



VIRGINIE RENARD

THE GREAT WAR AND POSTMODERN MEMORY

THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN LATE 20TH-CENTURY
BRITISH FICTION (1985-2000)



P.I.E. Peter Lang

The end of the twentieth century was marked in Britain by a renewal of academic and public interest in the Great War, which remains one of the most defining historical events in British national consciousness.

Focusing on questions of memory, this book examines some of the First World War narratives that were published during what has been called the late twentieth-century "war books boom". It provides a panoramic overview of these new war stories and offers close readings of texts written not only by best-selling authors such as Pat Barker and Sebastian Faulks, but also by less well-known writers who deserve greater academic attention, such as Robert Edric and Helen Dunmore.

It investigates military historians' claims about the lack of historical perspective of recent Great War writers, their perpetuation of "myths" and their inability to move beyond what has already been imagined and said. Positioned at a mid-point between literary analysis and history, this study challenges monolithic views of the war and creates a dialogue rather than a confrontation between the two disciplines.

It shows how the selected narratives engage both with the writings of the trench poets and the preoccupations of their postmodern world in order to offer alternative perspectives on the war, exploring in the process complex issues regarding, among other things, the ethics of historical representation, traumatic memory, the politics of memory, and the significance of remembrance for later generations.

Virginie Renard received her PhD in Literature from the Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium) in 2009. She has published several articles on First World War fiction in English and French. She now teaches at the Haute École Charlemagne in Liège (Belgium).

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P.I.E. Peter Lang

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Abbreviations of Frequently Cited Works

- AW* Pat Barker, *Another World*. 1998. London: Penguin Books, 1999.
- B* Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong*. 1993. London: Vintage, 1994.
- BD* David Hartnett, *Brother to Dragons*. 1998. London: Vintage, 1999.
- DH* Robert Edric, *In Desolate Heaven*. 1997. London: Anchor, 1998.
- DM* Richard Burns, *A Dance for the Moon*. 1986. London: Bloomsbury, 1991.
- E* Julian Barnes, "Evermore," in Julian Barnes, *Cross Channel*. London: Picador, 1996, pp. 89-111.
- ED* Pat Barker, *The Eye in the Door*. 1993. London: Penguin Books, 1994.
- EH* Sue Gee, *Earth and Heaven*. 2000. London: Headline, 2001.
- G* Esther Freud, *Gaglow*. 1997. London: Penguin Books, 1998.
- GR* Pat Barker, *The Ghost Road*. 1995. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- IHS* Julia Hamilton, *The Idle Hill of Summer*. 1988. London: Fontana, 1989.
- LE* Pat Barker, *Liza's England* [first published as *The Century's Daughter*]. 1986. London: Virago, 1996.
- M* Nicky Edwards, *Mud*. London: The Women's Press, 1986.
- P* Jane Thynne, *Patrimony*. London: Fourth Estate, 1997.
- R* Pat Barker, *Regeneration*. 1991. New York and Harmondsworth: Plume, 1993.
- ZD* Helen Dunmore, *Zennor in Darkness*. 1993. London: Penguin Books, 1994.

Introduction

On 11 October 2012, while visiting the Imperial War Museum in London, David Cameron announced Britain's plans to mark the centenary of the First World War in 2014. He outlined the Government's proposed national programme of events, which included, among many other initiatives, a re-enactment of the football match played against the Germans during the 1914 Christmas Day truce, a recreation in the UK of a field of Flanders poppies, and visits to the battlefields by pupils from every secondary school in the country. In his speech, the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of remembering the "extraordinary sacrifice" of all those who had fallen and commemorating an event that would shape the century that followed it. He also called the First World War "a fundamental part of [Britain's] national consciousness" and stressed the "emotional connection" that continues to bind the British public with stories from that war: "Current generations are still transfixed by what happened in the Great War and what it meant."¹

Few would disagree with the Prime Minister's analysis. The British public's interest in the "Great War," the war that was to end all wars, has not waned in the years since its end. Even while the war was raging, its contemporaries were already conscious of the conflict's unprecedented vastness and the "radical change" that it would necessarily bring about.² Since the end of the hostilities, the war has continued to be understood in such hyperbolic terms and has never disappeared from the British collective memory. In 1965, the poet Ted Hughes described the years 1914-18 as Britain's "number one national ghost," and according to the historian Samuel Hynes, the war remained "a powerful imaginative force" throughout the next half-century.³ As attested to by the Government's decision to commemorate the centenary of the war on such a grand scale, public interest today is as strong as ever and likely to grow exponentially in the years 2014-18.

¹ David Cameron's full speech is available on the War Poetry Website <<http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/commemoratingwar.html>> (retrieved 29 April 2013).

² Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Collier, 1990), p. xi.

³ Ted Hughes qtd. in Mark Rawlinson, *Pat Barker* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 95; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 469.

The (late) 1980s and 1990s have been recognised as important and defining years in Britain's long-term relationship with the Great War. Indeed, the last two decades of the 20th century saw an explosion in historical writing about the First World War, but also in popular representations of the conflict, as demonstrated by the amount and variety of historical researches and books, museum exhibitions, television documentaries, films, novels and commemorative ceremonies that emerged at the time. It is probably in the field of literature that this upsurge of interest in the war was most visible. As the British cultural historian Dan Todman notes, "In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a host of new works of historical fiction set during the First World War were produced, sufficient to amount to a second 'war books boom'," comparable in scale to the first boom that occurred in the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁴ This renewal of academic and public interest was due in part to a widespread sense of *fin-de-siècle*: as the 20th century drew to a close, there was a broad tendency to look back at the event that was commonly believed to have opened it. Other historical reasons may also account for this rise in interest, including the collapse of the communist bloc, the fall of the Berlin Wall, a new war in the Balkans and the redrawing of the official map of Europe, which had been in use since 1918.

Because of its unprecedented scale and the power of fascination it continues to wield, the First World War remains at the centre of heated debates and controversies concerning its causes, conduct, meaning and consequences. When I embarked on this research project in 2003, I was immediately struck by the vocabulary of war that is sometimes used to discuss existing versions of the conflict. Debates have crystallised around two predominant "camps": popular culture *vs.* history. Two main distinct perceptions of the First World War now exist, and their coexistence has been described by some military historians in terms of a war of representations that opposes two "Western Fronts": the Western Front of literature and popular culture against the Western Front of history.⁵ While the latter strives to discover and convey the "truth" about the past, the former perpetuates what has been called the "myth of the Great War," a restrictive and "false" version of the war that obfuscates the more general, historical context to focus exclusively on the horrors of combat and life in the trenches. Military historians especially mourn the fact that, if the Great War still holds a special place in the British collec-

⁴ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London and New York: Hambleton and London, 2005), p. 39.

⁵ Stephen Badsey, "Blackadder Goes Forth and the 'Two Western Fronts' Debate," in Graham Roberts and Philip M. Taylor (eds.), *Television and History* (Luton: U of Luton P, 2001), pp. 113-125, qtd. in Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p. 87.

tive memory today, it is not as the historic victory that it was for the Allied forces, but as a futile disaster, brought about by the sheer incompetence and callousness of wartime leaders, who sent their men to certain death in stupid, horrifying, and bloody battles.

Literature has especially come under attack, firstly for helping to create this myth, and secondly for stamping it indelibly onto the British collective imagination. Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Robert Graves, the most famous trench poets, are said to have given the myth its definitive form, perpetuating their upper-class, highbrow vision of the war as a time of horror, death, and futility. The many contemporary writers who re-imagined the conflict at the end of the 20th century – especially Pat Barker in her *Regeneration* trilogy (1991-1995) and Sebastian Faulks in *Birdsong* (1993) – are usually considered the true heirs of the war poets in this matter. For instance, the writer Geoff Dyer argues that recent First World War novelists have found it impossible to “remain[] beyond the reach of Sassoon and Owen” and that their narratives, which “almost inevitably bear the imprint of the material from which they are derived,” often “feel like secondary texts.”⁶ The literary critic Bernard Bergonzi claims that Pat Barker and Sebastian Faulks both adopt an “essentially mythic approach” to the war, and thus can only offer a “fixed, static and ahistorical” image of the conflict.⁷ Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy has received especially harsh comments from historians and reviewers alike. Barker has been said to “cement mythologies of the war across different reading spectrums”;⁸ according to the reviewer Ben Shephard, the writer only “retells an old story and faithfully recycles modern academic clichés,” thus failing to “re-create the past in its own terms”;⁹ and for the critic Martin Löschnigg, Barker only “perpetuates a cluster of myths about the war rather than investigating in detail the complexity of some of her themes,” and therefore does not “meet the ‘responsibility of the novelist to the past.’”¹⁰

⁶ Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme* (1994. London: Phoenix Press, 2001), p. 80 and p. 79.

⁷ Bernard Bergonzi, “*Regeneration*: Pat Barker’s Trilogy,” ch. 1 in Bernard Bergonzi, *War Poets and Other Subjects* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 13.

⁸ Esther MacCallum-Stewart, “The Problem of Regenerating the Great War,” in <www.whatalovelywar.co.uk/war/Regeneration>, October 2002, no pagination, no longer available at this address.

⁹ Ben Shephard, “Digging up the Past,” in *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 March 1996, p. 12.

¹⁰ Martin Löschnigg, “‘... the novelist’s responsibility to the past’: History, Myth, and the Narratives of Crisis in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* Trilogy (1991-1995),” in *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 47 (3), 1999, p. 227.

The present work looks at some of the British First World War narratives that were published during the late 20th-century “war books boom” (1985-2000) and primarily aims to examine the damning claims of their “mythicality,” “ahistoricity” and lack of creative imagination. The problem with these negative assessments is that they tend to be based on a superficial and biased reading of the best-known novels (Barker’s trilogy and Faulks’s *Birdsong*), and are harsh evaluations, which are then generalised to cover all contemporary First World War narratives. The present work seeks to do justice to these narratives both by providing a panoramic overview of these new war stories, and by highlighting the merits and possible deficiencies of each individual work. Only then can their role as cultural productions, as well as their literary quality, be fairly appraised.

The first step was to define a corpus of representative narratives. As just argued, most comments about the alleged mass of new First World War novels tend to refer either to Barker, Faulks, and unspecified “other” works, or to Barker, Faulks, and novels that lie outside the range of this study. Older or foreign narratives are sometimes mentioned alongside the *Regeneration* trilogy and *Birdsong*, such as Susan Hill’s *Strange Meeting*, published in 1971 and therefore before the “war books boom,” or Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*, published in Canada in 1977. In his thorough examination of the changing views of the war over the last century in Britain, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (2005), Dan Todman draws his conclusions about the role of late 20th-century war fiction mainly from an analysis of popular romances, while my aim is to look at more “serious” works of fiction to see what they can offer to our understanding of the conflict and its importance in the collective British memory, but also of the relationship between memory and warfare.

The fifteen novels and one short story under scrutiny, written by twelve British authors and published between 1986 and 2000, have been selected on the basis of a detailed perusal of the *Times Literary Supplement* (1985-2000), the British weekly literary review, which is considered one of the world’s pre-eminent critical publications. The works that have been singled out are (in chronological order): Pat Barker’s *Liza’s England* (1986), which is not a war novel *per se* but deals with the Great War and sets out many of the themes Barker develops in her later trilogy; Richard Burns’s *A Dance for the Moon* (1986); Nicky Edwards’s *Mud* (1986); Julia Hamilton’s *The Idle Hill of Summer* (1988); Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy (*Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door*, and *The Ghost Road*, 1991-1995); Helen Dunmore’s *Zennor in Darkness* (1993); Sebastian Faulks’s *Birdsong* (1993); Julian Barnes’s short story “Evermore” published in *Cross Channel* (1996); Robert Edric’s *In Desolate Heaven* (1997); Esther Freud’s *Gaglow* (1997); Jane

Thynne's *Patrimony* (1997); Pat Barker's *Another World* (1998); David Hartnett's *Brother to Dragons* (1998); and Sue Gee's *Earth and Heaven* (2000). All these narratives are set either during the war or in its immediate aftermath, or examine the lasting consequences of the war from a late 20th-century perspective. Their most striking feature is their common concern with memory. Even if it is not exhaustive, I believe that this body of works is representative of the middle- and highbrow novels that were published at the end of the 20th century and of the ethos of the period, and that any narratives not dealt with here would fit easily within the framework of my analysis.

Among the twelve writers examined here, it is Pat Barker, now recognised as one of the best British novelists of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, who has received the most critical attention and acclaim. Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, seen as a major contribution to war literature, was awarded various literary prizes, including the prestigious Booker Prize for *The Ghost Road* in 1995. Its first volume, *Regeneration*, was made into a feature film directed by Gillies Mackinnon in 1996.¹¹ A large number of critical essays on Barker's novels, and especially on the *Regeneration* trilogy, have appeared in journals and as individual chapters in various books of cultural studies or literary analysis. Six book-length studies on Barker's work as a whole have been published to date.¹² In view of this mass of criticism, my main ambition with regard to Barker's novels is to place them within a larger literary context and trend. Julian Barnes is another celebrated writer, and his postmodernist work has also been widely reviewed and analysed, though his collection of short stories *Cross Channel* is not well known.¹³

¹¹ *Regeneration* was nominated as one of the four best novels of 1991 in the *New York Review of Books*; *The Eye in the Door* won the 1993 *Guardian* Fiction Prize, and *The Ghost Road* was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize in 1995 against such competition as Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

¹² Sharon Monteith's *Pat Barker* (Horndon: Northcote House, 2002) examines Barker's novels up to 2001; Sharon Monteith *et al.* have edited an anthology of essays that deal with Barker's work up to 2003 and attest to the existence of an international community of Barker scholars (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* [Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2005]); John Brannigan's *Pat Barker* offers close reading of Barker's novels as well as a comprehensive overview of the critical work on Barker up until 2005 (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2005); Mark Rawlinson's book *Pat Barker* examines Barker's first eleven novels and provides an author interview (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, New British Fiction series, 2010). Pat Wheeler's collection of essays, *Re-Reading Pat Barker* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), offers new and stimulating readings of Barker's work by established and newer Barker scholars. See also David Waterman, *Pat Barker and the Mediation of Social Reality* (New York: Cambria, 2009).

¹³ Book-length studies of Barnes's literary career include: Merritt Moseley, *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1997); Matthew Pateman,

Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong* is the most successful of all the new First World War novels. The book has had what is described in retail terms as a "long tail": it has so far sold approximately three million copies and has not stopped selling since its publication in 1993. The novel has been adapted for the radio, the stage, and the small screen. Despite – or perhaps because of – its popularity, it has been mostly neglected by literary scholars and has only been the subject of one reader's guide so far.¹⁴ The other writers of my corpus have so far been largely ignored. I hope to show that some of them, especially Robert Edric and Helen Dunmore, are actually well worthy of academic interest.

Other literary critics have carried out relatively detailed research into recent British First World War fiction and some articles on the genre have been published, but the present work is the first book-length study entirely dedicated to the subject. In "The Grandfathers' War: Re-imagining World War I in British Novels and Films of the 1990s" (2001), Barbara Korte has focussed on some of the novels that I will be examining in detail in this book, and identifies the themes (class, gender and memory) that have become prevalent in recent First World War novels. In 2003 Rainer Emig published an article which investigates how and why memory and remembering have become crucial areas of contention in Barker's trilogy, Faulks's *Birdsong*, and Barnes's "Evermore." Sharon Ouditt wrote a chapter dedicated to late 20th-century re-imaginings of the Great War in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, edited by Vincent Sherry and published in 2005. Her article looks at a dozen novels published between 1969 and 1995 and

Julian Barnes (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2002); Vanessa Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Frederick Michael Holmes, *Julian Barnes* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), and Sebastian Groes and Peter Childs (eds.), *Julian Barnes: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011). His short story "Evermore" has been examined by Pascale Tollance in an article published in a French journal: "Écriture et silence: texte-écran et texte-énigme dans 'Evermore' de Julian Barnes," in *Études britanniques contemporaines* 30, June 2006, pp. 131-144. See also Claire Patin, "Les Immémoriaux de la Grande Guerre dans la fiction britannique contemporaine à travers *Bird Song* (S. Faulks), *Evermore* (J. Barnes), *Another World* (P. Barker): incar- ou désincarnation?" in *Études britanniques contemporaines* 36, June 2009, pp. 189-198.

¹⁴ Pat Wheeler, *Sebastian Faulks's Birdsong: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002); see also Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, *Sebastian Faulks: The Essential Guide* (London: Vintage, 2002). In 2002, *Birdsong* had already sold 14,000 copies in hardback and 1.3 million copies in paperback in the United Kingdom alone (Wheeler, *Sebastian Faulks's Birdsong*, p. 76). Faulks's novel was adapted for the stage by Rachel Wagstaff in 2010, and for BBC One by Abi Morgan in 2012; a radio adaptation was aired by BBC Radio 4 in 1997.

shows how they echo the epistemological, ontological, and heuristic questions that have haunted modernism and postmodernism.¹⁵

Korte, Emig, and Ouditt's articles attest to the inextricable link that now connects First World War studies with the questions of memory and remembrance.. Issues of memory – such as trauma, repression, forgetting, forgiveness, testimony, identity, duty of memory, nostalgia, heritage industry, and monuments – have become increasingly important areas of research in a variety of academic domains over the last two or three decades. The First World War historian Jay Winter observed in 2006 that:

In virtually every corner of intellectual life, there is evidence of a major change in focus, a movement toward the analysis of memory as the organizing principle of scholarly or artistic work. Whereas race, gender, and social class were foci of early waves of scholarship in cultural studies, now the emphasis is on a set of issues at the intersection of cultural history, literary studies, architecture, cognitive psychology, psychoanalysis, and many other disciplines besides. What they have in common is a focus on memory.¹⁶

According to Winter, the urge to finally acknowledge and attend to the victims of war is one of the most significant factors to have contributed to the appearance of this “memory boom.”¹⁷ The 20th century is now recognised as the bloodiest in the history of humanity, and as it was drawing to a close, people started to feel the need to reflect on its legacy of individual and collective trauma, and on the way these overwhelming events should be memorialised and remembered. As noted by the political scientist Jenny Edkins, “Places such as Flanders, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Vietnam all hold our attention now not only as events, but in relation to the question of memory.”¹⁸ For Jay Winter, the practices and

¹⁵ Barbara Korte, “The Grandfathers’ War: Re-imagining World War I in British Novels and Films of the 1990s,” in Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction* (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 2001), pp. 120-134; Rainer Emig, “False Memories: The Strange Return of the First World War in Contemporary British Fiction,” in *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 240, 2003, pp. 259-271; Sharon Ouditt, “Myths, Memories, and Monuments: Reimagining the Great War,” in Vincent Sherry (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 245-260. I can add my own article to this list: Virginie Renard, “Reaching out to the Past: Memory in Contemporary British First World War Narratives,” in Jessica Meyer (ed.), *British Popular Culture and the First World War* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 285-304.

¹⁶ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2006), p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁸ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), p. xiii.

language of memory which emerged from the Great War largely determined the ways in which future conflicts would be remembered: "It is in the Great War that we can see some of the most powerful impulses and sources of the later memory boom, a set of concerns with which we still live, and – given the violent landscape of contemporary life – of which our children and grandchildren are unlikely to be free."¹⁹ The efflorescence of interest in the Great War at the end of the 20th century is therefore closely connected with this "memory boom," which keeps returning us to warfare and its victims.

Writing some eighty years after the war, in what has been termed "the era of memory," the contemporary First World War fiction writers examined here were drawn to questions of memory and remembrance.²⁰ As will be demonstrated during the course of this book, their fiction explores complex issues regarding, among others, the formation and transmission of personal and collective memory, the relation between memory and history, traumatic memory and the significance of remembrance for later generations. The notion of memory is thus central to the present work, which looks at the ways the British First World War narratives under scrutiny, turned into contested sites of memory, have contributed to the perpetuation of a specific, mythical version of the historical event. This work will also explore the ways they have conceptualised memory and the processes of remembering, thus displaying a certain degree of reflexivity and self-awareness. I am interested both in what the selected novels and short story say about the Great War as an historical event and in what they reveal about the period in which they were written. I will therefore ask in what forms, to what aims, and with what effects the First World War returned – both as history and as memory – in British fiction at the end of the 20th century.

As indicated by its title, the present work is meant as a modest sequel or afterword to Paul Fussell's award-winning *The Great War and Modern Memory*, first published in 1975 and now considered essential reading for any researcher into the cultural history and literature of the war.²¹ In his seminal and controversial book, the American literature

¹⁹ Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 1 and pp. 2-3.

²⁰ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006), p. 8.

²¹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000). Paul Fussell's classic book has inspired many other studies, which often adapt Fussell's title: in addition to the present work, see among others Michèle Barrett, "The Great War and Post-Modern Memory," published in *New Formations* 41 (2000), pp. 138-157; Patrick J. Quinn and Steven Trout (eds.), *The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Modern Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); and Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remem-*

professor examines what he calls the “Matter of Flanders and Picardy” – i.e. the trench poetry and memoirs which Fussell helped to establish as the Great War literary canon – and “the literary means by which [World War One] has been remembered, conventionalized, and mythologized.”²² The present work looks at some of the soldier-writers’ successors and is also interested in the connections between war, literature and memory, but its methodology is rather different from Fussell’s. As will be explored at greater length in Chapter 2, Fussell’s work has been criticised for its highly subjective, speculative and mythologizing approach; its exclusively literary perspective on the war and its representations while the author claimed an affinity with cultural history; and, as Leonard V. Smith has noted, its usage of “memory” as “a wonderfully unproblematic and self-evident concept” which requires no clarification or definition whatsoever.²³

This book stands on the borderline between literary analysis and cultural history, and attempts to avoid Fussell’s failings by more systematically confronting the literary with the historical perspective. It seeks to place the novels and short story under scrutiny back into their cultural context of writing and reception, and therefore refers to the research findings of confirmed cultural and military historians like Jay Winter, Samuel Hynes, Gary Sheffield, and Brian Bond, but also to those of a younger generation of scholars, such as Dan Todman and Esther MacCallum-Stewart. In so doing, I seek to challenge monolithic views of the war and create a dialogue rather than a confrontation between the two disciplines. As Esther MacCallum-Stewart has argued, it is time “to dissolve tensions between literary and historical academia”: “for a more realistic (and multi-faceted) view of the war to emerge and be fully understood by the popular reader, both disciplines must work together to facilitate change.”²⁴ Unlike Fussell’s, the present work starts with a theoretical chapter on the notion of “memory” which provides a general framework for my analysis. Faced with the emergence in the critical field of a richly diverse theoretical literature, I will attempt to clear the ground and offer definitions of, and reflections on, some of the key

brance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006).

²² Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. ix-x.

²³ Leonard V. Smith, “Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*: Twenty-Five Years Later,” in *History and Theory* 40, May 2001, p. 242.

²⁴ Esther MacCallum-Stewart, “The Cause of Nowadays and the End of History: First World War Historical Fiction,” in *Working Papers on the Web* 9, December 2009, no pagination. Jessica Meyer similarly lays emphasis on the need for interdisciplinary First World War studies in her introduction to her collection of essays *British Popular Culture and the First World War* (Leiden and London: Brill, 2008), p. 10.

concepts, terms and issues that have come to dominate discussions of memory.

The term “postmodern” in the present work’s title therefore references Fussell’s analysis and suggests that my study comes *after* his, and modestly attempts to both complement and go *beyond* it. “Postmodern” is also inevitably a chronological and theoretical term. As noted by Peter Middleton and Tim Woods in *Literatures of Memory*, “Terms such as ‘contemporary’, ‘postwar’, ‘modern’, ‘postmodern’, ‘postcolonial’, and ‘twentieth century’ are regularly used to describe ‘recent’ literature, and [...] deployed without too much self-reflexiveness.” However, the two critics point out that these terms “are themselves theories of the relation of present to past,” and connote specific assumptions about temporality.²⁵ For instance, while “modernity” implies a move beyond traditions, “postwar” “occurs in the future of [...] wartime [...]” and suggests that subsequent literary forms are overshadowed by the horrors of the past.²⁶ The term “postmodern” used here refers both to a time period that began after modernism and to the movement of thought known as “postmodernism.” As will be demonstrated in the course of this book, even if the novels and short story under scrutiny do not qualify as what Linda Hutcheon has called “historiographic metafiction,” they were written at a time when postmodernist tenets had become widely known and popular and inevitably bear their mark.²⁷ The narratives have especially been drawn to postmodernism’s problematisation of grand narratives, its challenging of engrained assumptions about the past, and its questioning of history’s truth-claims, which have encouraged a move to memory’s local and subjective form of knowledge.

The first part of the present work, entitled “The Myth of the Great War,” examines late 20th-century First World War narratives as sites of memory that perpetuate a certain version of the war that may differ from historical interpretations of the events, but holds a powerful appeal for

²⁵ Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2000), p. 60.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

²⁷ As argued by Nick Bentley, postmodernism was “an important trope within literary and cultural theory” during the 1980s and 1990s (Nick Bentley, “Introduction: Mapping the Millennium. Themes and Trends in Contemporary British Fiction,” in Nick Bentley [ed.], *British Fiction of the 1990s* [London and New York: Routledge, 2005], pp. 4-5 and p. 7). On historiographic metafiction, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), esp. ch. 7. Hutcheon coined the term “historiographic metafiction” to refer to novels that are “intensely self-reflexive” and question the possibility of attaining historical knowledge, and “yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (*ibid.*, p. 5).

the collective imagination. It investigates military historians' claims about the lack of historical perspective of contemporary Great War writers and their inability to move beyond what has already been imagined and said. Chapter 2 defines "myth" as a universal and indispensable constituent of human thought, rather than as a fable to be fought by all possible means and explains how the myth of the Great War has come to dominate other possible versions of the war in the British collective memory, despite military historians' demythologising campaigns. Chapter 3 describes the four main elements of the mythical scenario of the Great War. It examines whether and how they have shaped the works under scrutiny, and sees whether and how these writers engage with, and depart from, the language and imagery handed down by the war poets. Chapter 4 discusses the intertextual presence of the war poets in recent First World War fiction and shows how contemporary writers dialogue with, and question, their poetic forefathers.

The second and third parts focus on the recourse to, and conceptualisation of, memory in the narratives under scrutiny. Part II looks at shell shock as the cultural legacy of the war. From the late 20th century onwards memory has increasingly been problematised as trauma, as an overwhelming, violent event that has been found to be impossible to deal with and that therefore lingers, unresolved, in individual and collective memories. Chapter 5 contextualises the rise of shell shock as a fundamental element in the myth of the war and provides a theoretical framework to the close reading of five novels (i.e. Barker's trilogy and *Another World*, and Edric's *In Desolate Heaven*) that follows in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. These three chapters show how the five selected narratives engage with the contemporary fears of the revenant quality of the past and the possibility of a contagious, transgenerational transmission of trauma. In reshaping the myth in this new frame, these narratives ask new questions not only about the war, but also about our allegedly "post-traumatic" world. They also raise questions concerning the politics of memory, the adequacy of historical narrative, and the ethics of historical representation.

Part III investigates questions of remembrance and the duty of memory in the First World War narratives that have a late 20th-century time frame. Chapter 9 looks at the widespread conviction that the past is under threat and that the Great War, gradually slipping away from memory into history, needs to be rescued. It shows how remembrance is conceived and fictionalised as a rescue operation in many of the narratives under scrutiny. Chapter 10 looks at the various material traces that the past has left behind and on which this search for, and rescue of, the past necessarily relies. Both chapters show how the works under scrutiny seek to provide answers to epistemological questions regarding the

remembrance of the First World War, but also refer to the war to examine late 20th-century preoccupations. Before turning to these questions, I will first “set the framework” by defining memory, its origin, its relation to forgetting and its uses and abuses, and by examining the relation between the three narrative routes to the past that this book follows, namely memory, history and fiction.

CHAPTER 1

Setting the Framework

Memory, History, Fiction

Memory is a highly complex and fascinating phenomenon, which has been examined for centuries by scholars in fields as varied as philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, political sciences, history and literary studies. Over the past three decades, during what has been called the “memory boom,” academic interest in memory has grown considerably. Contested terms such as “collective memory,” “traumatic memory” or “transgenerational memory” have been at the centre of heated theoretical debates and polemics. Important questions regarding memory have been asked: To what extent is memory a reflection of reality? How does an individual work through a traumatic past? How do states, and especially former belligerent countries, remember and use memory to political ends? In what ways do various media (such as films, narratives, or photographs) and public sites (such as monuments, museums or tourist spots) shape memory? The list of contributions is now voluminous and continues to grow, and it would therefore be impossible to discuss them all in detail within the scope of a single chapter. All I attempt to do here is to provide a sound theoretical basis that clarifies some of the key concepts and main issues that have a direct bearing on the questions addressed in the present work. I particularly want to identify the specificities and powers of fiction when it deals with the past, so as to better understand and assess the role played by late 20th-century fiction in the collective remembrance of the First World War.¹

I. Individual and Collective Memory

“Memory” first and foremost refers to a mental faculty by which individual human beings store and retrieve information and reconstruct past experiences for present purposes. Memory enables us to retain a great variety of information: we remember phone numbers and birthdates, the

¹ The present chapter owes much to a theoretical article that I wrote in collaboration with François-Xavier Lavenne and François Tollet, “Fiction, Between Inner Life and Collective Memory: A Methodological Reflection,” in *The New Arcadia Review* 3, 2005, <www.bc.edu/publications/newarcadia> (no pagination).

horrid smell of a rotten egg and the pride we felt when we graduated from university; we remember playing hide-and-seek as children, how to swim or ride a bike, and to lock the door each time we go out. Most of our experiences and sensations leave long-term memory traces that our brain stores in three types of memory:² *Procedural memory* is a sensory-motor memory that records embodied skills and habits, such as remembering *how* to use a cell phone, play tennis or tie shoelaces. *Semantic memory* is memory for facts and contains conceptual and factual knowledge about the world, e.g. remembering that Brussels is the capital of Belgium. *Episodic memory* is memory for the specific episodes and events that define our life, such as a trip to Italy or an argument with a colleague. It retains when, where and how a particular recollection was stored, and provides perspectives on the past, allowing us to get self-consciously in touch with our past experiences. When assembled into a narrative, episodic memories turn into autobiographic memory.³

The importance of memory in our lives cannot be overrated. Memory permeates human existence. As David Lowenthal notes, “We devote much of the present to getting or keeping in touch with some aspect of the past.”⁴ We use our memory to perform the simplest everyday tasks, such as walking, talking, or eating with a knife and fork. Without memory, we would have to learn everything anew. Memorised knowledge of the past also renders the present familiar. “Without habit and the memory of past experience,” Lowenthal explains, “no sight or sound would mean anything; we can perceive only what we are accustomed to.”⁵ As will become evident in the course of this chapter, memory is also crucial for our sense of personal identity and self-awareness. A person who suffers from a dysfunctional memory cannot know who he or she is and has great difficulty leading a fulfilling life and integrating into society.

Clearly, memory lies at the heart of an individual’s life, an observation which has led the school that the French philosopher Paul Ricœur calls “the tradition of inwardness” (Augustine, Locke, and Husserl) to

² See Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), p. 17 and p. 170.

³ Astrid Erll, “Wars We Have Seen: Literature as a Medium of Collective Memory in the ‘Age of Extremes’,” in Elena Lamberti and Vita Fortunati (eds.), *Memories and Representations of War: The Case of World War I and World War II* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 37.

⁴ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), p. 194.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

support an individually-based conception of memory: when we recall the past, we primarily remember our past selves; self-reflexivity is therefore central to memory.⁶ Inspired by the Durkheimian notion of collective consciousness, the school of the “external gaze” has challenged this subjective conception of memory, arguing that memory is primarily collective.⁷ The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs was one of the most ardent advocates of this position, which he developed first in *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* and later in his epoch-making *La Mémoire collective*.⁸ Halbwachs acknowledged that memory does not exist outside of individuals, who remember in the physical sense of the term. However, he argued that there are no purely individual memories, for the person who remembers necessarily does so in relation to the group(s) to which he or she belongs (such as family, friends, political party, social class, or nation). The group pre-exists the individual. For Halbwachs, individual memory is always socially framed and inherently shaped by collective contexts. Memory is, therefore, located in the social structure; individual memory is only one specific “point of view” on, or reflection of, collective memory.

The opposition between the individualist and the collectivist approaches to memory is only apparent, for they are in fact complementary. While some scholars continue to challenge the notion of collective memory,⁹ most now stand at a mid-point between these two extreme positions and argue that memory processes involve both the individual and the group: memory needs to be both *present* for the subject and *shared*. Paul Ricœur locates memory on a continuum between the poles of reflexivity and sociality. It is evident that memory belongs to the realm of interiority, for we always remember what we, as individuals, saw and experienced in the past.¹⁰ However, an individual always

⁶ Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), pp. 112-146. Ricœur's book has been translated into English by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer as *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2004). All subsequent page references to Ricœur's book are from the English translation.

⁷ Joël Candau, *Mémoire et identité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), pp. 21-25 and Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 120-124.

⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925. Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), and *La Mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950). Maurice Halbwachs died of dysentery in the deportation camp of Buchenwald in 1945; *La Mémoire collective* was published posthumously.

⁹ See Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, “Collective Memory – What is it?” in *History and Memory* 8 (1), Spring/Summer 1996, pp. 30-50. Gedi and Elam argue that the term “collective memory” adds nothing to the well-established categories such as “myth” or “tradition,” and is therefore useful only on a metaphorical level.

¹⁰ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 124-132.

belongs to various social groups and thus never remembers in isolation. The individual members of a given social group enter into an exchange relationship and share memories of past events with one another, for the evocation of the past implies a communication and transmission of that past.¹¹ Interaction within the group triggers, rekindles and reshapes individual memories. This is a “conversational process” which gives rise to collective memory.¹² Memory is therefore “a product of discourse” and necessarily “dialogic.”¹³

Inspired by Roger Bastide’s anthropological model of collective memory as the outcome of the interweaving of individual memories, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan evocatively compare collective memory to a sing-along, a metaphor that brings to the fore the dialogic dimension of memory:

This is a kind of event which is not very regimented, and in which each participant begins singing at a different time and using a somewhat different text or melody which he himself has composed or developed. But he does it according to norms – musical, linguistic, literary – accepted by other members of that informal choir. Moreover, when each sings, he hears himself in his inner ear, but he also hears the collective choir in his external ear. That is, he hears the product of the collective effort. Certainly, this collective product may modify or even slant his own singing, almost in spite of himself.¹⁴

Amos Funkenstein uses another, Saussurean metaphor to describe the relationship between collective and individual memory: in his view, collective memory functions as *langue* – language – and individual memory as *parole* – speech.¹⁵

Since memory is highly dependable on the group that sustains it, its strength, duration and content will change as the group evolves, expands or disappears. Candau explains that the strength of collective memory depends on the size of the group and on the frequency of information

¹¹ Candau, *Mémoire et identité*, p. 45.

¹² Ron Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity,” ch. 3 in Jeffrey C. Alexander *et al.*, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley and London: U of California P, 2004), pp. 66-67.

¹³ *Ibid.* For an overview of the development of the concept of “collective memory,” see Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma,” pp. 64-69.

¹⁴ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 28. See Roger Bastide, “Mémoire collective et sociologie du bricolage,” *L’Année sociologique* 21, 1970, pp. 65-108, esp. pp. 27-28.

¹⁵ Amos Funkenstein qtd. in Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler, “Introduction,” in Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler (eds.), *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 17.

exchange between the members of that group.¹⁶ A strong memory is a memory that imposes itself upon the majority of members and influences the present praxis of the group. By contrast, a weak memory is a superficial memory that is not shared by all the members. Memories and representations of the past circulate more easily and rapidly within a small group in which the members often interact. Halbwachs believes that collective memory cannot outlive the group that sustains it: when social bonds dissolve, collective memory necessarily disappears.¹⁷ In Halbwachs's view, transgenerational interaction and transmission helps preserve memory beyond the limits of an individual's life and experiences.

Deschamps, Paez and Pennebaker develop Halbwachs's view and argue that collective memory is usually constituted by events of which the members of the group have a direct experience, i.e. by events which they have personally experienced, or which were related to them by time witnesses such as grandparents.¹⁸ This form of memory, transmitted directly from the old to the young, does not usually last more than three or four generations, i.e. 80 to 100 years. Events which occurred further back in time are taught, rather than told, to younger generations (in school or from books for instance) and therefore belong to the realm of history. Collective memory is thus to be distinguished from history and general knowledge: memory is not the *knowledge* of the past, but the *presence* of the past, for it establishes an emotional link between the past and the present.

However, as observed by Jean Viaud, there exists beside the living memory of a relatively recent past and the historical knowledge of a more remote past, a memory of the origins and founding events of the group. To explain and legitimise its existence, a group needs to refer to its past. The members of a given group thus share a common representation of its origin and of the various events of its history – traumatic and glorifying – that have made it what it is in the present.¹⁹ This distant past, located beyond individual memory, is voluntarily saved from

¹⁶ Candau, *Mémoire et identité*, pp. 33-42.

¹⁷ Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, ch. 2 and pp. 121-130.

¹⁸ Jean-Claude Deschamps, Dario Paez, and James W. Pennebaker, "Mémoire collective et histoire à la fin du second millénaire," in Stéphane Laurens and Nicolas Roussiau (eds.), *La Mémoire sociale: Identités et représentations sociales* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002), pp. 18-19.

¹⁹ Jean Viaud, "Contribution à l'actualisation de la notion de mémoire collective," in Stéphane Laurens and Nicolas Roussiau (eds.), *La Mémoire sociale: Identités et représentations sociales* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002), pp. 22-23. Viaud calls these two types of collective memory "memory of origin" ("mémoire d'origine") and "exemplary memory" ("mémoire exemplaire").

oblivion and perpetuated as collective memory in order to sustain collective identity. The memory of origins can sometimes influence the present praxis of a given group in tragic ways. According to Tzvetan Todorov, the memory of collective wrongs and atrocities suffered in the remote past from another nation or ethnic group often burdens a present conflict with strong resentment and a desire for revenge and historical redress.²⁰ The Serbs, for instance, used the sufferings that were inflicted upon them during the Turkish conquest and rule – from the 14th to the 19th centuries – to justify their own violence towards the other peoples of the former Yugoslavia. Less dramatically, the memory of origins and founding events leads to the preservation of family history, heritage, customs and traditions.

A comparison between the memories of the First and the Second World Wars will illustrate these claims. In Europe, 1940-45 is still very much a part of living memory: most people have heard directly from their grandparents what the war was like for them and thus have an emotional link with that war. By contrast, 1914-18 has entered into what Eric Hobsbawm has called the “twilight zone between history and memory,” i.e. a zone between the past as dispassionate knowledge of what once was and the past as a continuing and emotionally meaningful presence in people’s life.²¹ While people in their forties and beyond might still have a personal and familial interest in, and connection to, the conflict, this is no longer the case for younger generations, for which the First World War is now part of their historical knowledge.²² In Britain, however, 1914-18, still remembered as the “Great War,” continues to hold a very special place in collective memory as what Dominick LaCapra has called a “founding trauma,” i.e. “the trauma that paradoxically becomes the basis for collective or personal identity, or both.”²³ As will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter, the Great War is perceived as the event that founded the modern world; the story of the First World War that continues to be collectively told in Great Britain is thus akin to a “myth of origin.”²⁴

²⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 1998), pp. 23-28.

²¹ Eric Hobsbawm qtd. in Diana Wallace, “Dialogues with the Dead: History and the ‘Sense of an Ending,’ 1990-2000,” ch. 9 in Diana Wallace, *The Women’s Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 220.

²² The third part of the present work shows that this transformation of memory into history is often represented as a threat in contemporary First World War narratives.

²³ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001), p. 81.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

II. Memory as a Narrative Reconstruction of the Past in Light of the Present

Popular beliefs often conceive individual memory as a collection of faithful images of all past experiences that persist unchanged in the brain, akin to snapshots kept in a photo album, or computer files placed in storage and pulled out when needed. This view of memory as a passive and literal recording of reality has been prevalent among scholars for centuries, from Plato to Freud. For instance, Plato compared memory to a block of wax onto which traces of past sensations and thoughts are impressed. In a well-known passage of his *Confessions* Saint Augustine used the metaphor of the “vast palace” to describe memory and its processes, arguing that the whole treasure of our experience is stored in specific chambers and can be recalled whenever we summon them. Freud compared the process of anamnesis to archaeological excavation and believed that the past still exists “somewhere,” unaltered and waiting to be unearthed by the remembering subject.²⁵

More recent experimental studies have shown that this conception of memory is at variance with what actually happens in the brain. Memory is never simply a photographic record of the past, but is instead always a highly selective and interpretative readjustment of the past according to present needs and purposes. “The prime function of memory,” as David Lowenthal puts it, “[...] is not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present.”²⁶ Firstly, as Daniel Schacter explains, individual memory cannot store all the elements of one’s life, or it would be totally overloaded.²⁷ Memory therefore simplifies and revises the mass of information and perceptions of our actual experiences, only stores meaningful fragments of the past, and forgets the rest. Winter and Sivan note that selection and distortion already occurs in the initial stage of the encoding of an experience in the brain.²⁸ Secondly, what is eventually remembered is continually revised according to newer perceptions and needs. For Halbwachs and Bastide, present circumstances act as a “filter,” or a “lock gate” that re-evaluates and only lets through the elements of the past that can adapt and be useful to the present praxis of the individual and the group.²⁹ Moreover, newly acquired knowledge

²⁵ On Freud’s conception of memory as archaeological excavation, see Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), pp. 12-16. See also ch. 9 of the present work.

²⁶ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p. 210.

²⁷ Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 81.

²⁸ Winter and Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” p. 13.

²⁹ Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, pp. 57-66 and Bastide, “Mémoire collective,” p. 79 and p. 94.

and later events constantly force the individual to reconsider the past. As noted by Lambek and Antze, “we are continuously reexploring the significance of earlier episodes [...] in light of what transpires later.”³⁰ Finally, as already noted, interaction between individuals reshapes and reconfigures their respective personal memories. New ideas and memories that originate from others can therefore fit into, and modify, an individual’s memories.

This constant readjustment and reconstruction of the past takes the form of a narration. Memory, in the words of the French psychologist Pierre Janet, is essentially “the action of telling a story.”³¹ As Candau notes, since the past can never be remembered in its entirety, it needs to be told, to be turned into a narrative that will draw together disparate fragments into a concordant unity and take the form of a meaningful totality, with a beginning, middle developments and an end.³² Like fictional narratives, life stories order and shape our life experiences into a logical sequence of events that provide cohesion and give meaning to our existence.³³ Unlike written texts, however, narrative memory is

³⁰ Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, “Introduction: Forecasting Memory,” in Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (eds.), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. xix.

³¹ Janet qtd. in Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2000), p. 105. For a thorough discussion of Janet’s theories, see *ibid.*, pp. 105-119.

³² Candau, *Mémoire et identité*, p. 62. The importance of narrative in human memory and in human thought in general has become a prominent theme in psychology in the last two decades. For a detailed discussion of the importance of narrative for memory, see, among others, Jefferson A. Singer and Pavel Blagov, “The Integrative Function of Narrative Processing: Autobiographical Memory, Self-Defining Memories, and the Life Story of Identity”, in Denise R. Beike, James M. Lampinen, and Douglas A. Behrend (eds.), *The Self and Memory* (New York and Hove: Taylor and Francis Books, “Psychology Press,” 2004), pp. 117-138.

³³ Basing his argument on literary theory, the psychologist Kenneth J. Gergen has identified five rules for narrating and constructing one’s personal past: (1) *Valued endpoint*: narratives are usually organised around a “point” which gives the story its direction. Similarly, the memories that enter a self-narrative are built around some valued condition or state – “a goal failed or accomplished, a condition prized or repudied, an outcome embraced or eschewed.” (2) *Selection of related events*: the valued endpoint largely determines the content of the personal memory, as the selected events are necessarily related to the endpoint. (3) *Temporal ordering of events*: self-memory relates events in a linear, clock-time sequence, from a beginning to an end. (4) *Causal linkage*: self-narrative is an interpretation of past events and, as such, it creates causal linkage between isolated events. (5) *Demarcation signs*: proper remembrance must be marked as “memories of the self” through metastatements such as “I remember that...” which indicate when various accounts figure not as mere facts, but as “reports on self-memory” (Kenneth J. Gergen, “Mind, Text, and Society: Self-memory in Social Context,” in Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush [eds.], *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-narrative* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994], pp. 91-94).

never finite or fixed, but is always an open-ended work in progress. As Lambek and Antze note, “we are at once author and reader of our stories,” and as readers “we are continuously [...] caught up in the hermeneutic spiral of interpretation.”³⁴

Narrative memory plays a fundamental role in the formation of a collective memory and a strong social network, for a narrative necessarily implies an addressee and is by definition meant to be *shared*. Memory as narration is thus first and foremost a transmission and a performance of the past. As such, memory reinforces social connexions and the group’s sense of self. The different stories of the past that circulate among the members of a given group are knotted into a collective narrative of the past. Like the individual memories from which it derives, collective memory is reinterpreted and modified with the passage of time and through generations and the emergence of new circumstances.³⁵

III. Memory and Identity

Autobiographical memory, i.e. the narrative memory of the events that happen to an individual, is essential to one’s sense of identity. As David Lowenthal puts it, “to know what we were confirms that we are.”³⁶ According to Paul Ricœur, identity is very fragile for it is “purely presumptive” in character. It therefore needs the support of memory as a temporal component that will give a sense of continuity to the self by linking the present with the past and by enabling a projection in the future.³⁷ Memory is therefore the guardian of identity: it is a primary faculty that strengthens identity and maintains a continuous sense of self through changes and crises. Recalling past experiences links us with our earlier selves and gives our existence meaning and purpose. Even traumatic and painful memories are essential to an individual’s history, for we are the product of all our past experiences. This is why amnesia – or other types of dysfunctional memory – causes loss of identity and tragically deprives one’s life of meaning.

Our memory construes our life as a story, complete with settings, scenes, characters, plots, themes, intentions and outcomes. The narrative form of memory helps the individual and the group to gather, order, and give coherence to the various elements of the past, thus building a strong sense of identity and continuity. In telling the story of our past, we

³⁴ Lambek and Antze, “Introduction,” p. xix.

³⁵ Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma,” p. 75.

³⁶ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p. 197.

³⁷ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 81.

discover who we were and thus who we are, and how we fit into a particular social, economic, and cultural context. According to Paul Ricœur, identity is necessarily narrative: we understand who we are by telling ourselves a meaningful and coherent story about our past, present and future.³⁸ As Candau remarks, narrative memory and identity are in a dialectic and symbiotic relationship: memory helps build a strong sense of self and in turn, our search for identity shapes our memory's selection, narration and interpretation of the past.³⁹ Memory will preserve elements of the past that serve the construction of, and fit into the story of, the self.

Therefore, the stories that we tell ourselves about our life are not necessarily true. We may believe that our representation of ourselves is accurate but, Ulric Neisser warns us, "autobiographical memory is best taken with a grain of salt. The self that is remembered today is not the historical self of yesterday, but only a reconstructed version. A different version – a new remembered self – may be reconstructed tomorrow."⁴⁰ As Linda Grant puts it, "the self isn't a little person inside the brain, it's a work-in-progress. [...] Memory [...] is a fabrication, a new reconstruction of the original. And yet out of these unstable foundations we still construct an identity. It's a miracle."⁴¹

Like individuals, groups deprived of their memories and histories do not know who they are. They therefore resort to collective memories to sustain a sense of communal identity and legitimise their existence. Collective memory provides a group and its members with a "temporal map," giving it a sense of unity across time and space.⁴² According to Bernhard Giesen, collective identity is primarily based on the memory of past collective triumphs and traumas, which "represent liminal experiences and ultimate horizons for the self-constitution of a collective subject."⁴³ For Dominick LaCapra, as already noted, collective identity often originates from the collective memory of a past "founding trau-

³⁸ The notion of "narrative identity" was first suggested by Paul Ricœur, in "L'Identité narrative," in *L'Esprit* 7-8, July-August 1988, pp. 295-314 and in *Temps et récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).

³⁹ Candau, *Mémoire et identité*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Ulric Neisser, "Self-Narratives: True and False," ch. 1 in Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush (eds.), *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), p. 8.

⁴¹ Linda Grant qtd. in King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity*, p. 175.

⁴² Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma," p. 66.

⁴³ Bernhard Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity," ch. 4 in Jeffrey C. Alexander *et al.*, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley and London: U of California P, 2004), p. 112.

ma.” Collective memory is here similar to a myth of origin: it recalls and perpetuates the memory of founding events.⁴⁴ Jeffrey Alexander *et al.* similarly argue that trauma can shatter, and then re-establish the identity of a group. What they call “cultural trauma” occurs “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”⁴⁵ Collective responses to cultural trauma aim at reassessing the past in order to “narrate new foundations” and reconstitute a collective identity.⁴⁶

IV. Memory and Forgetting: Memory Aids

The relationship between memory and forgetting, Marc Augé notes, is akin to that between life and death: the one can only be defined in relation to the other.⁴⁷ As already suggested, memory cannot store all the informative and perceptive elements of experience that one constantly registers, or else the past would turn into a heavy burden that would prevent one from living in, and enjoying, the present. Individuals and groups only retain what is worth remembering, i.e. what is considered meaningful for the construction of their identities.⁴⁸ Forgetting is indispensable for a stable and coherent identity based on memory. Augé considers that forgetting is the “vital force” (*force vive*) of memory, the “main operator” (*opérateur principal*) at work in the construction of memory as a narration of the past.⁴⁹ Contrary to common belief, forgetting is thus not necessarily a sign of the failure of memory, but rather a necessary erosion of memory, which brings the recorded experiences and events into relief.

However, if forgetting is a vital necessity for memory to exist and function as the criterion for identity, excessive forgetting leads to a loss of self. It is therefore necessary to strike a balance between too much and too little memory. To ensure that what is worth remembering is

⁴⁴ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 81.

⁴⁵ Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” ch. 1 in Jeffrey C. Alexander *et al.*, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley and London: U of California P, 2004), p. 1 and Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma,” p. 60.

⁴⁶ Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness* (New York: Vintage, 1998), p. 6, qtd. in Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma,” p. 63.

⁴⁷ Marc Augé, *Les Formes de l'oubli* (Paris: Payot, 1998), p. 20.

⁴⁸ Candau, *Mémoire et identité*, p. 65. According to Ron Eyerman, the role of the new generation is to promote collective forgetting and “provide society with a fresh look at itself” (“Cultural Trauma,” p. 71).

⁴⁹ Candau, *Mémoire et identité*, p. 30 and p. 47 (my translation).