

Invisible Lives, Silent Voices: Modernist Studies in Invisibility

The Case of Literary Testimonies of the First World War

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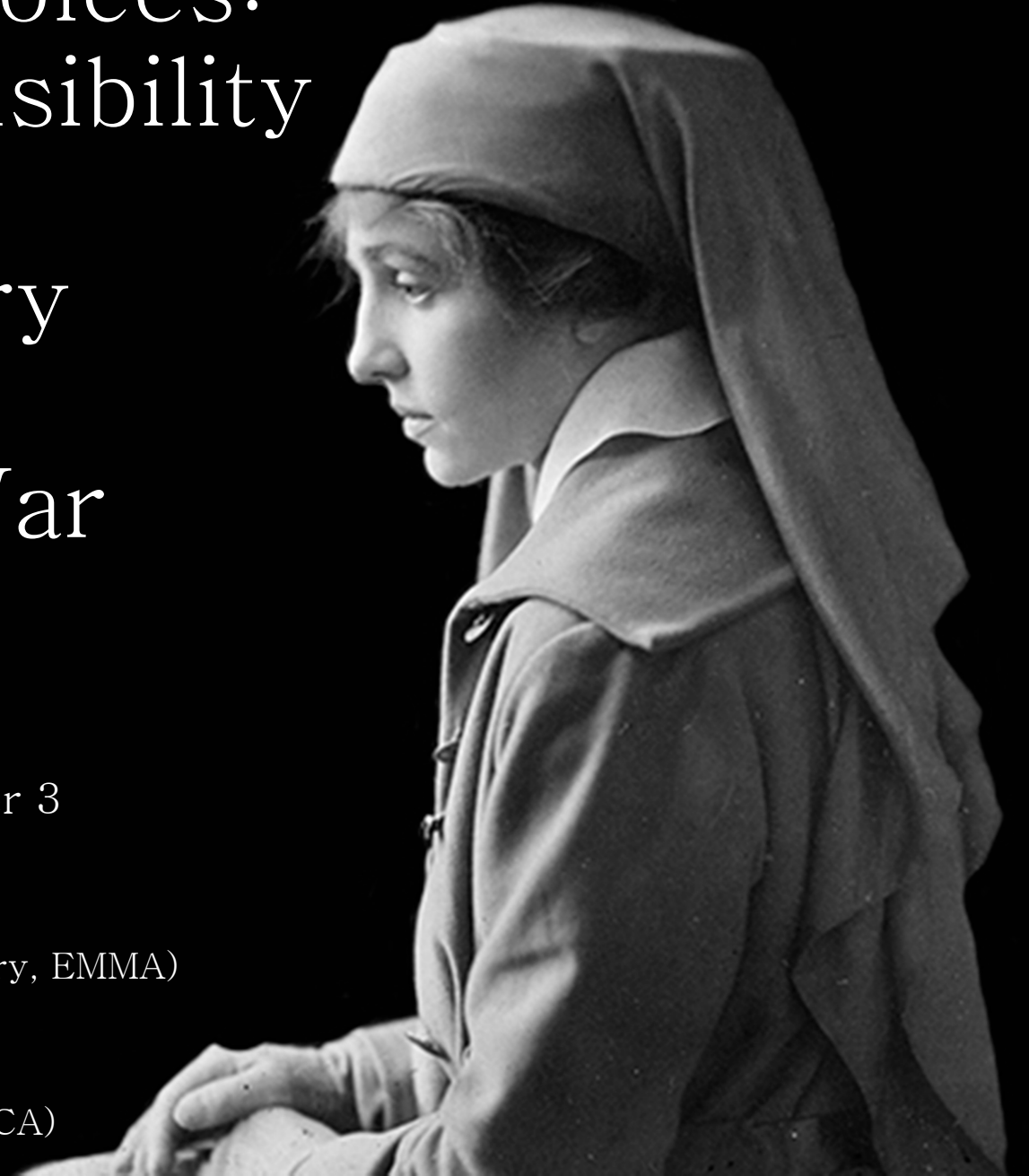
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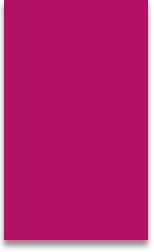
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- ▶ I. Overview of the Four Authors
 - ▶ II. May Sinclair: Negativity as A Subversive Mode of Writing
 - ▶ III. Mary Borden: from the Liminality of the ‘Forbidden Zone’ to the Agency of *The Forbidden Zone*

I. Overview of the four authors



May Sinclair



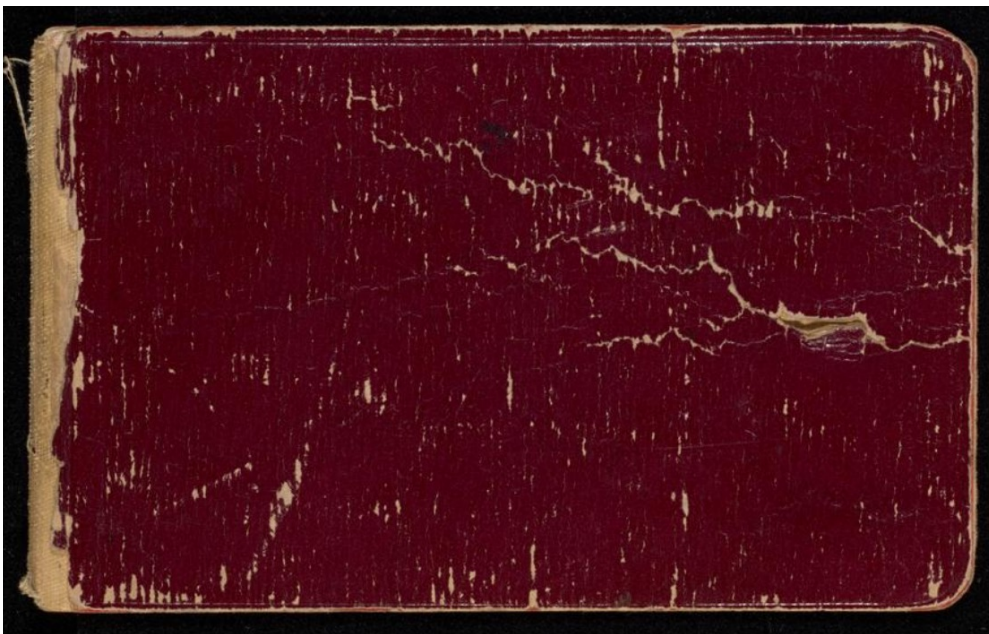
Ford Madox Ford



Siegfried Sassoon



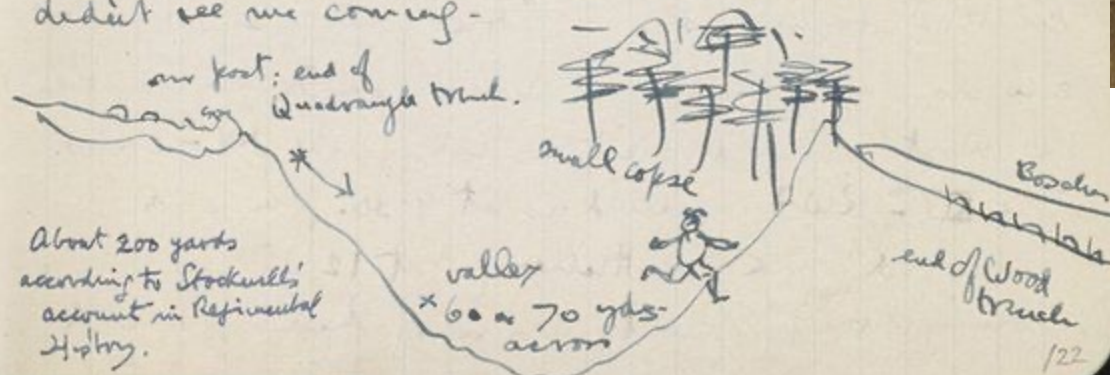
Mary Borden



18/
 March 19th. Riding out to the trenches last night the sky at 6:30 was angry with a red smoky sunset: the village loomed against the glow; it was a sultry, threatening dusk. But when I came home at 10 o'clock everything was covered with exquisite moonlight & a great star hung over Marlescourt, unbelievably bright in the pale azure heavens.

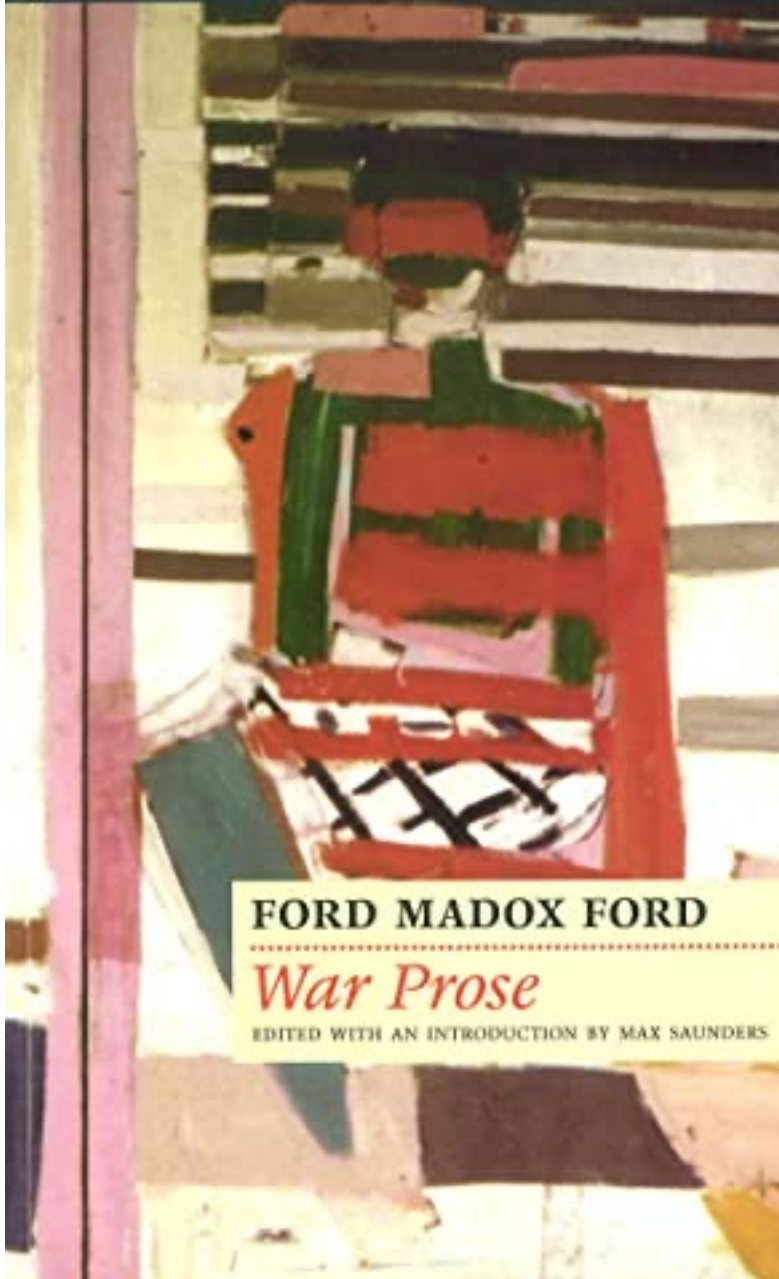
This morning came the evil news from the trenches, - first, that Doctor Richardson had died of wounds after being knocked over by a shell last night in front of the trenches; this was bad. But they came afterwards & told that my little Tommy had been hit by a stray bullet & died last night. When last I saw him ^{two} ~~the night before~~ ^{ago} ~~last~~, he had this note-book in his hand, reading my last poem. And I said good night to him in the moonlit trenches, that I but know! - the old, human-wreck cry. Now he comes back to me in memories, like an angel, with the light in his yellow hair, I think of him at Cambridge last August when we lived together 4 weeks in Pembroke Coll. in rooms where the ^{previous occupants' name,} "Paradise" was written above the door.

sniped a lot from the wood, & we had 5 men killed & several wounded. (C.D. Morgan - got hit in the leg - not badly) - I went across from our bombing post ^{where} to wood trench ended, as there was a Bosche sniper: the others fired at the parapet so they didn't see me coming.



CARCANET *1st*

The Millennium For



FORD MADOX FORD

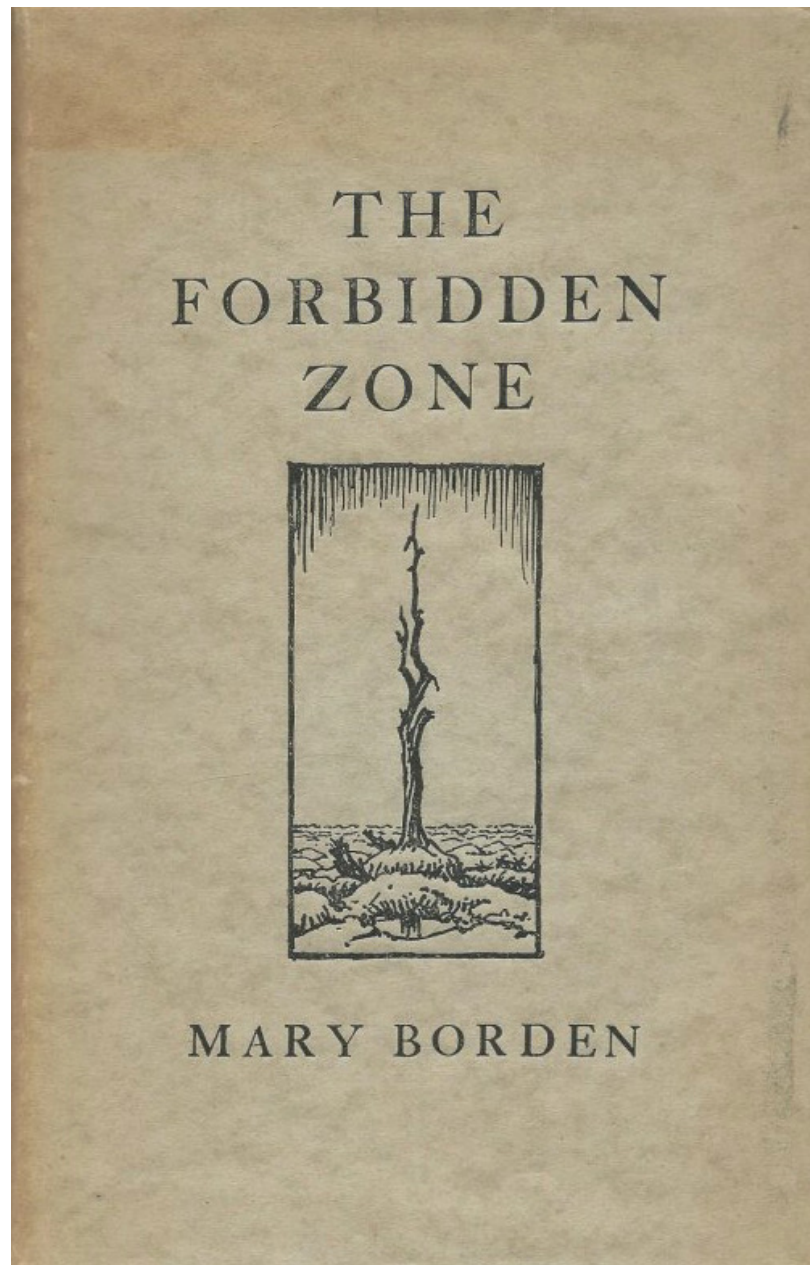
War Prose

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY MAX SAUNDERS



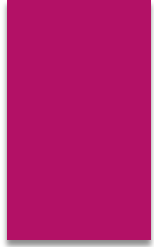
A JOURNAL OF
IMPRESSIONS
❖ IN BELGIUM ❖
MAY SINCLAIR





II. May Sinclair: Negativity as a Subversive Mode of Writing

- ▶ 1. A Paradoxical 'Journal'
- ▶ 2. Testimonial Sabotage
- ▶ 3. Claiming Anomaly As an Act of Resilience

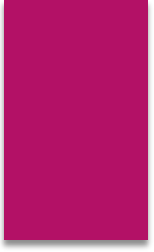


They've called me the Secretary and Reporter, which sounds very fine, and I am to keep the accounts (Heaven help them!) and write the Commandant's reports, and toss off articles for the daily papers, to make a little money for the Corps.

A Journal of Impressions in Belgium, 4



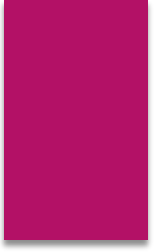
HEAD OF THE MUNRO FLYING AMBULANCE : DR. HECTOR MUNRO (X).



Women like May Sinclair [...] struggled to make a place for themselves in a world that was preoccupied with the vulnerability of young men, rather than of older women. Her war journals reveal in painful and awkward detail the shame of a middle-aged woman who sees in middle age her last chance at life.

Suzanne Raitt, “‘Contagious Ecstasy’: May Sinclair’s War Journals’, 65–6

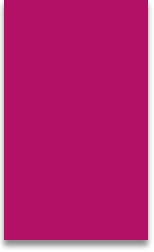
1. A Paradoxical 'Journal'



I was always behindhand with my Journal—a week behind with the first day of the seventeen, four months behind with the last.

This was inevitable. For in the last week of the Siege of Antwerp, when the wounded were being brought into Ghent by hundreds, and when the fighting came closer and closer to the city, and at the end, when the Germans were driving you from Ghent to Bruges, and from Bruges to Ostend and from Ostend to Dunkirk, you could not sit down to write your impressions, even if you were cold-blooded enough to want to. It was as much as you could do to scribble the merest note of what happened in your Day-Book.

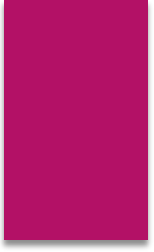
‘Introduction’, n.p., par. 2-3



For the Solid Facts and the Great Events [the readers] must go to such books as Mr. E. A. Powell's 'Fighting in Flanders', or Mr. Frank Fox's 'The Agony of Belgium', or Dr. H. S. Souttar's 'A Surgeon in Belgium', or 'A Woman's Experiences in the Great War', by Louise Mack.

'Introduction', n. p. par. 1

2. Testimonial Sabotage



They told me that the village had been fired on by shrapnel a few minutes before we came into it. They said we were only a hundred [?] yards from the German trenches. We could see the edge of the field from the village street. The trenches [?] were at the bottom of it. (189)

have no tears for it; it is a sorrow that transcends everything you have known of sorrow. These people have been left "only their eyes to weep with." But they do not weep any more than you do. They have no tears for themselves or for each other.¹ This is the terrible thing, this and the manner of their flight. It is not flight, it is the vast, unending and unending movement of a people crushed down by grief and weariness, pushed on by its own weight, by the ceaseless impact of its ruin.

This stream is the main stream from Antwerp, swollen by its tributaries. It doesn't seem to matter where it comes from, its strength and volume always seem the same. After the siege of Antwerp it will thicken and flow from some other direction, that is all. And all the streams seem to flow into Ghent and to meet in the Palais des Fêtes.²

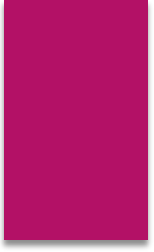
¹ Of all the thousands and thousands of refugees whom I have seen I have only seen three weep, and they were three out of six hundred who had just disembarked at the Prince of Wales's Pier at Dover. But in Belgium not one tear.

² This is all wrong. The main stream went as straight as it could for the sea-coast — Holland or Ostend.

Hospital, and are working in the operating theatre all day. They have got enough to do now in all conscience.

All night there has been a sound of the firing of machine guns [?]. At first it was like the barking of all the dogs in Belgium. I thought it *was* the dogs of Belgium, till I discovered a deadly rhythm and precision in the barking.¹

¹ I'm inclined to think it may have been the dogs of Belgium, after all. I can't think where the guns could have been. Antwerp had fallen. It might have been the bombardment of Melle, though.



Five days in Ghent and not a thing done; not a line written of those brilliant articles (from the Front) which were to bring in money for the Corps. (87)

3. Claiming Anomaly As an Act of Resilience

A colossal Flora stands by the lift at the foot of the big staircase. Unaware that this is no festival of flowers, the poor stupid thing leans forward, smiling, and holds out her garland to the wounded as they are carried past. Nobody takes any notice of her. (20)

III. Mary Borden: From the Liminality of the 'Forbidden Zone' to the Agency of *The Forbidden Zone*

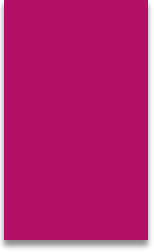
- ▶ 1. The Invisibilisation of the Nursing Gaze and the Silenced Voices of War Nurses
- ▶ 2. Writing as an Assertion of the Nurse's Scopic Power
- ▶ 3. The Uninhabitability of War Nursing



Mary Borden in front of her field hospital



Borden's Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile



I have called the collection of fragments *The Forbidden Zone* because the strip of land immediately behind the zone of fire where I was stationed went by that name in the French Army. We were moved up and down inside it; our hospital unit was shifted from Flanders to the Somme, then to Champagne, and then back again to Belgium, but we never left *La Zone Interdite*.

To those who find these impressions confused, I would say that they are fragments of a great confusion.

Any attempt to reduce them to order would require artifice on my part and would falsify them. To those on the other hand who find them unbearably plain, I would say that I have blurred the bare horror of facts and softened the reality in spite of myself, not because I wished to do so, but because I was incapable of a nearer approach to the truth.

Mary Borden, 'Preface' to *The Forbidden Zone*

1. The Invisibilisation of the Nursing Gaze and the Silenced Voices of War Nurses



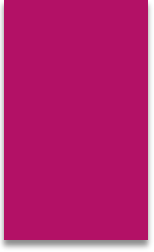
The
GREATEST MOTHER
in the WORLD



THIRD RED CROSS ROLL CALL



THE ALIBATES PRESS, BOSTON



If she wrote realistically, she could face official censorship for producing demoralizing, unpatriotic texts. A veteran, who had risked and perhaps given his life to the nation, might be justified in holding the leaders of the nation to account for the bloodshed it had exacted. But a woman who had not been called upon to make parallel sacrifices, from this point of view, had no right to criticize the very system that protected her.

Higonnet 1993, 207.

2. Writing as an Assertion of the Nurse's Scopic Power

BELGIUM

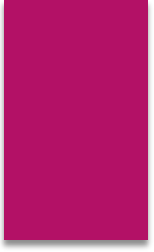
MUD : and a thin rain coming down to make more mud.

Mud : with scraps of iron lying in it and the straggling fragment of a nation, lolling, hanging about in the mud on the edge of disaster.

It is quiet here. The rain and the mud muffle the voice of the war that is growling beyond the horizon. But if you listen you can hear cataracts of iron pouring down channels in the sodden land, and you feel the earth trembling.

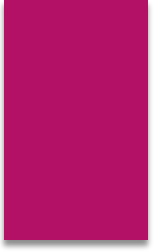
BOMBARDMENT

THE wide sweet heaven was filling with light: the perfect dome of night was changing into day. A million silver worlds dissolved from above the earth : the sun was about to rise in stillness : no wind stirred.



I have dared to dedicate these pages to the *poilus* who passed through our hands during the war, because I believe they would recognise the dim reality reflected in these pictures.

Borden, 'Preface', *The Forbidden Zone*



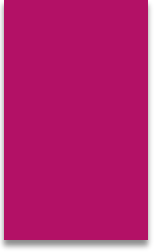
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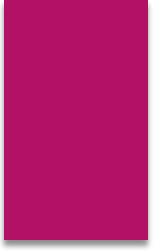
3. The Uninhabitability of War Nursing

On our right? That's the road to Ypres. The less said about that road the better: no one goes down it for choice—it's British now. Ahead of us, then? No, you can't get out that way. No, there's no frontier, just a bleeding edge, trenches. That's where the enemy took his last bite, fastened his iron teeth, and stuffed to bursting, stopped devouring Belgium, left this strip, these useless fields, these crumpled dwellings.

Cities? None. Towns? No whole ones. (1-2)



I think that woman, myself, must have been in a trance, or under some horrid spell. Her feet are lumps of fire, her face is clammy, her apron is splashed with blood [...]. She does not seem to notice the wounds or the blood' ('Blind', 151)

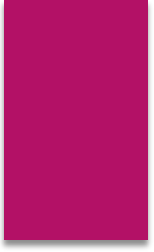


When one hears about another person's physical pain, the events happening within the interior of that person's body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that [...] has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth.

Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 3

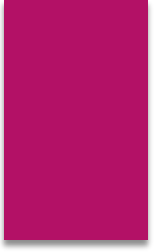
What is abject [...], the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.

Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* , 2.



At midnight we always have cocoa in there next to the operating room, because there is a big table and boiling water. We push back the drums of clean dressings and the litter of soiled bandages, and drink our cocoa standing round the table. Sometimes there isn't much room. Sometimes legs and arms wrapped in cloths have to be pushed out of the way. We throw them on the floor-they belong to no one and are of no interest to anyone-and drink our cocoa. The cocoa tastes very good. It is part of the routine.

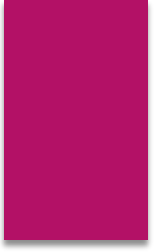
‘Moonlight’, 56



The little whimpering voice of a man who is going to die in an hour or two comes across the whispering grass from the hut next door. That little sound I understand. It is like the mew of a wounded cat.

‘Moonlight’ 52-53

He is my brother, that wounded cat. This also is true. His voice goes on and on. He tells the truth to me. He tells me what I know to be true. (56)



The reject is not always passive [...]. In its turn, it can actively express a force of rejection in retaliation to the external forces acting against it.

[...]

The auto-reject [...] is always able to think (itself) anew constantly and to be always open to what arrives to thought and to itself, which arrives not only from the future but also from the past. Auto-rejection involves creative regeneration, therefore, and not [...] self-annihilation.

Irving Goh, *The Reject: Community, Politics, and Religion After the Subject*, 2014,