, his 1924 book War against War! The monograph, published simultaneously in four languages (German, English, and French, with a fourth language in accordance with place of publication), at a time in Germany of remilitarization and a rising tide of nationalist revisionism about the war, makes its pacifist case via shocking documentary photographs from the war. Juxtaposed against such images as sketches of children’s toys, propagandist slogans, and photos of various public figures on holiday, and counterpoised by ironic captions, come the startling photographs: horribly mutilated bodies on the battlefield, mass graves, ruined architecture, the skeletons of starved Armenian children (p.58) all in grisly focus. But most shocking are the culminating photos, close-ups of the mutilated faces of former soldiers. These extreme disfigurements seem as far from the aesthetic on the representational spectrum as one can go: nearly unviewable, they are effective in part because they insistently remind us not only of the ghastliness of extreme injury to the flesh, but also of the injured person’s humanity.
Friedrich, like Woolf, believed in the sheer power of such visual confrontations, and he felt that to strip away (the metaphor is his) all layers of false ideology from the truth of bodily violation and mutilation would have real consequences. From our own vantage point, it seems clear that Friedrich’s pacifist agenda strongly marks how a viewer approaches his photographic archive—his strategies for staging and ironizing the photographs, as well as his choice of these particular images (many of them apparently obtained from medical facilities for maimed soldiers and hence offering a seemingly scientific objectivity) are effective, but they are not neutral. In presenting the photographs, however, he adeptly evokes an ideal of transparency, admitting no sense of aesthetic structuring on his part, and calling on the images’ powerful directness to combat all forms of celebrating, heroizing, and sanctifying war.39 “The pictures in this book,” he declares, in his brief, manifesto-style introduction, “show records obtained by the inexorable, incorruptible, photographic lens … And not one single man of any country whatsoever can arise and bear witness against these photographs, that they are untrue and that they do not correspond to realities.”40 In both Woolf’s and Friedrich’s accounts, photographs of horrendous injury make special claims on their viewers, but the first claim is that we look, something not always easy to do. Interestingly, Bataille concludes his Tears of Eros, a work dedicated to a version of enchanted violence, with an archive of photographs that are nearly impossible to bear, from a 1905 torture, in which the prisoner is eviscerated while still alive. Bataille is enthralled by the photographs, one of which he owned, in part because of the man’s transfigured expression (“This photograph had a decisive role in my life,” he writes; “I have never stopped being obsessed by this image of pain, at once ecstatic (?) (sic) and intolerable” (Tears, 206)). In these pictures, Bataille reaches the culmination of his life’s work on eroticism and death (here unimaginably violent death), “the instant where the contraries seem visibly conjoined, where the religious horror disclosed in sacrifice becomes linked to the abyss of eroticism, to the last shuddering tears that eroticism alone can illuminate” (Tears, 207). And yet, despite these claims, there is something irreducibly disenchanted about these utterly horrendous photographs (the fact, acknowledged by Bataille, that the man had been given opium also raises doubts about his transfiguration thesis). Its placement in a kind of afterword seems appropriate; we may have to close the book.
The torture photos occupy a troubling spot as the final statement on sexual desire and death, but for Friedrich, no such ambiguity stands; he positions his photographs of the dead and maimed as pure witnesses, and this emphasis on testimony—often juxtaposed against artfulness or fiction—was a major feature of postwar culture, insofar as it attempted to look at war directly and unflinchingly, to see its corpses and rubble without its heroics and sacrifice. Perhaps most radical in this regard was the French literary critic Jean Norton Cru, an illuminating figure in the debates about how to remember and canonize the First World War. A combatant in the war, Cru spent the better part of the postwar decade reading every word that had been written about it, and compiling a massive report on these works, which he titled _Témoins_ (1929), and which he shortened and self-translated into English as _War Books: A Study in Historical Criticism_ (1931). Cru was immediately controversial, in part for his willingness to critique high-profile literary works like Henri Barbusse’s _Au Feu_ and Remarque’s _All Quiet on the Western Front_ for what he called their dishonesty and distortion: they relished death and killing, their horrors outpaced even the actual grisliness of combat, they represented yet another myth of war. Cru has a number of criteria on which he bases his evaluation, all of which circulate around the integrity of the witness. We will recognize the accurate accounts, says Cru, because they all tell the same story, unvarnished and direct. There are true stories of war (a very few) and there are false ones (many), and their relative consequences are grave and long-lasting. “These testimonies,” he promises, “will teach the sociologists, the psychologists and the moralists that man comes to the point of making war only by a miracle of persuasion and deception practiced on the future combatants, in peace time, by false literature, false history, and false war psychology” (Cru, 19).

Cru’s antiwar agenda in some ways aligns him with writers like Woolf, who hoped that a combination of will, activism, and stylistics might help to effect a genuine disenchantment of war, yet his argument represents an extreme edge to the discourse. For Cru, whose dream would be to replace fiction with a pure model of testimony, is fundamentally suspicious of imaginative writing. Accordingly, novels are judged not for their expressive power but for their factual correctness and their utility in furthering an epistemological goal (to know the facts of war). So he writes, “The usefulness of the novels of Barbusse and of Dorgelès, the usefulness of the novel of Remarque—this book is a much more significant case in point—is scarcely more real than the usefulness of a fictitious medical study,” and, even more stringently:

Professional writers, gifted with the mob sense, and aware of the unhealthful attraction exerted by the gesture that kills, the bloody knife, and the mutilated corpse, they have played on these things unconscionably while reshaping them artistically, and have served the sheep-like crowd what it has been reading for centuries but colored now after the fashion of the hour. (Cru, 48, 49)
Cru’s strategy is to hold up good science (testimony) against bad (Remarque), or, more pointedly, to contrast science (a good medical study) with artifice (a bad one). And it is artifice, ultimately, that is his real antagonist. The issue is not one’s stance for or against war; any kind of aestheticizing is dangerous. In this rendition, then, the disenchantment of violence is tantamount to a full rejection of the literary.

For all the hyperbole and strangeness of Cru’s view, the tension he registers about what the relation should be between the imperative to disenchant violence (here war) and the medium of expressive writing about it swept wide across postwar culture. The Waste Land becomes perhaps the greatest exemplification of such a balancing act, but in other works Eliot holds firmly to the disenchanting position. Most salient as a skeptical riff on war is “Gerontion,” a prelude, in some respects, to The Waste Land (and Eliot had considered attaching it as a prologue to the longer poem, a scheme rebuffed by Pound), composed between 1917 and 1919 and establishing itself as a commentary on war from the locus of one likely to have a polarized perspective—either to enchant through the haze of nostalgia, or to mock youthful self-indulgence. The old man, as it happens, defines himself first and foremost as one who stayed out of war, a noncombatant. A series of not/nor lines in the opening stanza establishes his credentials in such terms, a listener more than an actor, yet with a richly physical sense of what war is:

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.

Critics have long noted the combined resonance of the First World War, only just ended—its gates still hot—and ancient precursors, most explicitly the Thermopylae or literal “hot gates” of the Greek wars against the Persians. If the speaker denotes himself by dearth and dryness, the description of war drips with humidity, the warm, repeated vowel sounds (fought, warm, salt, marsh), themselves bounded by the doubly used “fought,” suggesting something lush and tropical in the salty scene. Lush but arduous; war is hard work, as evocative of Greek slaves as of the famous warriors. Moreover, if the Spartans’ heroism at Thermopylae represents a high point in the mythologization of sacrifice, comradeship, stoicism, and intra-Greek harmony, to be praised and emulated for centuries, Eliot embeds in Gerontion’s monologue another Greek reference, less noted by critics and much less celebratory of war, Aeschylus’s Agamemnon.

It is the herald, just returned from Troy, announcing the imminent arrival of the king. He describes no great feats:

Were I to tell you of the hard work done, the nights
exposed, the cramped sea-quarters, the foul beds—what part
of day’s disposal did we not cry out loud?
Ashore, the horror stayed with us and grew. We lay
against the ramparts of our enemies, and from
the sky, and from the ground, the meadow dews came out
to soak our clothes and fill our hair with lice. And if
I were to tell of winter time, when all birds died,
the snows of Ida past endurance she sent down
or summer heat, when in the lazy noon the sea
full level and asleep under a windless sky—
but why live such grief over again?45

In Aeschylus’s fifth-century Athens, the disenchantment of war—not just any
war, the definitive Homeric one—comes as a shock, yet the play holds its course.
More than ferocious battles, brilliant stratagems, tragic adventures, or magical
journeys, the war is denoted, here in the herald’s statement, by its physical
hardships and its elemental struggle (needless to say, there are no lice in the
Iliad!); by the signal Greek malfeasance, repeatedly mentioned in the play, of
desecrated altars; by concubinage and revenge; and above all by the needless
slaughter of the young, whether the beautiful Iphigenia, killed by her father’s
own hands to make it all possible, or the countless young men of Argos, who had
left their towns in proud ships, but “now, in place of the young men,/urns and
ashes are carried home/to the houses of the fighters” (Aeschylus, 48).
In channeling Aeschylus’s dark and cynical reflections on his culture’s great war, Eliot sows disenchantment deep into the roots. The old man’s mind, acting as a collective or ancestral memory of war and other historical crises (“in the juvescence of the year/Came Christ the tiger”), carries with it an old story of pointless war, whose consequences are as far-reaching as Western history itself, in many senses the overarching subject of the poem.\(^4\) Indeed, like *Agamemnon*, the poem is fundamentally concerned with aftereffects—all those “issues” whose genealogy (p.62) is lost in the labyrinthine welter of the past’s unpredictable designs, as it is in Gerontion’s winding thoughts. In the case of war, those issues seem entirely resistant to any kind of self-satisfaction or Enlightenment rationalizing. The old man’s canonical, rhetorical question is an apt one—“After such knowledge, what forgiveness?”—for the possibility of any kind of generative telos emerging from the mess of the recent war (or, perhaps, from any war) seems dim. Even with Christ making a double appearance in the poem, there is no vista of salvation, resurrection, or rebirth; the devouring tiger shares the field with other predators in the pagan tradition (“the shuddering bear”), while the governing natural force in the poem is not of growth or blooming, but of chaos and destruction: wind.\(^4\) The closest the poem comes to the afterlife, indeed, is an infernal reference to some of the most memorably (and perhaps undeservedly) punished of Dante’s sinners, the prophets whose heads are twisted backwards, their tears left to drip down their buttocks (“wrath-bearing tree” indeed). What violence and war birth into the world, in other words, is more likely to be wrath and predation than honey of generation.
Eliot’s disenchantments of war in “Gerontion” follow complex routes, in keeping with the instability built into the dramatic monologue form, and thematically, the poem is thickly knotted (war being only one of its many subjects of reflection, refracted in the wilderness of mirrors), but others from the First World War generation made it their business, first and foremost, to expose the crude realities of war. Most familiar, for English readers, are soldier-poets like Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, who attempted in their lyrics to force war’s brutal reality into the purview of wartime and postwar Europe, which continued to sanitize war, and into the genre of poetry, which had for centuries served to glorify it. In the well-known story, these writers attempted to rescript the narrative of the war from one of glorious and heroic self-sacrifice to one of useless and demeaning slaughter. Their poems were created in a spirit of urgency, designed to make a major intervention into the culture’s self-understanding; it is a political poetry, which faces off against its readers, demanding that we see war in all its degraded ugliness. Critics, moreover, have focused not only on this reconceptualization of the war from heroic to disgraceful, but also on how that shift actually took place—over more than a decade and in the context of severe postwar convulsions, and with important consequences for other, alternative stories that were marginalized in its wake. The fetishization of war experience (what James Campbell has called “combat gnosticism”), in particular, has laid the ground for a mode of thinking about war that gives primacy to soldiers—as its victims and its narrators—hence often obscuring the experience of the enormous number of war victims whose suffering takes different forms (targeted civilians, refugees, prostitutes, children). These have been (p.63) important and corrective discussions, yet there remains something irreducible and compelling about the war writers’ endeavor to pit the unimaginable violence of war against its enchantments.
Indeed, in the canonical literature of the First World War, the disenchanting of violence becomes in many ways the primary work of the writer.49 Sassoon, perhaps more than any of the other famous soldier-poets, consistently hammers away, in poem after poem, on the troubling consequences of enchanting violence. His poetry works feverishly to expose and ironize the conventional discourses that glorify and romanticize war. So “Glory of Women,” one of the most canonically angry of his works, pits a naively enchanting set of conventions (the “worship” of decorations, “chivalry,” the “thrill” of war narratives, martyrdom, maternal pride) against the disenchanting facts of “war’s disgrace,” soldiers being “killed,” fear and panic, and, most centrally, corpses and blood: “You can’t believe that British troops ‘retire,’” the poet scornfully accuses his female addressees, “When hell’s last horror breaks them, and they run, / Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.”50 That women are held partially responsible for perpetuating the fatal and callous deceptions that turn men’s bodies into corpses increases the demystifying agenda of the poem; even gender itself—perhaps the ultimate, underlying institution sustaining the romance of war—is repudiated as just another violently consequential fiction. The poem offers a jagged critique of enchanted violence as both a creator and consequence of gender conventions, even without letting go of its own misogyny. Sassoon’s war poetry, by and large, keeps disenchantment front and center, though we might note that his memoir—the more famous and widely read of his works in his lifetime and for decades thereafter—is more equivocal. Its portrait of upper-class, stoic, military masculinity strains, to some degree, against his own war poetry.

All of the other well-known First World War poets, and especially Wilfred Owen, structure their works around a visceral disenchantment; at the same time, they incorporate elements of enchantment into their verse. A poem like Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est,” to take perhaps the most widely read of the English war poems, exemplifies the pattern.51 The poem generates its force from a division of war language into two opposing styles: the generative mode of the Horatian ode, in which war is glorified and made symbolic, and the ruthlessly disenchanted mode of the contemporary poet, in which war is figured through its pitiful soldier victims. When the poet turns angrily on the reader in its final stanza, having depicted a gas attack that choked and strangled a soldier amidst a group of bedraggled, retreating comrades, leaving its narrator shell-shocked and aghast, he gives a name to the ideal of generative violence against which his poem stands: “the old Lie.” (p.64) “Dulce et Decorum Est,” along with many other poems in the same family, exposes the betrayal enacted in all such old lies, making the dichotomy between sacralized violence and the ugly reality of war its central object.
Owen mocks and condemns a classical tradition of glorifying and aestheticizing war, but his poem makes its own use of some powerfully enchanting images. We might note several arresting phrases along these lines: “Drunken with fatigue,” “An ecstasy of fumbling,” “vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,” even the accusatory Latin line, which includes the lovely word “dulce.” At these moments—and throughout the poem—Owen absorbs and reconstitutes many figures often associated with the old lie: states of exaltation engendered by war, traditional notions of innocence and purity, soothing rhythms concealing harsh realities. Indeed, the more searing the visual tableau, the more thickly his metaphors are pasted, as for instance when the choking man is depicted as “flound’ring like a man in fire or lime” and “As under a green sea.” Visually compelling, these images do not represent a direct or simple transcription of a body in agony; they require real imaginative reach. Perhaps most significant is Owen’s repeated use of drowning imagery. Throughout the poem’s ABAB rhyme scheme, there are no repeated words except for the final rhymed pair in the middle stanza:

Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

For all its terrors, drowning adds something muted and consoling in these lines. By comparison, say, with “flound’ring,” “guttering,” or “choking,” drowning suggests a kind of peace, and is redolent of many literary conventions. I do not think we could say that Owen enchants violence, but his poem exults in its ability to make the language of enchantment do the seemingly contradictory work of exposing and rejecting violence.
One thing recurs repeatedly in poems with a disenchanting agenda: the deployment of carefully chosen images of bodily rupture and pain. From the rolling eyes and “guttering, choking, drowning” face of the gas victim in “Dulce,” to the “legless” veteran, “sewn short at elbow,” in Owen’s “Disabled,” to the “muscled bodies charred” in his “Miners,” to the German soldier in “Glory of Women” whose “face is trodden deeper in the mud,” to Isaac Rosenberg’s “We heard his weak scream/We heard his very last sound,/And our wheels grazed his dead face” in “Dead Man’s Dump,” the appearance of a body in a state of acute and terrible mutilation is a critical feature of these lyrics. Clearly, images of bodily injury and decomposition (p.65) are meant to shock and activate the reader, along the lines of Woolf’s reaction to the photographs sent by the Spanish government. Just as clearly, they work symbolically—Owen’s gas victim has a hanging face, “like a devil’s sick of sin,” and Rosenberg begins “Dead Man’s Dump” by invoking “many crowns of thorns”—even as they are presented as an argument against symbol (Owen, 117; Rosenberg, 81). Too, critics have recently voiced a wariness about the impulse to become the spectator of such violent injurings, even among well-meaning readers ready to be skeptical of war.53 The point, then, is not that the famous antiwar poems transcribe violence with pure transparency (we know that is never possible) or that they eschew figurative language (they are poems, after all) or even that the impulse to read them is unqualified by a certain voyeurism (how could one ever prove that?), but rather that they remain committed to the idea that poetry must expose rather than elevate the violence of war. Violence is meant to linger in the imagination and from there to compel change, but it is not the germ of culture, the force for national uplift, or the sign of sublimity. In All Quiet on the Western Front, in the interwar years posed as a German prose companion to the developing canon of English war lyrics, Remarque offers his version of this commitment. As the novel progresses in its steady course of death, loss, and imaginative diminishment, the earth—site of nurture and fertility early in the novel—comes to represent a scene of extictive degeneration:

The rifles are caked, the uniforms caked, everything is fluid and dissolved, the earth one dripping, soaked, oily mass in which lie yellow pools with red spiral streams of blood into which the dead, wounded, and survivors slowly sink.

... Our hands are earth, our bodies are clay and our eyes are pools of rain.
We do not know whether we still live.54

We might take that muddy, swallowing swamp as disenchantment’s answer to the fecundity of enchantment’s growth motif. Its signal mode is devolution, and blood—the magic ore—here becomes just one more garish bodily liquid.

The Waste Land
Both the enchanted and the disenchanted modes of imagining violence pivot on
war, the most extravagant and devastating expression of violence that most
cultures undergo. Perhaps more than any other field of experience, that is, war
tends to invite the (p.66) thematics that surround generativity, and to do so in
dichotomizing terms. In Homer’s *Iliad*, we find an originary language of war as
generator of aesthetic productivity:

He dropped then to the ground in the dust, like some black poplar,
which in the land low-lying about a great marsh grows
smooth trimmed yet with branches growing at the uttermost tree-
top:
one whom a man, a maker of chariots, fells with the shining
iron, to bend it into a wheel for a fine-wrought chariot,
and the tree lies hardening by the banks of a river.\(^5\)

As with the general Homeric dictum that wars are fought to give singers their
subjects, the relation here between art and death in war is intimate. The
warrior’s body is likened to the tree which in turn becomes part of the chariot, a
“fine-wrought” work of art, and, in circular fashion, an important war tool. So
organic is the enchantment of violence here as to be almost invisible (though we
might note that violence will appear in visibly disenchanting form later in the
epic, when Achilles descends, with wild brutality, on the battlefield). In the early
twentieth century, as we have seen, a robust discourse of disenchantment
attempted to propel its readership in the opposite direction from what the
poplar/chariot simile suggests, to take apart what Homer so exquisitely aligns
(war, bodies, art, productivity). Yet we have also seen how interconnected and
mutually dependent enchanted and disenchanted violence really are, aligned,
especially, when they come close to the magic ore of blood, or when they
consider concepts like drowning, which touch both on unredeemable nastiness
and on the urge toward creation.
Exemplary and iconic, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* comes to express all of these motifs. The poem contemplates both the ideal and the drawbacks of enchanting violence; it is simultaneously a reflection on violence in general and a primary work in the literary and cultural history I have been presenting. Critics have read *The Waste Land* as many things, including, of course, as an aesthetic reckoning with the war. The thematics and imagery of the war underlie the poem at many levels, beginning with its memorial opening and encompassing its burning cities, soldier songs, shell-shocked London citizenry, ubiquitous dead, burial phobias, even the rats. The poem has been personalized, historicized, and deconstructed, as it asks to be. But it has never been understood as providing a robust theory of violence and art, encompassing but not limited to the war; a deeply considered and sensitive engagement with those dominant cultural approaches to imagining violence I am calling enchantment and disenchantment. The enchantment of violence is both the product and the subject of *The Waste Land*, and yet the poem, with its famously contradictory style, cannot easily glory in the tradition of Western literary culture it elicits, for it also recoils from the brutality that sustains that edifice.

*The Waste Land* disperses and disseminates a complex language of aestheticized violence, but the configuration is quietly condensed in one interlude, “Death by Water”:

> Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,  
> Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell  
> And the profit and loss.

> A current under sea

> Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell  
> He passed the stages of his age and youth  
> Entering the whirlpool.

> Gentile or Jew

> O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,  
> Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.
In accordance with its truncated status among the poem’s five acts, “Death by Water” has unique features. Its powerful, unbroken brevity seems to set it off from the rest of the poem (Eliot appended no notes to this section), creating a sense of completeness that the image of the whirlpool also highlights, a drawing inward, as an antidote to the wild outward spiraling that characterizes so much in the poem’s diffuse atmosphere. It is the most meditative section in the poem, a rumination on death, something like a reflective, later stage in the mourning process set in motion by the poem’s opening, “The Burial of the Dead.” Moreover, death by water, prophesied and promised by the poem’s ironized seer, Madame Sosostris, functions as an aestheticized and dreamlike contrast with other forms of bodily degradation in the poem. Even if Phlebas enters a deep forgetfulness—metaphor for death, of course—the water and whirlpool have the effect of reconstituting and recalling, as many of the poem’s reiterated motifs return here in a softened manner, their edges blunted. The purifying power of the waters, one of the poem’s continuous symbolic strands that trace back, in part, to Weston, here takes the form of a gentle dematerializing. The whirlpool acts in the poem the way it acts on Phlebas, generating a very specific kind of transformation.

(p.68) In “Death by Water,” this ideal of an enchanting transformation of violence and bodily harm to wonder and beauty suggests, in its calm and gestural way, a paradigm for poetic consolation. The body is now a corpse, Phlebas’s life is gone, mortality asserts itself, yet the whirlpool, with its whispering tones, offers some kind of satisfying compensation, with the material life of the body, attached as it is to profit and loss, dissolving and passing. More generally, enchantment in The Waste Land is at once a magical spell (as the term suggests), a way of figuring the artist’s touch, and also, in the case of the Shakespearean motif of enchantment that appears throughout The Waste Land, a kind of trickery. The poem is particularly attached to Ariel’s song from The Tempest. “Those are pearls that were his eyes”: the refrain, repeatedly conjured in the poem, gives a succinct language for the large process of moving from the horror of death (here drowning) into the creation of beauty. From a corpse to a pearl, each item of the otherwise bloated and gruesome body is mutated into “something rich and strange,” Ariel’s arresting phrase for the outcome of water’s aestheticizing powers. Or at least its fake powers: what Ariel describes never in fact happens; his song not only analogizes fiction, it is fiction. Like such musical charms, the whirlpool at the swirling center of “Death by Water” presents a force for imagining the process of change as a process of enchantment, and this both correlates and contrasts with the larger discourse of death and rebirth in the poem. On one hand, the materiality of rotting corpses permeates the poem, as readers can hardly fail to notice; on the other hand, to enchant is to imagine the body not in its physical agonies or material decomposition but as an agent of the imagination, for the churning of images into aesthetic wonders.
And yet, we should perhaps pause to note the oddity of this aestheticizing of drowning, a form of death that might be seen as uniquely horrific. In the late poem *Four Quartets*, when Eliot returns to the seas and waters, depicted in rich, ruminative language as agents of both history and the imagination, he is highly aware of the awful human cargo that the oceans have swallowed. “We cannot think,” he writes “of a time that is oceanless/Or of an ocean not littered with wastage,” and the river, too, “with its cargo of dead negroes,” is adrift in the old, terrible crimes of the past. On those occasions when it does reemerge from its watery grave, the drowned body is a grim spectacle, bloated and disgusting, inevitably encrusted with the sea’s detritus. In Homer, to return to origins, drowning presented a distinctly dishonorable form of death, and warriors at risk of drowning typically berate the gods for not having given them death on the fields of Troy, where they might have received proper burial and mourning, rather than be lost at sea. Drowning, for Homer’s superlative men, is tantamount to invisibility, almost not to have existed in the first place. Or drowning can be reckoned as all too material. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot’s manuscript notes, he had drafted a “Dirge” in which the character Bleistein, known to readers from “Burbank with a Baedeker, Bleistein with a Cigar,” makes an appearance as a cadaver under water, and this fragment, in which crabs and lobsters consume Bleistein’s flesh and his gold teeth shine ironically from the sea floor, comes much closer to indexing the ghastliness of drowning than the published text. “Dirge” has a comic tone; yet the unpleasant corporeality and indignity of Bleistein’s situation bring Eliot’s anti-Semitism to the fore (and hence seem a welcome omission from *The Waste Land*), at the same time that these features suggest Eliot’s own recognition (aided perhaps by his editor Pound) that the drowned body is in fact a quite inapt figure for aesthetic power. Or perhaps it is the reverse: by offering the drowned body as site of literary wonder, he points to the virtuosity of this medium, its flex and magic, and to his own conjuring powers. If “Gerontion” manifestly kept within the consciousness of its aging protagonist, with the whirlpool Eliot displays his most magisterial authorial presence. Drowning, it seems, offers up two contrastive possibilities: the disappearance of the body, which Homer deplored, but which allows for the kind of elegiac transformation that Eliot develops in *The Waste Land*, or the reappearance of the corpse, in a scenario that calls up gruesome visions of the body’s materiality. Literary history, in its long tradition of figuring drowning, has tended both ways, with elegies that celebrate drowned young men alongside more realist works sickened by the sight of a reemerged corpse. Stephen Dedalus, meditating on Sandymount Strand, gives the two possibilities raw and vibrant life:
Bag of corpsegas sopping in foul brine. A quiver of minnows, fat of a spongy titbit, flash through the slits of his buttoned trouserfly. God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain. Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead. Hauled stark over the gunwale he breathes upward the stench of his green grave, his leprous nosehole snoring to the sun.

A seachange this, brown eyes saltblue. Seadeath, mildest of all deaths known to man.\textsuperscript{64}

Stephen, like Eliot, sees in drowning the essence of transformation (all those “becomes”), balancing in his mind the fleshly, grim prospect of the drowned body with its more lyrical literary complement.\textsuperscript{65} For \textit{The Waste Land}, the latter of these must serve; Eliot’s omission of Bleistein’s corpse indicates the direction the poem will go. The unsightliness of drowning is occluded, in a poetic that abstracts from the body, emphasizing the transformative magic and generative power that, in the whirlpool/poem, the flesh leaves in its wake.

(p.70) In this poem of sailors and seafarers, the sea holds many associations.\textsuperscript{66} Not only is it a site of death and longing and a metaphor for purifying change, but it also represents a set of commercial routes and passages, as suggested by one of its representatives in the poem, the Smyrna merchant.\textsuperscript{67} Mr. Eugenides, with his pocket full of currants, functions as a double for Phlebas, also at the mercy of currents, and the sexual suggestion of a weekend at the Metropole has led critics to connect both of these men, along with the hyacinth girl/boy, in a web of homosexual fantasy.\textsuperscript{68} Moreover (and perhaps relatedly), Smyrna, the ancient trading city, calls up an image of Asiatic antiquity, pointing backward, that is, to other eras of global trade, colonization, prosperity, and warfare. Smyrna is a place of commerce, both in its ancient and modern renderings. In the period when Eliot was composing \textit{The Waste Land}, it was also a place of intense internal violence. As anyone reading the papers from 1919 until the time of the poem’s publication would have known, the fierce fighting between Greeks and Turks, which enveloped what would become the modern nation of Turkey after the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, reached a peak in the city of Smyrna. Not only was there a Greek occupation and combat in the streets, but Smyrna also became a locus for the policy of forced migration of Greeks and Turks into their respective nations. If the enmity of Greece and Turkey had been ferociously alive for a century, Smyrna represented one of its most virulent contemporary embodiments. Eliot himself took a keen interest in these events, writing a letter to the \textit{Daily Mail} in 1923 in which he praised the paper’s coverage of the war in Turkey.\textsuperscript{69} Here, then, was a location that dramatized the chaos and spiraling violence still being unleashed by the First World War as the old imperial order disintegrated.
And one more thing: Smyrna is a reputed birthplace of Homer, as Eliot certainly knew. For Homer—the presiding genius of Western literature in general, and of the poetry of war and the seas in particular—to be associated with the fraught city of Smyrna is a hint at what *The Waste Land* perhaps always wants to promise, that aesthetic potency will develop directly out of real-world agony. In the years immediately following the war, Homer’s connection to Smyrna and to Troy must have provided a powerful and poignant association, for the notion (widely held among classicists) that the real “first world war” was the Trojan War suggested an almost infinite historicity in the cycle of violence, in which war was increasingly intertwined with global commerce, but also, for Eliot, with artistic payoff. If some of Eliot’s most powerful influences and closest friends—most notably Pound—had become virtually obsessed with the sinister intertwining of war and trade, emphasizing in particular the diabolical persona of the Jewish financier, cast as the villain of the world’s recent catastrophes, the Smyrna merchant sets those intersections in a different light. Certainly, there is something off-color about him, with his casual attitude and demotic language. And yet the Smyrna merchant holds in his person the explosive and terrible history of modern nations; he simultaneously brings the complex legacy of modern war into view and obscures the picture, as the poem ultimately pursues its own goal of erecting new monuments on the site of still-smoldering ruins. Viewed in this way, the Smyrna merchant’s mutation into Phlebas in the following section, himself soon to be metamorphosed via watery transformation into something rich and strange, seems a kind of willful relief, an aesthetic forgetting of modern calamity, or perhaps a signal that even such intransigent conflicts as the legacies of hatred left by the Ottoman Empire can be amalgamated into the imaginative project of enchantment. In this fantasy, neither capitalism, which now rules the waves (supplanting and supplementing the British navy), nor internecine war, in which geography is breached by violence, is immune to the power of death by water.
The whirlpool may create an inward spiral, a vast embrace and ingathering vortex, but *The Waste Land* opens with burial in the ground, and it is the problem of the corpse, both buried and distressingly present, that in many ways requires Eliot to invoke the sea as a contrastive death fantasy. In the poem’s celebrated opening, Eliot sets the stage for a rumination on the land and the dead. The communal mourning of a people emerging from war is aligned with universal motifs that reframe the pain of immediate loss and individual grief, with an anthropological and generative cast. The lines (so different in spirit from the drunken brothel scene that had inaugurated the draft version) convey multiple valences on the way death and land conjure one another, including the vegetative structure of resurrection and life-worship alluded to in Eliot’s opening note to the poem, in which he references Frazer and Weston. The lines invoke the parched earth which nevertheless will breed, the land impregnated by dead bodies (no-man’s-land made general), and the cruel discomfort and pain of bringing blossoms out of such a soil. In all of this, the sadness associated with loss, death, burial, and the recent war is hitched to the inevitable cycling of the seasons, poignant precisely because it cannot be avoided or altered. Of course, it will not be long before the metaphor of death leading to new flowers takes comic shape in the blooming corpse:

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying, “Stetson!
“You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
“That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
“Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? (*TWL*, 69–72)

(p.72) The absurdist tone here differs from the mournful concerns that make up the April lines, but in other ways the passage marks a continuity. Ever since Fussell discussed the trope of the blooming corpse in 1975, it has seemed axiomatic that the red poppies of Flanders’ bloody fields lie at the base of Eliot’s imagery, a mordant ironizing of the truism that the violence of war can be germinative. Other wars are present too, the cumulative, ongoing sense of war enfolding and accruing individual conflicts, as suggested by the fleeting appearance in the poem of the battered Coriolanus from Shakespeare’s play, who carries the scars of old wars on his back. In *The Waste Land*, moreover, we have the Great War’s bones and rats, and if these bones do not sing or chirp as loudly as they will in a later poem like “Ash Wednesday,” still “the grass is singing/Over the tumbled graves” (*TWL*, 386–87). The graves and corpses are abundant here, yet as critics have forcefully noted, they were missing from the local parishes in the years after the war, the bodies of the dead soldiers remaining an absence. Nevertheless, their music in *The Waste Land* remains in keeping with the poem’s overall idea that dead bodies must produce song, as Phlebas’s body is slowly transformed in “Death by Water,” and as the whole achievement of the poem is cast in terms of the transforming of old wrecks into new wonders.
Standing on the cusp of the contrasts between sea and land, transformative creation and terrible disintegration, is Jean Verdenal, and, behind him, another iteration of the First World War’s narrative of violent death. Verdenal’s status in *The Waste Land* has been much discussed by critics, beginning with John Peter’s argument in 1952, immediately suppressed by Eliot’s estate, that *The Waste Land* represents a homoerotic love song and tribute to Eliot’s friend Verdenal, “mort aux Dardanelles,” to whom Eliot dedicated *Prufrock and Other Observations*. As with later queer-theoretical iterations, this argument makes the case that Verdenal’s death functioned as a traumatic catalyst for Eliot, inaugurating his mental breakdowns, partially unleashing a crisis of sexual ambivalence, and requiring articulation in oblique and redirected language. Whatever one may think about Verdenal’s role in Eliot’s psychosexual development, the image of a young man, full of promise, whose life is cut off by the war was a powerful and ubiquitous trope in the period of *The Waste Land*. Eliot’s decision in 1925 to append the phrase “Mort aux Dardanelles” to his *Prufrock* dedication, for instance, suggests a perceptiveness about such associations, as Eliot puts his own stamp on the familiar signifier of the tragically dead young men. Often associated metaphorically with flowers, not only the poppies of Flanders, but also such overdetermined Greek species as narcissus and hyacinth, these men were inevitably described as the “flower of manhood” (also as “lads”), their deaths often mourned within the framework of the pastoral. The war period marked a moment when the Romantic propensity to conjoin the English countryside with an ethos of masculinity seemed reborn in the person of the male flower, the lost youth, the tragically self-sacrificing soldier, emblem of the Lost Generation. At some level, that is, Verdenal’s death in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign provokes one of the central issues in *The Waste Land*: the romantic allure of death being fruitful, perhaps even death by water—anything rather than mud.
In *The Waste Land*, there is a real dread of the soil as the ultimate (or premature) home for the body, and, indeed, this rendering taps into a common war fixation. Notwithstanding the poem’s repeated warning to “fear death by water,” what the majority of soldiers in the First World War feared was death in the ground, or, worse, death via the ground. In surveying writing from the trenches, one finds a powerful, widespread, shared anxiety about being buried alive, and, more generally, the image of the dismembered corpse filling in the land is ubiquitous in the war’s many representations. Again, Eliot’s poem seems divided, on one hand suggesting a poetic enactment of burial and regrowth, where the possibility of recovering and blooming after the war is painful but possible (recalling Brooke’s “The Soldier”), and on the other hand offering an alternative fantasy of consigning the body not to the ground but to the sea, where the whirlpool, in its whispering ways, will dematerialize the body, making art out of organs, pearls out of eyes. In fact, these two forms, drowning and burial, each reach out toward the possibility of enchantment, which is suggested not only by the whirlpool, but also by several other images. Most central is color, a riveting site of intensity. There are many colors in the poem—white, brown, ivory, gold, green, orange, black, and red (this last particularly pronounced)—and these form part of the dense sensorium that characterizes *The Waste Land* at every stage.

But there is something special and unique about one color, and that is violet. It is entirely adjectival, for one: the word is used four times in the poem, twice in quick succession, and each time to modify a certain kind of ethereal noun and to describe something in the atmosphere:

> At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
> Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
> Like a taxi throbbing waiting ... (*TWL*, 215–17)

> At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
> Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
> The typist home at teatime ... (*TWL*, 220–22)

> What is the city over the mountains
> Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air ... (*TWL*, 370–71)

> And bats with baby faces in the violet light
> Whistled, and beat their wings ... (*TWL*, 379–80).

The hour, air, and light: each iteration attempts to capture something both precise and uncertain in the nature of the moment. In the first two examples, the violet hour is twilight, a time of transitions and transformations, literally, as day turns to night, and figuratively, as a moment of hovering between one mode of existence and the next, a thick and tense anticipatory pause, as indicated by the image of the human engine throbbing—a vast being comprising the whole working city.
Indeed, the violet hour is a time of enchantment, in the sense I have been developing. The hour in question is not going to bring the valiant sailor home to his beloved and long-suffering wife, but the young man carbuncular to the cramped accommodation of the typist, heralding a scene famous for its depiction of depleted, degraded, modern sexuality, a bored encounter which resembles a rape, in which the victim is barely involved, sensorially or psychically, in her own “folly” (TWL, 253). Yet the word “violet” does add luster and shine to the sordid occasion, if only momentarily. Its use is partly mock-heroic and ironic, but it is also real; its beauty and resonance transform the lines, enhancing the sense of both anticipation and tragedy in the scene. When air and light and the hour are violet—the color of sorcery in The Odyssey, of Mary’s poignant humility in Christian iconography, of both mourning and royalty in the modern world, and of brilliant flowers prevalent in springtime throughout the northern hemisphere—they seem piercing, aesthetic, saturated, deepened.

Perhaps most importantly, the word “violet” is so close to “violent” as nearly to become it, and certainly to suggest it. This metonymic affinity is further tightened when we consider that each time “violet” is used, it is at an instant in the poem when violence impends. As with the general concept of enchantment, that is, violetness crops up precisely at those times when some kind of violent reality is ready to be transformed into—and via—the aesthetic experience. The violet air tolls with the apocalyptic sound of bells and the explosions of warfare; the violet light is the light of terror, after and before such reverberations, the place of burning cities, and also of bats and hysterical strains; the violet hour is a time of compressed urban rage, the human energy beastlike in its containment, and also of impending sexual assault. “A sudden blow,” Yeats proclaimed for the moment of rape and knowledge and loss, but here the moment comes more slowly, as part of an ongoing process of transformation, a time of flickering transition and pause, yet it holds its own piercing and intense qualities. For The Waste Land, the nature of violet is to usher (p.75) in violence, to herald or represent it; but it is also to soften and beautify it. Indeed, violetness is perhaps the ideal emblem for enchantment at its most enriching; its transforming energy is all in the direction of the aesthetic, forging an exceptionally sensitive kind of perception.
Other moments of sexual violation, however, seem depleted of this violet vibrancy; one thinks, for instance, of Lil, whose narrative of decay and reproductive trauma appears in its own flickering light, amidst the closing rituals of pub life. On one hand, the scene in the pub where Lil is featured has its lyrical aspects, especially in the goodnight sequence, a kind of Joycean melody. The “hot gammon,” perhaps alluding to the aborted child, adds a gothic element to the scene, and this, along with the bartender’s reiterating call and the catty female rivalry, makes for a chaotic and partly comic tone. And yet, Lil’s body is the subject of suffering and horrible manipulation, as “them pills I took, to bring it off” have left her aged and sickened, and this, we learn, came only after other devastating reproductive experiences: “(She’s had five already, and nearly died of young George.)” (TWL, 159, 160). Eliot, with his own personal and marital history of psychological treatment, gives a vague suggestion of near-criminal neglect and indifference on the part of the medical industry, represented here by the chemist, and, more generally, presents Lil as a woman whose physical and sexual life remains entirely at the mercy of men, her soldier husband Albert first among them.77 Indeed, in Lil’s body, many vectors of contemporary life converge—domestic inequality and abuse; the war’s paradoxical empowerment and disempowerment of men; the limited medical possibilities for working-class women; the tight social arrangements that lead to neighborly surveillance as much as to community support; the position of the pub as a social meeting ground—and this amounts, in the end, to a kind of confused pain for the hapless Lil. Lil’s stretched and exhausted body thus becomes a metaphor for the deeply physical realities of modern life (another lilac from the dead land). In a brilliant analysis, moreover, Paul Morrison has made the case that Lil represents a modern incarnation of the poem’s other terrifically unhappy woman, Philomela.78 The phonetic miming of their names is only the most ocular sign of their affinity. Lil’s face, expressive of sadness and weak defiance; her muted protests; her deteriorated mouth; her tortured reproductive system—all of this indicates not only an individual but a whole cultural history of rape and sexual abuse. She forms part of the landscape of harsh, physical reality that underwrites the poem, and seems as much in need of enchantment or aesthetic transformation as the drowned Phlebas or the rotting bodies of the war’s dead.

If Lil’s is a modern case of a battered and beleaguered body, her ancient predecessor, the mutilated Philomela, represents an even more deeply troubling prototype, (p.76) a figure associated with the swallow, and whose story haunts the poem.79 It enters first in “A Game of Chess,” where it forms the subject for art, a painting to adorn the lady’s room:

Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
“Jug Jug” to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed. (TWL, 97–106)

Philomela’s is a terrible tale: dragged to the woods by her sister Procrine’s husband, King Tereus, she is isolated, raped, and then silenced by having her tongue cut out (a precursor to a later raped girl with a similar fate, the atrociously mangled Lavinia in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*). That she is ultimately able to communicate her tale via clever ruse, spinning her story into a loom, and that she and her sister, having taken grisly revenge on the king, are transformed, along with Tereus, into birds—such artistic outcomes seem only mildly reparative after the extremity of her violation and suffering. Indeed, in Ovid’s canonical telling of the myth in *Metamorphoses*, there is no sense of recompense (no “yet”) in the “inviolable voice” of the nightingale. It is Eliot’s proclivity to stress the compensatory nature of song, “the change of Philomel.” Or, if one prefers the alternate reading of “yet,” meaning “continuing,” so that the lines suggest that Philomela will persevere in singing (“And still she cried”), in an endless refrain to remind the world of her suffering, again, this represents an Eliotic, as distinct from Ovidian, emphasis (the “still” also, anticipating “Leda and the Swan”).

Interestingly, when Eliot refers to Philomela again in the last stanza of the poem, via the Latin line “Quando fiam uti chelidon,” (“when shall I be as the swallow?”) he refers not to Ovid, but to a later version of the story, as it appears in the anonymous *Pervigilium Veneris* (TWL, 429). By the end of the poem, the narrative has become increasingly impacted in the sediment of literary history. Already in the fifth century or so, a process of transformation is underway: the girls, turned into birds, provide songs, which are then imagined as a shared, or shareable, expression of longing and sorrow. For the writer of *Pervigilium Veneris*, the sting attached to Philomela’s narrative is especially raw, since her futile cries (p.77) follow a poem that extols fruitful love and blossoming sexuality. Eliot’s poetic voice calls up this welter of associations, so that his “swallow swallow” alone is enough to become an aching dirge and many-purposed lament. What is both lost and never quite lost in this movement is the rape and mutilation of Philomela—the victimized female body, the visuality of the horrible scene, the sense of outrage that the story of Tereus’s “barbarity” invokes.
Perhaps most ironic and complex in this cycle is the substance of the poet’s lament; what the narrator of Pervigilium Veneris is actually regretting is not so much the horror of Philomela’s treatment but the failure of her voice, her muteness. If the birdsong represents an abstraction—an image of communication rather than actual communicability—still it symbolizes voice over silence, a voice for which Philomela longs with all her energy. These short bursts—twit twit, jug jug, swallow swallow—represent, for the truly desperate, a badly needed form of utterance, cathartic if bleak, a saving language. And there is power in those repetitions, as there is in the poem’s final benediction, the thrice-repeated Shantih. On one hand, such instances represent language pushed to the breaking point, on the verge of becoming extralinguistic. On the other hand, the narratives bound to those repeated words are dense, elaborate, and terrible, and hence what they offer is, in their own way, thick with history and experience. To cry for the swallow is to wish for a voice that simultaneously does and does not communicate; it is to lament one’s current silence, and also the silence entailed even when one does speak.

Throughout The Waste Land, questions of voice have been paramount; here, in the swallow’s call, language oscillates between a dreaded silence and a burst of sound that expresses all too much. In Swinburne’s poem “Itylus” (1866), to which Eliot makes reference (though without citing it) in his “O swallow swallow,” the question of silence and song is further complicated by the issue of memory, of keeping alive the most hellish of stories. Swinburne’s lush, swooning lyric, with its reiterated onomatopoetic “s” sounds, itself performs a kind of enchantment, coating the narrative in softness and luxury and suggesting a lethe-like, drugged quality that recalls Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”:

Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow…
O swallow, sister, O fair swift swallow,
Why wilt thou fly after spring to the south,
The soft south whither thine heart is set?…

Sister, my sister, O fleet sweet swallow…

(p.78) It is Philomela’s voice that we hear, and she is not so much fixated on the atrocities committed against her as on the murder she and her sister exacted on the little boy, Procne’s son, whom the sisters killed and served as a meal to Tereus. The great imperative of her song is to plead insistently for the bloody tale not to be lost, never to be forgotten:

O sister, sister, thy first-begotten!
The hands that cling and the feet that follow,
The voice of the child’s blood crying yet
Who hath remembered me? who hath forgotten?
Thou hast forgotten, O summer swallow,
Enchanted and Disenchanted Violence

But the world shall end when I forget. (Swinburne, 189, italics in original)

Eliot, as it happens, has his own version of how the world ends (“not with a bang...”). More to the point, Swinburne links the unending commemoration of crimes to the very survival of civilization, a provocative notion for a poem like *The Waste Land*, where the issue is not so much willful forgetting of the past as the inescapable traces that the past leaves on everything that succeeds it. Swinburne’s birds ask for poetry to ward off the silence of moral compromise; in Eliot’s poem, neither silence nor the extremities of language can escape the wrongs that comprise the world’s—and literature’s—history.

The image of the swallow, it is becoming clear, is one of those overdetermined *Waste Land* constellations, suggesting not only a whole thicket of themes involving the Philomela narrative and its later artistic instantiations, but also the idea of swallowing. For a poem with an insatiable appetite, the act of swallowing reflects the poem’s own processes, the impulse to contain the whole of Western culture (with a large dollop of the East), and to recombine them, so to speak, via aesthetic digestion. Like his contemporary Joyce, Eliot in *The Waste Land* has often been described as having an omnivorous relation to the cultural past, and it is perhaps not coincidental that the figure of Conrad’s Kurtz—symbolized so memorably in *Heart of Darkness* by his dramatic open mouth—should be one of the contemporary fictional characters who most resonated for Eliot (and Kurtz’s “The horror! the horror!”—those last words, uttered in a “supreme moment of knowledge,” had provided the epigraph of the original draft [Eliot, *Fasc*, 3]). The swallow takes us in the direction of both silencing and ingesting, and the story of Philomela acts as the thread uniting these operations, and tying them, in turn, to the poem’s insistent theme of transformation. It is, after all, the “change of Philomel” that is recorded in the sylvan scene, and, more specifically, the poem emphasizes the way music or art or poetry becomes a resonating, lingering record, a sensory trace, for the violence (p.79) that cannot be spoken directly—as Philomela cannot herself speak her own story and must create a form of pictorial writing to convey the events.
Nevertheless, despite Eliot’s emphasis on the way the rape and mutilation are, in effect, enchanted into art, the poem is not complacent about such an outcome. For one, the transliteration of “jug jug”—even before we get to the “dirty ears”—is an ugly sound, very far from the lyrical beauty, the “ecstatic sound” or “full throated ease,” of Keats’s or Hardy’s nightingales. And, too, “other withered stumps of time/Were told upon the walls”: these “stumps” suggest Shakespeare’s Lavinia, who not only had her tongue chopped off but also her hands (to prevent her from taking Philomela’s route of writing her way to explication and revenge), and, more generally, the phrase suggests a weariness with the subject matter of art in its most time-weathered manifestations. Those staring forms seem less exalted than traumatized, an ancient, painted version of contemporary shell shock.

The stumps can also be read more literally: they evoke amputated arms, bringing the visual spectacle of the war’s injuries into view. If much in contemporary culture seemed to avert its collective glance from the war’s lasting attack on the flesh, here the disenchanting imperative to see those amputated limbs is enfolded into Eliot’s larger plotline. The stumps have withered; they have begun to heal; they indicate a long future, past the immediate blast of injuring. Art, it seems, continually tells stories of brutality. Its narratives cannot erase, perhaps cannot even fully beautify, the horrors that humans inflict on one another. On one hand, then, the poem relies heavily on the chain of powerful associations that the history of literature has bequeathed, including the history of ghastly violence; it makes its music from these. The poem here is like Philomela herself, who wove the letters in her loom in the one color we might have intuited, purple. She is a creature of the violet hour; indeed, hers is perhaps the underlying, haunting narrative of violetness. Moreover, in the lines following the “withered stumps of time,” Eliot gives yet another case of an art form produced out of desperation and pain, with the image of a fiery, savage music created by the lady’s hair, a kind of eccentric, female artistry that seems to epitomize both the pity and the vitality of a culture. On the other hand, the poem hates these “stumps,” and their reiterated appearances within the poem have the effect, almost, of a sputter, an involuntary cough, irruptions that simply cannot be avoided.

The withered stumps of Philomela’s rape return on several occasions, always in disruptive, broken phrases, suggesting the kind of abrasive and uncomfortable role within the poem that actual stumps played in postwar civilian culture. These passages (there are only a few in the poem) read like chunks of linguistic jetsam, torn or broken bits that have floated off from their original masses to reappear in the midst of the poem’s larger sea:

\[(p.80)\] Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc’d
Eliot’s repetition of these bird cries is highly evocative, for they embody what the poem depicts in so many forms, that the most horrendous species of violent attack becomes part of the language of culture, and these cries, in turn, cannot be excluded from Eliot’s larger poetic project. These strange sounds have their own special character, acting as signs or traces of a larger, terrible set of stories, simultaneously exposing and not exposing. The phrases hold in their tight, nearly nonrepresentational packages a sense of what the world does not want to be its oldest stories; they are withered stumps of time, but they are also resonant little bits of song in their own right, an interesting and important complement to such melodies as the nymphs’ chorus (“Weialala leia/Wallala leialala”), the Augustinian chant (“Burning burning burning burning”), the cry of the desert (“Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop”), which Eliot thought one of the most beautiful parts of *The Waste Land*, even the poem’s final three shantihs (*TWL*, 277–78, 309, 357). At the same time, these bursts of language could also be read in almost the opposite way, as broken echoes of disenchantment, or perhaps as symptoms of an antiaesthetic spirit that emerges, side by side with enchantment, from the violent events at the base of the poem.

In *The Waste Land’s* final burst of stuttered lines, Philomela’s story returns once again in the image of the swallow, solidifying its place at the endpoint of the poem’s violent trajectory and returning us to the poem’s other primary locus for aestheticizing violence, the whirlpool. Indeed, the swallow and the whirlpool come together in several ways, abutting one another, presenting alternative visions of poetic enchantment. The swallow represents the way art filters and keeps alive the most detestable of crimes, through an ambiguous process: its language is of tortured remembering, forcing a withered history into the present, and yet it also represents that burst of song that arises even from the pits of human experience. The whirlpool, too, with its transformative, magical properties, makes art out of destruction. If the swallow combats silence, the whirlpool creates it, its whispering currents a kind of speaking silence. In both cases—indeed, more generally in *The Waste Land*—the central idea is to utilize imagery of change, rebirth, resurrection, and metamorphosis as part of a reflection on the troubling relationship between art, with its core commitment to beautiful forms, and the violence that has wrecked human life throughout history.
The Waste Land can come to no conclusion about such a basic contradiction. To recognize that art neither flees violence, nor transcends it, nor merely represents it, but rather trades on its power, at times appropriating its force and creating something especially brilliant, at other times succumbing to the sheer ruin that violence leaves in its wake: such an insight represents, in poetic form, one of the signal achievements of Eliot’s poem. The Waste Land offers a way to understand literature as a self-conscious artifact produced out of and within a history of violence, recognizing its origins in a frightful set of half-forgotten tales. One need only look at the many layers of embedded destructiveness in the poem’s penultimate lines to see how fundamentally it views literary history as a history of violence. This willingness to offer a poetic of enchantment that at the same time ruthlessly disenchants its own origins sets Eliot’s work off from many other engagements with violence in the period, especially those that grew out of the war, with is dichotomizing energy. Perhaps, counterintuitively, it was the immediate context of the war that actually enabled The Waste Land’s balancing act, since the war created an exceptional urgency to conceive violence in relation to a wider cultural legacy. The more massively devastating an event, it seems, the more it calls forth the forces of generativity; ugliness demands beauty, destruction invites transformation, old wrecks become wonders. Ultimately, The Waste Land, founded on these paradoxes, works almost too well. It spawned generations of imitators, but when it comes to seeing violence and culture in a relation of mutual creativity, no other works of the period could join in its combined aura of celebration and devastation. It is one of the poem’s unique accomplishments, indeed, that it can see in violence the genesis of beauty and form, and can also make vivid the human tragedies that are swept into that old, innocuous phrase, “the waste of war.”

Notes:


The stages of [Leatherstocking’s] life are marked by beginnings stained with violence. As biography The Deerslayer gives Leatherstocking two features that allow him to begin his life: first, he has taken an adult name and left youth behind. The cost is one dead Indian. Second, he has been endowed with recovered freedom, radical freedom (at the cost of a massacre). Now his history begins. (Fisher, 86)


The machine, of course, can function in contrary ways with respect to these issues. Often demonized as the primary agent in disenchanting the world, the machine was also lauded, by (certain) modernists, as the model for futurity’s special aesthetic promise. In the visual field, perhaps the most arresting modernist portrayal of machine aesthetics—and dystopics—is Fritz Lang’s 1927 film *Metropolis*.


(11) Owen, The Place of Enchantment, 13, 16


(13) My usage is thus unique, yet I have chosen to maintain the terms enchantment and disenchantment for two reasons. First, there is no substitute for “enchantment,” which, in addition to the meanings already discussed, carries echoes of magic and the supernatural. Second, in the modernist period itself, the term had begun to be used in some of the ways I will be suggesting. Weber I have mentioned, and in chapter 3, I will consider Yeats, who, for instance, uses the term “enchanted to a stone” in “Easter 1916,” his most famous reflection on generative violence. Conrad, in one of his late novels (Victory, 1915), makes much of the idea of enchantment (his protagonist’s nickname is “enchanted Heyst”) using the term to invoke the allure of the East. Yet the idea of enchantment in the early twentieth century, unlike myth, was still uncertain and its usage sporadic, allowing for more critical flexibility.

(14) King LearPortrait William Shakespeare, King Lear (New York: Penguin, 1999) 120


Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), 44

Arendt, *On Violence*

(31) *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fr., 1952, Eng., 1967), especially, draws a devastating portrait of colonial subjectivity as a product of racial and class hierarchies that cut across metropolis and island, men and women.

(32) As Jean-Paul Sartre noted in his preface to the 1961 edition, Fanon “shows perfectly clearly that this irrepressible violence is neither a storm in a teacup nor the reemergence of savage instincts nor even a consequence of resentment: it is man reconstructing himself” (Fanon, lv). Unlike Fanon, Sartre takes up the prominent stereotypes that surrounded violent black masculinity in the early 1960s (primitivist, simultaneously fearsome and unthreatening), even as he follows Fanon in elevating violent action as the key to postcolonial self-development.


(36) I will discuss some of these issues more fully in chapter 4.


(38) Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

(39) For discussion of Friedrich’s text, within the context of the competing uses of photography that emerged in Germany in these crucial postwar years, see Dora Apel, “Cultural Battlegrounds: Weimar Photographic Narratives of War,” *New German Critique* 76 (Winter 1999), 49–84. See also Bernd Hüppauf, “Experiences of Modern Warfare and the Crisis of Representation,” *New German Critique* 59 (Spring–Summer 1993): 41–76.

(40) Ernst Friedrich, *War against War!* (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1987), 22

(42) On the subject of listening, the “boy” of line 2 might be imagined to be the speaker’s own youthful self, or perhaps one of the boys whose experience at the hot gates the poem depicts; or, again, the boy’s reading can be understood as conjuring the tableau that follows it—first “waiting for rain,” now in it.


(44) Eliot’s deep reading in Aeschylus is well established; Agamemnon in particular is referenced as the epigraph for “Sweeney among the Nightingales,” composed just before “Gerontion.” I have not noted any critical discussion of Agamemnon in relation to “Gerontion,” however.


(47) An interesting intertext here is Yeats’s poem “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” written two years later and sharing a good deal in spirit with “Gerontion,” which also takes the destructive wind as a guiding motif.


(49) Disenchantment C. E. Montague, Disenchantment (New York: Brentano’s, 1922)

(50) Siegfried Sassoon, The War Poems (London: Faber, 1983), 100


(56) The tradition of linking *The Waste Land* to the war goes back to its initial publication in 1922. Despite an ahistorical bent among early reviewers, who stressed the poem’s universal themes, and Eliot’s own demurring against historical interpretation, readers nevertheless have long seen the poem as an epochal statement of the postwar condition, carrying with it echoes of war. Paul Fussell helped to canonize that position in 1975, giving Eliot a central place in his story of modernity as a product of the war, while the new historicist turn in the 1980s opened new avenues for reading the history in grittier detail. I will make reference over the course of this discussion to several studies that engage the place of war and postwar in the poem.


(62) Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 132, 133

(63) . The Bleistein “Dirge” recalls Clarence’s dream in *Richard III*, an allusion notably omitted from Eliot’s notes. In a nightmare of drowning,

Methoughts I saw a thousand fearful wracks,
A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon,
Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
All scattered in the bottom of the sea.
Some lay in dead men’s skulls, and in the holes
Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept
(As ‘twere in scorn of eyes) reflecting gems,
That wooed the slimy bottom of the deep
And mocked the dead bones that lay scattered by.


(64) James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 41–42


(69) In the letter, Eliot praises the Daily Mail for its “attitude on nearly every public question of present importance.” With respect to Turkey in particular, he writes, “On the Turkish question, and on other matters of foreign policy, you have manifested a temperance, sanity, and consistency which can but rarely be attributed to the Press—virtues, however, in which the Press ought to lead the public. In an age when the intellect is eclipsed alternately by passion and apathy, such virtues can hardly be over-estimated” (T. S. Eliot, letter to the Daily Mail, January 8, 1923).


(74) One generic context in which The Waste Land might be read is the pastoral, and particularly the pastoral elegy. Most canonical as sources are Shelley’s “Adonais” and Milton’s “Lycidas.” For a discussion of the pastoral tradition with respect to the war, see Sandra M. Gilbert, “‘Rats Alley’: The Great War, Modernism, and the (Anti) Pastoral Elegy,” New Literary History 30 (1999): 179–201. For thorough discussion of the trope of lost youth, see Paul Fussell, Great War; Adrian Caesar, Taking it Like a Man; Peter Parker, The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos (London: Constable, 1987); and Martin Taylor, introduction to Lads: Love Poetry of the Trenches (London: Constable, 1989).
(75) The manuscript of the poem contains three further references to violet, very much in the spirit of the four that remain in the final draft, and these are layered into one long segment: “So through the evening, through the violet air...,” “Oh, through the violet sky...,” “The Shril bats quivered in the violet air...,” and, for good measure, “In the calm deep water where no stir nor surf is/ Swims down and down;/And about his hair the seaweed purple and brown.” See Eliot, Fasc., 113–15.

(76) Woolf’s novels are also filled with violets; they are ubiquitous. I have found no repeated or regular signifying system, though their affiliation with mourning is often evoked. Wilfred Owen’s version is a poem entitled “Purple.” Meanwhile, other associations for the word violet and the color purple abound, including those clustering around flowers (widespread in English poetry of the nineteenth century); the light spectrum (which ends in violet); and, in the twentieth century, with queer identities.

(77) The soldier name Albert carries generalizing associations, along the lines of (but not as fully as) Tommy.


(83) “Jug jug” represents a standard Elizabethan rendering of the nightingale’s song.
One might immediately object to Eliot’s use of the phrase “So rudely forc’d” as a description of the rape—such an artful and stylized rendition of what, in Ovid’s telling, is recounted in anything but delicate terms. It is worth noting, in this context, a sense of hesitation on the part of the editors of the Norton Critical Edition of *The Waste Land*: in the segment on Ovid, the editors include Tereus’s cutting out of Philomela’s tongue, but they skip over the next sentence in Ovid’s narrative, in which we read “Even after his crime, though the story is scarcely believable,/ Tereus debauched that bleeding body again and again.” Certain violations seem too atrocious even for scholarly mention. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004), 237, and T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land, A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: Norton, 2001), 48.