

CHARLES HUNTER JOPLIN

The Poet's Corpus

Meter, Memory, and Monumentality in Wilfred Owen's "The Show"

The treatment worked: to use one of his favorite metaphors, [Owen] looked into the eyes of the Gorgon and was not turned to stone. In due course the nightmares that might have destroyed him were objectified into poetry.

—Dominic Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography*

WILFRED OWEN WAS AN ENGLISH POET who wrote his best work during the autumn of 1917 while recovering from shell shock in Craiglockhart War Hospital for Neurasthenic Officers. Although a few of his poems were published during his short lifetime, Owen died on November 8, 1918 in the Sambre-Oise Canal, before he could publish his book of war poetry. Owen's body of work was collected by his mother and seven of those poems were edited by Edith Sitwell and published in a special edition of the avant-garde art magazine *Wheels: 1919*, which was dedicated to the memory of "Wilfred Owen, M.C." (Stallworthy 81; v.). Following the *Wheels* edition, Owen's war poetry spread slowly throughout the Western world. His work appeared in two separate collections in 1920 and 1931, saw widespread circulation during World War II, formed the basis for Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* in 1962, circulated in two more collections in 1963 and 1983, and rose to become a staple of twentieth century poetry anthologies (Stallworthy 81). Although there are other "trench poets" who achieved notoriety after the war's end, the gradual canonization of Owen's corpus has entrenched his life and works as a literary monument to our prevailing myths, feelings, and narratives of the First World War.¹

Owen's monumental status in English literature is appropriate because, during his time as a war poet, he carried a monumental mission. Although he had begun his poetic career as a mere torchbearer for the Romantic tradition of "Keats and the rest of them," Owen's near-death experience in the spring of 1917² not only gave him a profound subject matter—"War and the pity of War"—but also a role to play in the passage of the Great War (Owen, "Letter 302" 130; Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen* 317). Owen's newfound mission was to reach out to English

civilians—whom he believed to be ignorant and apathetic—and shock them “out of callousness into recognition of actuality, not to arouse pity but to convey the knowledge which could be pity’s foundation,” which, in due course, could inspire Englishmen to bring peace to the world (Hibberd, *Owen the Poet* 128). Owen affirmed that, “by leading [his comrades] as well as an officer can” and “by watching their sufferings” he could plead their case to the world (“Letter 662”). Owen’s poems stand as monuments to his noble mission and his untimely death; their tragic posture is illuminated by the forgetfulness of history and the ascendancy of global, mechanized warfare.

In this paper, I propose that we investigate the complex intersection of meter, memory, and monumentality in English war poetry by reading the poet’s published poems—his monumentalized work—in concert with his manuscripts—his actual body of work. Owen’s late poem “The Show” is concerned with the monumental capacities of lyric poetry and the difficulties of conveying traumatized memories. In his depiction of trench warfare, Owen deliberately subverts normalized Edwardian concepts of meter and musicality in favor of visually intense, deliberately sculpted forms and content. “The Show” suggests that “true” war poetry must enable its viewers to *see* mutilated soldierly bodies and to reject the militaristic swagger that pervades nationalistic verse. At the same time, the poem complicates the necessity of sight by foregrounding the fallibility of memory, a prosodic move that alludes to Owen’s mental trauma and the vast chasm between the home front and the trenches. Thus, “The Show” can be read as a war monument that points to soldierly bodies as the ultimate monuments of trench warfare, a reading present not only in the anthologized edition but also in the poem’s manuscripts: the late 1917 Scarborough draft and the early 1918 Ripon draft.³ Using the anthologized edition and its manuscripts, we may consider how the act of composition can enable a poet to solidify and sculpt his memories into a visual image of his private thoughts, allowing the poet to reshape those rough utterances into a visual monument suitable for the public eye. At the same time, the manuscripts’ messiness challenges readers’ ability to see the experiences of soldiers and reminds them of their distance from the front lines. The rough-hewn manuscripts affirm the anthologized poem’s greatest concern: that symbolic constructs always distance viewers from the lives that they recall, and that poetic significance is no substitute for sensory experience. Indeed, such a reading confirms Owen’s tragic mission to plead for his comrades’ sufferings by pointing towards their gruesome fates in the trenches. By reading Owen’s published and physical work in concert, it is evident that

“The Show” rejects officially sanctioned means of commemoration and, in contrast, posits the soldier’s body as the only “truthful” monument to the First World War.

To reckon the idiosyncrasies of Owen’s poetic craft, it is necessary to understand how English prosodic theory relates to war and soldiers in the early 20th century. English prosodic theory in the Edwardian period stressed the concept that hearing is a natural talent to Englishmen and that the iambic pentameter is a bodily force. Meredith Martin’s excellent study of prosodic history, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930*, reveals that there was no standardized “English meter” for most of the country’s history; classical forms were still the primary reference point in schools and prosody manuals. However, beginning in the eighteenth century and moving into the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras, iambic pentameter and the concept of an “English ear” became normalized in common discourse and the public-school system. According to George Saintsbury, one of the notion’s primary practitioners, Englishmen are endowed with an “English ear” that privileges iambic pentameters as “the most definitely English” of all forms and imagines them as “‘vast armies’ that English citizens, future armies, are conditioned to hear ‘naturally.’ It is a matter of national pride that English readers should, can, and do cultivate their faculties in order to correctly appreciate poetry” (Martin, *Rise and Fall* 101). Significantly, the ability to hear and feel iambic pentameter is inextricably linked to militaristic movement, a theory which was carried out most successfully by the popular poet Henry Newbolt. His poetry mimics “the drum and a natural ability to hear and follow rhythm as essential aspects of English military history, glory, and sacrifice; thus, reading and ‘feeling’ English poetry through its rhythm... was conceived of, by Newbolt and others, as an essential aspect of English citizenship” (126). In this view, English meter is the intangible fighting spirit of Englishmen made audible, a force so powerful that it can propel soldierly bodies without their mental recognition and revive the pulses of dead men (Newbolt 184). In the hands of Newbolt and fellow poets and prosodists, this nationalistic concept of an English meter and bodily rhythm created what Martin calls the “military-metrical complex,” a term which refers to the widespread proliferation and circulation of propagandistic, easily digestible drum-verse in the school system and the press (130). Thus, English meter in the early twentieth century was a physical force that could be heard in the ears, recited by mouth, and was essential to the strength of soldierly English bodies.

Because poetic meter and soldierly bodies are sutured together in Edwardian English thought, it is also necessary to understand how war monuments commemorate the experiences and sufferings of English soldiers. A war monument is a visual, sculpted representation of individual experiences presented to the public as representative of ideals that transcend (and frequently hide) the violence endured by those very individuals. At its core, a monument functions as a *memory site* which, in Pierre Nora's definition, is able "to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial" (19). In this sense, a single poet may use the language of monumentality to crystallize a moment in time, keep hold of his memories, make a deliberate statement about those memories, deal with the real and figurative aspects of death, and materialize his immaterial trauma in powerfully meaningful ways.⁴ However "personal" a monument might be, all monuments are public spaces that rely on communal participation to maintain significance. They are physical sculptures that perpetuate memory in external deposits "located not within the people but within its shared public space...to anchor collective remembering, a process dispersed, ever changing, and ultimately intangible, in highly condensed, fixed, and tangible sites" (Savage 130). War monuments are especially interesting because they attempt to publicly sanctify a community's private grief while simultaneously solidifying that community's pride in their contribution to a national war effort (Moriarty 138, 135). Consider, for example, "the figure of the common [deceased] soldier, who is always erect and unwounded" cast in bronze and placed on a thick marble base (Savage 131) Although this monument may serve as a site for personal remembrance and communal grieving, it also negates the individuality of that community's soldiers, conflates them all into one body, and presents it as "an image of bodily continuity that seeks to displace or overcome the memory of bodies violated and destroyed, even though such violence to the body is the defining premise of warfare" (131). Crucially, although war monuments provide a physical space in which to grieve for a community's fallen soldiers, those monuments' beauty is an ironic reminder that, despite their claims to truth, monuments tend to misrepresent the soldiers they stand to commemorate.

A comparative reading of "The Show's" anthologized edition and archived manuscripts appropriate monumental language insofar as they both perform monuments' glorification of soldiers while criticizing their complicity in neglecting the carnage of modern warfare. Although it did not earn Owen any serious acclaim, the 1919 edition of *Wheels*

honored his death and gave his editors a starting point from which to publish successive volumes of his war poetry (Ledbetter 326). “The Show” was the first entry in his section of the table of contents and was meant to be the first poem that *Wheels*’ readers would have read (52-53). Furthermore, it would have been a crucial turning point in the “moral epic” of Owen’s unpublished book (Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen* 318). Therefore, “The Show” is an especially monumental poem in Owen’s corpus and is a crucial text for discussing Owen’s contributions to scholastic studies of the First World War. Studying the anthologized edition illuminates its concerns with lyric poetry, sight and sound, and monumentality. Following the anthologized edition, this essay conducts a thorough analysis of the poem’s rough copy, which was penned late in November 1917 at a military base in Scarborough on the Yorkshire coast, and by a summary of the poem’s second and final manuscript, the fair copy, which was penned in the spring of 1918 at the Northern Command Depot at Ripon, England (Hibberd, *Owen the Poet* 128). By readings of the anthologized poem and its manuscripts in concert, this essay demonstrates that, in the same way that a monument stands in and speaks for soldiers’ bodies, in “The Show,” the poet’s corpus stands in and speaks for the poet’s corpse.

“The Show” dramatizes the hellishness and brutality of modern warfare. It is set in the aftermath of a battle wherein the soldier-poet, who cannot remember how he died and why, stands on the precipice of a large cliff in Hell. He surveys the landscape and sees a cold, moon-like terrain that is wracked with plague and flecked with dull shades of blue, green, brown and gray. Thousands of caterpillars slowly cover the ground, plug themselves inside of holes, and eat each other. The soldier-poet watches these creatures with rapt fascination until he realizes something terrible about their presence and falls to the ground in shock. Although he does not explain his thoughts, the reader may infer two possibilities: that the caterpillars will be his only company in the afterlife and that he is, in fact, one of those slimy creatures. Death confirms the soldier-poet’s fears by kneeling and showing him a headless caterpillar. The speaker interprets the caterpillar’s legs to be his fallen battalion and, in the final line, realizes that he is the creature’s rotten head.

On a surface level, the poem’s meaning is obvious: war is hell.⁵ Dominic Hibberd calls the poem “a ‘photographic representation’ of war’s horrors” and affirms that “[n]othing before [Henri Barbusse’s] *Le Feu* had given such an appallingly vivid description of trench warfare or combined it with such passionate political conviction” (129, 128). Focusing on the image of “the Romantic bird in flight,” Patrick Jackson observes that Owen “looks into war’s

terrifying sublimity and sees base materiality and death, a world feeding on itself' (297, 299). Douglas Kerr suggests that Owen's nightmare vision portrays an officer's repressed guilt for losing his nerve on the frontlines and consequently failing to protect his men's bodies from the terror that claimed his mind (Kerr 210). What these readings do not mention, however, is the poem's union of sight and sound, a union which is necessary to both lyric poetry and traumatic memory. Regarding the latter, I find that Siegfried Sassoon's definition of trauma is instructive: despite the best efforts of his "listening doctor," his experiences and those of his shell-shocked comrades were "involuntarily 'reenacted' for the now livid audience of the dead and are, through their haunting recurrence, performed nightly on the stage of the patient's neurasthenic psyche" (Martin, *Rise and Fall* 161). This definition argues that sight is more important to the experience of trauma than sound, but those sights are nightmarish and deeply confusing, which complicates the victim's ability to represent his memories. These critical and psychological ideas illuminate Owen's usage of stifling silence and monumental imagery in "The Show" and the ways in which he complicates his audience's capacity to see and comprehend the suffering of English soldiers.

Although Owen learned the craft of English lyric poetry in school and Craiglockhart, Owen subverts his training to demonstrate the terror of war through a unique combination of form and content. Most of the poem reads in iambic pentameter, but that meter is frequently interrupted by lines that exceed the standard form. The first line, for example, establishes the poem's iambic pentameter but the second line's "unremembering" includes an extra syllable; the second line scans as pentameter-and-a-half. In total, lines 2, 7, 11, 16, 20-25, and 27 all break the "English meter" with an extra syllable. The poem's English rhythm is further distorted by lines 17 and 26, which scan as hexameter and hexameter-and-a-half, respectively. Consequently, the English drum-beat is interrupted almost immediately and can never move for long enough to establish forward momentum. The poem's broken drums bolster the poem's central image of butchered English soldiers: their bodies can never be raised because their *heartbeat* has been silenced. The proud drum-beat they learned in school, the very same that propelled them onto the battlefield, ironically drove them to their deaths; no relief will ever come for them, nor will their rest "be a 9 days-Rest" (qtd. in Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen* 240). Owen further subverts his audience's prosodic expectations by silencing the battlefield and everyone in it. Consider first the title: "The Show" is a reference to the fact that British soldiers called trench raids "shows" and would congratulate each other with a hearty "Good show!"

(Fussell 198). From the title, the audience expects theatricality and liveliness, but the poem's content quickly sours those expectations. The first mention of sound (not counting the sighing gods in the epigraph) is in line 15, which describes a smell that arises from the earth "As out of mouths." These mouths are silent, however, and only chthonic odors and dead air comes out, as if the body's lungs have begun to decay. The second mention can be found in the penultimate stanza, in which the soldier-poet's body falls as silent as "a feather" (24). The third is the most significant: after the soldier-poet falls, Death, in turn, falls "like a deepening moan" (25). This action could be said to have a sound, but a deepening moan has no perceptible pitch, just an endlessly reverberating bass. "The Show" contains absolutely nothing audible: no heartbeats, drumbeats, iambic beats, or anything else that could be said to contain spirit or liveliness. The poem's utter silence suggests that, for Owen, the "English beat" that propels Englishmen to the front cannot withstand the horrors of trench warfare, and that metaphors of spectacle and showmanship are insufficient means of describing traumatic memory, thus negating the most essential aspect of lyric poetry: the lyric itself.

Because sound is incapable of conveying the phenomenon of trench warfare the poem continually emphasizes sight as a better, yet ultimately flawed, means to truth. The epigraph attributed to W. B. Yeats compares human existence to fog on a mirror, which the gods must clear away to view their own reflection. Owen opens his poem with this epigraph as a direct call to his audience for attention and pity, drawing a difference of opinion the apathetic gods and the clear vision that he needs his audience to have: if they look down upon the suffering of the soldiers and can muster only a sigh, then he is failing as a poet. The poem's first stanza further establishes its central motif of sight (and lack of sound) by describing the landscape as being "gray" and "cratered like the moon" (4). This comparison is significant because the silence of the moon is much like that of the battlefield in the aftermath of bloodshed. The landscape is unearthly and indescribable, "the abode of madness" and a place of utter darkness (Owen, "Letter 481" 215). Paradoxically, although the moon can be *seen* from afar, because of its distance and inhospitality, it can never truly be *known*. Likewise, although Owen's audience may be able to see the ruined battlefield through his poetic imagination, they are too far away to ever truly understand it. When the soldier-poet states that the caterpillars "vanished out of dawn down hidden holes," he juxtaposes the clear light of morning with the darkness and secrecy of the caterpillars' hidden holes (13). Along those same lines, he notes that the caterpillars "seemed" to push themselves, but he does not make himself clear (8). In so doing,

Owen places limits on his soldier-poet's knowledge and juxtaposes his testimony with his lack of perfect understanding; his audience shares this same sense of ominous uncertainty. In the penultimate stanza, the soldier-poet insists on the authority of his witness even as his uncertainty clouds his vision. The first two lines of this stanza enforce his testimony in equal measure: he "saw" the caterpillars' bitten backs and he "watched" their bodies move (21, 22). He reels in terror at "that sight" and falls to earth "like a feather" (23, 24). That simile is interesting because, when a feather falls to the ground, it rocks slowly back and forth and lands without a sound. There is no life or force to the soldier-poet's fall, no tragic melodrama or bombastic chaos. By using the image of a falling feather, the soldier poet successfully conveys the stifling silence of the battlefield and the frailty of his battered body. However, the soldier-poet cannot describe what was so horrifying about the caterpillars and why they caused him to fall—he can only mention "what that sight *might* mean" (emphasis mine, 23). "The Show" compares the tenuousness of the soldier-poet's traumatized psyche and his audience's inability to understand what truly happened to him on the battlefield. Consequently, the poem can *show* what the war was like but can never bridge the vast gap between metaphor and phenomenon.

"The Show's" concern with the ambiguities of sight and physical presence calls attention to the poem's monumentality and its subtle examples of monumental imagery. Much like a sculptor, Owen's landscape is a physical representation of the psychological wounds. However, he does not use verbs like "chisel" or "carve," as one might expect. Rather, he uses "pitted" and "scraped," which allude to the damage sustained by Owen's body and mind and provide a physical referent to the damage sustained by soldierly bodies (5, 10). The earth's face, with its "beard, that horror of harsh wire," is one such representation of war's damaging toll on both the body and how the traumatized mind perceives itself. Wyndham Lewis claimed in 1918 that "[d]eadness...is the first condition of art" and the prerequisite of the powerful monument (279). These words take on a disturbing irony in Owen's poem, for his images are still and resolute precisely because they are dead. The soldier-poet stands upright like a statue, but he cannot remember how he rose and never moves from that spot. The land is "weak with sweats of dearth" and is completely devoid of life (3). No flowers will ever bloom there again, no animals will roam its fields, and no rivers or rain will move the earth from its place. The caterpillars seem to be active, but they move so slowly as to be almost imperceptible: they uncoil, writhe, shrivel, creep, bristle, and eat each other at a glacier's pace. The caterpillars of lines 8 and 9 plug the ditches to prevent any water from filling the trench, thus nullifying the

possibility of regeneration. The “deep wounds” deepen, but nothing spills out of them (15). The caterpillars stand on “dithering feet” and move towards “mire,” where they shall plant themselves and rot with all their brethren. The soldier-poet watches them move in the penultimate stanza, but they merely slither into stasis: they curve, loop, and *straighten*” and “curl, lift, and *flatten*” (emphasis mine 21, 22). The caterpillars eat each other in a continuous cycle and nowhere in the poem do they breed a new generation. Eventually, the very last caterpillar will ingest the very last of his kind and die shortly thereafter in a ditch or swamp. Likewise, in the poem’s finale, the soldier-poet sees his soul as a headless “manner of worm” with feet that “crawled no further” (26, 27). With these images, Owen turns soldierly bodies lying in the trenches into a war monument. His monument is gray and cold, static and silent, and stands both inside and apart from the rest of the world. It cannot be weathered by time because it is already hideous, it will outlast the author’s death because it was never alive to start with, and its physical form enables its viewers to visualize the horrors it attempts to convey. “The Show” can be read as a sculptural representation of the horrors of war, the death of English bodies, and the insufficiency of poetry to convey lived experience. Its central motifs of insurmountable distance, faraway landscapes, and the act of *showing* keep the audience at both a symbolic and literal distance from Owen’s body and those of his men.

This essay’s critical reading of “The Show’s” manuscripts bolsters the anthologized edition’s concerns with meter, memory, and monumentality.⁶ The manuscripts are the physical memory sites in which Owen worked through his trauma and his craft; they are sculpted objects that convey both personal and public significance. Although they may be viewed online and in facsimile, unlike the anthologized edition, Owen’s manuscripts are not in the public eye. Thus, by studying Owen’s handwriting, his experimentation with content and form and his attempts to convey traumatic experience through lyric signification are reimaged and elucidated.⁷ Dominic Hibberd claims that Owen accomplishes his “vision” by enabling the reader to view the battlefield “from the air like an aviator and [by] using images he had tried out in letters from the front” (*Wilfred Owen* 290). I add to Hibberd’s claim by arguing that the poet’s aerial perspective applies to the manuscripts as well as the content. By reading each stanza from an aerial perspective and then dropping into the text, this essay reveals that the manuscripts’ stanzas have visible features which recall Owen’s memories of the battlefield, complicating the referential capacities of memory and monumentality.⁸ Furthermore, this essay reveals that, in the same way that monuments typically hide the terror and banalities of

warfare behind marble and bronze, the fair copy hides the violence that went into its creation behind a bright, monumental sheen.

Owen's first rough draft of "The Show," which is called the Scarborough draft and currently belongs to the English Faculty Library in Oxford, is written in rough handwriting and was initially referred to as "Vision" (*Wilfred Owen* 290). It begins as follows:

He looked down, from the great height of death,
Having forgotten ~~I had died, and why.~~
how he died, and why. (Stallworthy 316)

In these first two lines, Owen uses monumental language to call his readers attention to the trenches and to establish the predominance of death. His description of his narrator, a soldier-poet, is also a call to his readers: "He looked *down*..." War monuments are typically designed to make the public look *up* and see their cultural values embodied in the forms of the glorious dead, raised high above the land. However, Owen calls his readers to see that the "truth" of war is not in the heavens or emblazoned on a pedestal but mired deep in the war-ravaged fields of France. Paradoxically, his soldier-poet describes the cliff as "the great height of death." War monuments tend to suppose that a nation's cultures and values—even the sculpture itself—can transcend death despite the prevalence of war. However, Owen beckons his readers to think of death as an insurmountable wall of stone not unlike an obelisk or a cenotaph. Before Owen establishes the monumentality of soldiers' corpses, death appears as a powerful monument, positing its own existence as the only "ultimate truth" about the world and the only certainty of war.⁹

Although there is no clear break between the first two lines and the subsequent section, it is easier and more manageable to break them up into subsequent parts. Therefore, this is the second section:

I
~~And saw this planet~~
~~is~~
~~th—continent~~
~~e~~

and as he continued to develop his soldier-poet's personality and perspective, Owen discovered profound and ingenious articulate his self-styled destiny as witness and victim of war (Winter 7).

At the end of the rough copy, the final stanza entrenches what the poem will ultimately become upon its near-completion at Ripon:

ate
Warred on the rest and them, and were eaten
ea
Death had
For yet yet even
~~now~~
I saw not nearer. ~~It was yet~~ forgiven me
~~was~~
those worming
To watch ~~the living~~ creatures torn and smitten
And know the feet of one that crawled no more,
For ~~my own men~~
men, my men. Whose head lay by them rotten. (Stallworthy 317)

Owen's marks are not as extensive as they are in the previous stanzas, but it is significant that he chooses not to describe the caterpillar's feet as "my own men" but, rather, "my men. Whose head lay by them rotten." This line positions the poem's protagonist as the captain of a battalion that was slaughtered in combat and burdens him with the guilt of their failure. It also references Owen's position as "Major Domo" at Scarborough and the aforementioned metaphor of worms and caterpillars: "I boss cooks, housemaids, charwomen, chamber-maids, mess orderlies – and drummers... I'll mind my business, I'm a good worm" (Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen* 286). Significantly, although the "I" has not figured prominently in the draft thus far, Owen's soldier-poet now places himself front-and-center: "I saw not nearer. Death had forgiven me." By describing the men as his own he implies that he is the rotten head, but this is not as explicit as the fair copy's final lines, where Death picks up the worm and shows him "its feet, the feet of many men, / And the fresh-severed head of it, my head" (28-29). The

perspective of the soldier-poet and his relationship with his audience is disorienting because the phenomenon of battlefield experience and memory is itself disorienting. Likewise, the manuscript's myriad images reflect the confusing nature of memory and the commensurate difficulties of artistic representation. Even so, the fact that the manuscript lacks resolution is indicative of both Owen's view of the Great War and the poem's conclusion. For Owen, his comrades' lives are prone to sudden destruction and stifling futility; their duty as soldiers lacks resolution. Likewise, the rough copy also lacks a strong resolution and it is unclear whether Owen will revise his draft or not. As we know well, however, Owen's intense focus on the sufferings of soldierly bodies will continue into the fair copy and will be fully articulated as a monument to the Great War in the anthologized version.

Although the Ripon draft of "The Show" looks much cleaner than the Scarborough draft and is virtually identical to the anthologized poem, it does contain some significant errata and changes. On a separate title page, Owen abandons his original title of "Vision" and calls his poem "The Show." This new title has three important implications. First, it refers to the theatricality of war, as previously mentioned. Second it refers to Owen's mission as a pleader for his men and the notion that he wants to *show* his audience the horror of war. However, the new title's most interesting referent is the climactic action of the poem's final stanza, in which Death shows the soldier-poet the headless caterpillar and the protagonist understands, once and for all, the dehumanizing horrors of warfare. On a separate page after the title, Owen slightly misquotes the aforementioned line from Foragel's speech in W. B. Yeats' "The Shadow Waters."¹⁵ However, the most significant correction to the fair copy is the elimination of the poem's subtitle, "as seen from heaven."¹⁶ If this subtitle were left standing, it would relate to Owen's motif of intractable distance (alluded to in the Yeats epigraph and the opening line's "vague height") and the implied distance between the home front and the war front. However, rather than place his audience in heaven with the bored gods of the Yeats epigraph, Owen needs his audience to see the meaning of war from the trenches. Thus, to facilitate England's memories, Owen rejects the comforts of heaven and erects a monument to his memories in the very ground where they occurred, which allows his audience to imagine themselves in his place and open their eyes to the horrors of the soldiers' experiences.

Not counting for these corrections and new additions, the fair copy establishes everything that we have read in the anthologized poem and watched develop in the rough copy. Owen's speaker-poet becomes more distinctly representative of the author through his

use of first-person pronouns, the landscape becomes a distinct representation of the poet's body and the French battlefields, and Death becomes a full-fledged character in the narrative. In the rough copy, the speaker seems detached from the action and poorly defined. However, Owen's revisions remind us that a real, flesh and blood human being is involved in the action of the poem and is building a monument from his own memories. Thus, the human characteristics of the landscape are allowed a deeper sense of gravitas because, in the same manner that the manuscript's physicality recalls Owen's traumatic experiences, the landscape recalls the poet's battered body. The fact that we cannot see Owen, however, coupled with the notion that the English populace could not see what was happening to the soldiers in the battlefields, reminds us that we cannot truly understand the soldier and his trauma. In the rough copy, Death's single action—his forgiveness—was in the past, something that happened some time ago. In the fair copy, however, Death does not forgive him, nor does he express sympathy. Instead, the reaper shows the poet a *monument*: the headless worm which half had hid / Its bruises in the earth, but crawled no further" (26-27). This worm—which seems more like a caterpillar in his description—can now be read as the poem's definitive war monument because it denies the glory and decorum that monuments are supposed to represent and instead foregrounds the mutability of representative structures and the carnage that ravages soldierly bodies. As we may now see, although a mere reading may allow one to gloss over the anthologized poem may gloss over Owen's lived experiences, the manuscripts' scars remind us that trauma and violence cannot be hidden away—it always resurfaces, and it is always under revision.

Owen's corpus suggests that, although a war monument can seem powerful and imposing from afar, all manmade creations bear the scars of their birth and the ravages of time. By reading only the anthologized edition of "The Show" with no consideration of its manuscripts, readers may overlook the girders, mortars, and tools that Owen used to build his war monument. Consequently, readers may forget the fact that monuments, much like war stories, are both physical and social constructs that do not transcend history but instead reveal its flaws.¹⁷ The same can be said of Owen himself—despite his well-documented personal accounts and his attempts to commemorate those accounts, it is easy enough to neglect his past and to generalize him among other poets whom have been critical of war. Furthermore, Owen's centrality in the English trench poetry canon tends to privilege his singular perspective above those of his contemporaries and, ironically, assumes that his views were typical of all

soldiers.¹⁸ Unfortunately, those are the consequences of being a monument: one's body is emblazoned in bronze on a pedestal, but the corpse is buried "under abysmal war...where we can no more find" (Owen, "As bronze maybe much beautified" 12). As the humanities continue to study the facts of the First World War and the lives of its authors, as well as twentieth century theories of prosody and monumentality, it is increasingly important that readers and scholars become willing to read authors' manuscripts and letters in concert with their published work. Such a reading grants a clearer, more revealing view of how and why the author lived and died. In other words, the poet's corpus is a means to see the poet's corpse.

Works Cited

- Ashworth, Tony. *Trench Warfare 1914-18: The Live and Let Live System*, Pan, 2000.
- Barbusse, Henri. *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad (Le Feu)*, translated by Fitzwater Wray, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1917.
- Field, Frank. "Isaac Rosenberg, Wilfred Owen: anthems for doomed youth." *British and French Writers of the First World War: Comparative studies in cultural history*, Cambridge UP, 1991, pp. 229-243.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford UP, 1975.
- Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*, 1977, Knopf, 1991.
- Hibberd, Dominic. *Owen the Poet*, U of Georgia P, 1986.
- . *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography*, Ivan R. Dee, 2003.
- Hynes, Samuel. *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, Collier-Macmillan, 1992.
- Jackson, Patrick. "Wilfred Owen's THE SHOW." *The Explicator*, vol. 72, no. 4, 2014, pp. 297-299.
- Kendall, Tim. "Introduction." *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. xx-xxvii.
- Kerr, Douglas. *Wilfred Owen's Voices: Language and Community*, Clarendon P, 1993.
- Ledbetter, Kathryn. "Battle for Modernism and 'Wheels.'" *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1995, pp. 322-328.
- Leese, Peter. "'Why are They Not Cured?' British Shellshock Treatment During the Great War." *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, edited by Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, Cambridge UP, 2001, pp. 205-221.
- Lewis, Wyndham. *Tarr*, 1918, Calder & Boyars, 1968.
- Martin, Meredith. *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930*, Princeton UP, 2012.

—. “Therapeutic Measures: The Hydra and Wilfred Owen at Craiglockhart Hospital.” *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2007, pp. 35-54.

McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West*, Vintage International, 1985.

Miller, Matt. “How Whitman Used His Early Notebooks.” *Collage of Myself: Walt Whitman and the Making of Leaves of Grass*, U of Nebraska P, 2010, pp. 1-47.

Moriarty, Catherine. “Private Grief and Public Remembrance: British First World War Memorials.” *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, Berg, 1997, pp. 125-142.

Newbolt, Henry. *Tales of the Great War*, Longmans, Green, 1916.

Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.” *Representations*, vol. 26, 1989, pp. 7-25.

North, Michael. *The Final Sculpture: Public Monuments and Modern Poets*, Cornell UP, 1985.

Owen, Wilfred. “As bronze maybe much beautified.” *The Complete Poems and Fragments. Volume II: The manuscripts and fragments*, edited by Jon Stallworthy, W. W. Norton and Co., 1984, pp. 529-530.

—. “Letter 302. To Susan Owen.” *Selected Letters*, edited by John Bell, Oxford UP, 1985, pp. 128-131.

—. “Letter 481. To Susan Owen.” *Selected Letters*, edited by John Bell, Oxford UP, 1985, pp. 214-215.

—. “Letter 510. To Colin Owen.” *Selected Letters*, edited by John Bell, Oxford UP, 1985, pp. 243-244.

—. “Letter 662. To Susan Owen.” *Selected Letters*, edited by John Bell, Oxford UP, 1985, pp. 351.

—. “The Show.” *The Complete Poems and Fragments. Volume I: The poems*, edited by Jon Stallworthy, W. W. Norton and Co., 1984, pp. 155-157. Print.

—. “The Show.” *The Complete Poems and Fragments. Volume II: The manuscripts and fragments*, edited by Jon Stallworthy, W. W. Norton and Co., 1984, pp. 316-318.

—. “The Show.” *Wheels: 1919*, edited by Edith Sitwell, Cowley S. John P, 1919, pp.52-53.

Puissant, Susanne Christine. *Irony and the Poetry of the First World War*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, U of Chicago P, 2004.

Rotella, Guy. “Introduction.” *Castings: Monuments and Monumentality in Poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney*, Vanderbilt UP, 2004, pp. 1-16.

Savage, Kirk. “The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil War Monument.” *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, edited by John R. Gillis, Princeton UP, 1991, pp. 127-149.

Stallworthy, Jon. "Owen and his editors." *Survivors' Songs: From Maldon to the Somme*, Cambridge UP, 2008, pp. 81-97.

Stephen, Martin. *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War*, Leo Cooper, 1996. Thompson, Hugh S. *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas: With the 42nd Rainbow Division in France*, edited by Robert H. Ferrell, Texas A&M UP, 2004.

"The Wilfred Owen Collection." *The First World War Digital Poetry Archive*, 15 April 2015,

<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/owen>.

Ugolini, Laura. "War-stained: British Combatants and Uniform, 1914-18." *War & Society*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2014, pp. 155-171.

Van Mierlo, Wim. "The Archaeology of the Manuscript: Towards Modern Paleography." *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive: Reclamation and Representation*, edited by Carrie Smith and Lisa Stead, Routledge, 2013, pp. 15-29.

Winter, Jay. *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2006. Print.

Endnotes

¹ For more on the myths and facts of the First World War, see Martin Stephen's *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War*. London: Leo Cooper, 1996.

² Chapters Twelve and Thirteen of Dominic Hibberd's *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography*—"Seventh Hell" and "Mental Case," pages 203-242 and 243-263, respectively—describe Owen's battlefield ordeals pre-Craiglockhart in exquisite detail.

³ PDF copies of both drafts are available to the public via *The First World War Poetry Digital Archive* at <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/owen>

⁴ For more on monuments in the poetic tradition, see Guy Rotella's Introduction to *Castings: Monuments and Monumentality in Poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004. 1-16.

⁵ To quote Tim O'Brien: "As a moral declaration the old truism ["war is hell"] seems perfectly true, and yet because it abstracts, because it generalizes, I can't believe it with my stomach" (78).

⁶ A particularly useful example of my kind of work is Matt Miller's "How Whitman Used His Early Notebooks" in *Collage of Myself: Walt Whitman and the Making of Leaves of Grass*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2010. 1-47.

⁷ To quote Wim Van Mierlo: "[t]he flow of the writing, the vigour of the pen, the boldness of the cancellations, the position of the writing on the page all inform us about not only the circumstances in which the writing took place, but also the characteristic habits (or *usus scribendi*) of the individual writer" (17).

⁸ Not all manuscripts have a visible form which complements their thematic content but, at least in this instance, I argue that they do.

⁹ To quote Cormac McCarthy: “It makes no difference what men think of war... War endures. As well ask men what they think of stone. War was always here” (259).

¹⁰ See Tony Ashworth’s *Trench Warfare 1914-18: The Live and Let Live System*, London: Pan, 2000.

¹¹ See Hugh S. Thompson’s *Trench Knives and Mustard Gas: With the 42nd Rainbow Division in France*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell, College Station: Texas A&M UP, 2004.

¹² See Laura Ugolini’s “War-stained: British Combatants and Uniform, 1914-18.” *War & Society*. 33.3 (2014): 155-171. *Taylor and Francis*.

¹³ See Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975.

¹⁴ In a May 1917 letter to his youngest brother, Colin Owen, Wilfred describes a freshly-shelled battlefield as “all crawling and wormy with wounded bodies” (“Letter 510” 243-244).

¹⁵ “We have fallen in the dreams the ever-living / Breathe on the tarnished mirror of the world, / And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh.” Owen, *CPF Vol. I* 155.

¹⁶ Stallworthy’s *CPF Vol. II* includes this correction, but it is not clear from the facsimile that it was intended as a subtitle. One must survey a copy of the handwritten Ripon draft to see the actual placement.

¹⁷ For more English poetry on this subject, I would recommend Charlotte Mew’s “The Cenotaph” (1919) and Siegfried Sassoon’s “On Passing the New Menin Gate” (1928).

¹⁸ See Tim Kendall’s “Introduction” to *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013. xx-xxvii.

Charles Hunter Joplin is a Ph.D. candidate in literature at The University of Southern Mississippi. His research interests include Great War Modernism, New Lyric Studies, and Textual Criticism, among others.