



Insult to Injury: Romantic Wartime and the Desecrated Corpse

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ABSTRACT

As a propaedeutic towards what I want eventually to call “a theory of the corpse,” my essay briefly considers images of Romantic remains—in particular, figures of desecrated, diminished, scorned, heaped, abandoned, unburied, forgotten, and otherwise ill-served and instrumentalized bodies of the war dead. Examining the figure of desecrated corpses in Jacques-Louis David, Sir Charles Bell, J. W. Turner, Jane Austen, and Felicia Hemans, I argue that the war dead pose unique challenges to historical knowledge and memory, and to the very concept of representation. The image of the marred corpse, I suggest, captures key features of the social and aesthetic derangements of Romantic war.

CRITO. How shall we bury you?

SOCRATES. Any way you like, if you catch me and I do not slip through your fingers.

(Plato, *Phaedo* 179)

As a propaedeutic towards what I want eventually to call “a theory of the corpse,” let me briefly consider images of Romantic remains—in particular, figures of desecrated, diminished, scorned, abstracted, discharged, despoiled, neglected, heaped, abandoned, ragged, unburied, unhoped-for, forgotten, derelict, and otherwise ill-served and instrumentalized bodies of the war dead.¹ By “war” we would need to consider armed conflict in all its late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century manifestations, not only international, colonial, civil, and total war but also the perpetual “societal” war that Foucault vividly describes in his 1975–76 lecture course as elemental to European modernity (46–8). The fact that there seems to be no end to imagining the different ways of profaning the war dead reveals the operation of a darkly inventive power “as sovereign as that of an unconscious desire” (Didi-Huberman 23).² The corpses that we are so often given to see in poems, novels, engravings, and paintings, among other media, are as disturbing as they are captivating. Human remains, Maurice Blanchot remarks, are that about “which there is no getting used to” (257).³ But there is no looking away either. Five rapidly developed examples will need to suffice here.

1.

The British physician, anatomist, and artist, Sir Charles Bell, sutures together parts of the cadavers of three soldiers to paint a man whose body has been gorgonized by a fatal

tetanus infection contracted on the battlefield at Corunna (Figure 1).⁴ The wars by this point feel perpetual and Bell knows he needs to create images like this to help train future generations of army surgeons. But there is much more here than meets the medical eye. As a visual allegory of the disarrayed state of Britain at this low point in the global struggle against Napoleon, the soldier is wholly beside himself, eyes bulging, his limbs and torso frozen in an impossible grotesque. Surrendered entirely to his symptoms, as he is to the fascinated gaze of the physician, the soldier has become a death-mask *in toto*; but of what is his twisted physique a mask except the absence of himself to his own symptoms, his own death? As Blanchot says so presciently of “the corpse image,” the body in death is “entirely resemblance and so nothing more. It is likeness, likeness to an absolute degree, overwhelming and marvelous. But what is it like? Nothing” (257).

We will take first steps towards parsing this suggestive claim in a moment, but for now it is worth emphasizing that Bell’s highly stylized painting is a resemblance of a resemblance; as a representation, it is *not* that which it resembles. The image repeats or mimes a “nothing” or non-“likeness” that Blanchot identifies with the strange “neutrality” or non-subjective space of the corpse.⁵ The soldier’s backwards arched body looks like a man who has been stretched on a “breaking” wheel, a torture device upon which criminals were publically executed and their bodies displayed. It was still in isolated use in Europe in the nineteenth century. But the violating curve that the soldier’s limbs and torso trace with such clenched vigor is “himself”; in the throes of death his body has become its own double. That the source of his wracking torment is invisible, or rather visible only in its spectacular symptomatic effects, puts to us that the war wounded and the war dead are puppetized and tossed about, subject to traumatic forces that are, as such, illegible to those that they anonymously desecrate. In the mounting and often untreatable casualties of war Bell glimpses the disfiguration of history, now seen to be contorted by pressures that lead nowhere and that are not human, a history experienced materially as spasms of uncontrollable potencies and frozen tableaux of pain rather than stately narratives of the heroic protection of the homeland and the progress of the spirit. What passes for life is in fact a pathologically vitalized death; violent intensities crackle through the



Figure 1. Sir Charles Bell, *Opisthotonus in a patient suffering from tetanus* (1809). Reproduced with permission from the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

bodies of combatants like electricity through a galvanized laboratory specimen. The soldier is a type not or not only because he must function as a medical case-history but also because, as a type, he embodies an empty selfhood, one evacuated by the pitiless onslaught of events. Reduced to a grimace, he is no longer “he,” but instead a nodal point through which the indifferent and punctuating forces of history now erupt unimpeded. Bell treated the soldiers upon which his study is based after they had been transported from Corunna to Portsmouth. The luxuriously detailed billet above which the man all but levitates is a figure for the succor of the homeland, but the forebodingly indeterminate space in which it is located makes a mockery of that welcome. The truth is that England has become a death-bed. The war has come home and will never be the same because of it.

2.

Jacques-Louis David, who had planned to arrange the quickly festering corpse of Jean-Paul Marat in a *tableau vivant*, ends up immortalizing the murdered revolutionary hero in a painting whose uncanny effect comes from idealizing the dead flesh of the cadaver as much as the once living man. In its arresting stillness, the painting stalls its own meaning, thereby committing itself to the corpse and the image of the corpse rather than the memory of the man whose remains we are given to see. In other words, it would be fairer to the image’s strangeness to say that David paints an image not of Marat but of the *not-Marat* that is “his” corpse or, to be more precise, the *not-Marat* that is *a* corpse, the remains that are not in Marat’s possession, neither his to have or to lose. *La Mort de Marat*: nothing could be less available to representation than *that*. In the radical absence of any representation of *la mort* (and of the fact that that death—that “thing” to which an artist, a writer, anyone, haplessly points, even though with death there is no *there*, there—is not Marat’s, not “his” to have), there are only a flurry of representations and metonymic substitutions. These are substitutions that are not resemblances because they are likenesses that are catachrestically likenesses of and counters for that for which there are no likenesses—and so endlessly, repetitively, *only* likenesses, “entirely resemblance and nothing more,” as Blanchot says (417). If a representation of death is like anything, it is like a stereotype or *cliché* in printing processes, an oft-used stand-in or *Abklatsch*, an inert substitution, place-holder, or “bad copy,” a kind of slug or fiat currency that we are compelled to use in the absence of real specie. How then to catch what escapes expressiveness and the visible in that radically estranged place where the dead body lies so heavily, estranged, it appears, even from the very buoyancy of the bath’s water? How to register in oil on canvas the uncanny way that a corpse marks a person’s vanishing into an abyss of anonymity? What remains is an after-image of a leave-taking, an image after the corpse’s afterness.⁶ As Blanchot points out, a dead body is indubitably *there* and yet impossible to locate, always also elsewhere.⁷

This duplicity about the corpse attracts Plato’s attention in the *Phaedo*:

CRITO. How shall we bury you?

SOCRATES. Any way you like, if you catch me and I do not escape you. (179)

Socrates asks his concerned interlocutor to experience his corpse, which, he emphasizes, is precisely not *his* and not where he is, as a redoubled phenomenon. It is first left in the

hands of others, entirely a thing to which things are done. But what the corpse leaves to others, whether friends or foes, what it gives without giving anything away, is more than dead flesh; it is also a *retrait*, an “escape,” of which the remains are the remains. The corpse is “a resemblance” or “an image” of a kind of “nothing,” as Blanchot says (259). It is, as I have suggested, an after-image, as long as we understand and experience the image as not mimetic, not representational, but as the trace of an abstention, the residue not of a person but of an impersonal withdrawal from sight and presence. In this curious and difficult way, the corpse is a neutral stand-in for that for which nothing can stand, a bare or “absolute” “likeness” and nothing more. The corpse and the image are each non-subjective spaces to which we bring—and are schooled into bringing—the enormous resources of subjectivity, even and especially if both corpse and image are mutely indifferent to those resources. *The Death of Marat* captures Marat’s scarcity in death and the after-image that are “his” remains by representing a repetition, a repetition that Blanchot recognized cadavers to be: the canvas, *qua* canvas, is not the corpse of which it is an image. If anything, it is an image or trace of that *not*. In other words, *The Death of Marat* attends most unerringly to Marat’s dead body as a likeness of itself by being itself so conspicuously a likeness.

3.

We can turn to Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*, which is a novel limned by the wars and the war dead, even if this violence and these losses enter the narrative in ways that are often suffused with a certain antic spirit, bordering on heartlessness, whose ironies, like corpses, are hard to fathom. The callous streak in the novel is well debated in Austen criticism,⁸ but what interests me here is its relation specifically to the remains of soldiers. Why does the novel sometimes feel like it flirts with the belittlement of England’s dead? Consider “poor Richard” (88), lost to his family before he was killed at sea, his absent corpse given over to the pleasures of maudlin commemoration that do not so much provide a foil to more sober forms of remembrance as bring out the conventional and citational nature of all mourning practices, whether melancholic or mournful. Still, we are invited by the narrator to smile wryly at the intermittent and showy quality of Mrs. Musgrove’s grief for a bumbling failure of a son. She seems mostly absent to the heartache that she professes; in this way she mimics the truant life of a boy who was always already MIA. Missing from the novel and dead before the story begins, he is nothing more than what remains. He is a specter that the living have incorporated into memory, that is, “eaten.” And what a meal they make of him. The narrator too treats the disappeared sailor as “very little cared for” (88) and “scarcely regretted” (88), openly colluding with the diminishment of his disappearance by finding mirth in it. Marked for death and then, in fact, dead: why is everyone in the novel, even and especially the narrator, mostly okay with that? Why is his loss at sea and the scarceness of remorse about that loss the subject not only of enjoyment but also different kinds of enjoyment, from Wentworth’s rueful relief to be done with him to the scorn shared by the narrator and the Musgroves? “*Poor Richard*”: on behalf of her mother, Louisa Musgrove expresses disdain for her dead brother in a verbal tic that barely masquerades as a fond honorific. Being sorry, not sorry, for her family’s loss is taken to be a sign of the Musgrove’s inelegance and thoughtlessness, unless and until we remember that they are hardly alone in the novel to mourn in this complicated, if everyday, way. Mother and daughter render Richard

anonymous by treating his name as a kind of empty signifier—an unseemly turn in a war in which thousands were killed with no name at all by which to be remembered. Here a brethren sailor, son, and brother endures the indignity of being forgotten and abandoned by being named. He is, in effect, reduced to the repeated pronunciation of the name that survives him. The effect is like a spell, only this verbal magic does not make Richard appear to memory so much as compels him to appear *as* his disappearance. It gets worse. His proper name is instantly shed in favor of “Dick,” the perfect epithet, we are told, for the lad “who had never done anything to entitle himself to more than an abbreviation of his name, living or dead” (88). What can it mean not to rise to the status of being worthy of a proper name? The novel tells us that the nick-name is a sign of Richard’s failure, but the wrenching distinction between the name he was given but did not deserve and the name that he finally receives as the mark of his short-comings only covers for the violence with which all names and namings thrum. For no one ever accedes to a truly proper name; no one had or has a name that is singularly their own. As Geoffrey Bennington argues, after Derrida, “For there to be truly a proper name there would have to be only one proper name, which would then not even be a name, but pure appellation of the pure other, absolute vocative” (105). Vis-à-vis that “pure appellation,” all proper names are an “abbreviation”; they are all that to which we are entitled, whether “living or dead,” precisely because they outlive us. What then is this depersonalized thing about Richard—this *not*-Richard—for whom or rather for which an easy, short-hand name will do? “Dick,” the abbreviated and bawdy nick-name, names or tries to name something neutral, generic, and non-singular about him, something for which the distinction between life and death is said not to matter. It is very hard not to hear the narrator saying that the young sailor’s name *was* death, that for which all names are inadequate, all are a kind of short-form. “Living or dead”: “Dick” was all that to which he was “entitled.” The name names the way in which he/not-he/not-Richard was dead to death; it names part of him—and the name does name a “part” of him, after all—that survives and survives precisely because it is not him, not the boy who was once son to Mrs. Musgrove and a sailor under the command of Captain Wentworth. And yet when it comes to death, the death of Dick, or, for that matter, the death of Marat, are we ever owed more in a name? Is there ever anything other than “an abbreviation” of a “name,” more or less short-hand elisions of and substitutions for me in my absence, which is to say my absence and not even my absence, to whether I am “living or dead”? The switching between the names, “Richard” and “Dick,” itself names the violence of naming, the ways in which names both identify and dispossess, mark and lay claim to the individuality of an individual *and* divest that individual, marking “me” for death, which is to say the sheer neutrality of death, never mine to have. . . and never not mine to have either. We are led to believe that when it comes to her wayward son, Mrs. Musgrove cannot help herself. Her “fat sighings” (108) are mocked for their showiness, their sentimental inadequacy. But then what lean kind of grief are those “sighings” measured against, exactly? The callousness of the narrator? Like the names, these grievings divest and possess the war dead more or less violently. Mrs. Musgrove can’t compete with the know-it-all storyteller, who claims to see her son as she cannot, but the truth is that both end up making a joke of the death of “Dick.” And we are asked to laugh along too. The novel, in other words, does surprisingly little to suggest that Richard did not deserve his ignominious death.

You start to wonder if the narrative struggles to come to terms with something barely thinkable: namely, what Elias Canetti describes as the virile pleasure, even “sinister elation,” that the living sometimes take when measuring themselves against a heap of corpses (227, 274). Take the example of Wentworth, who, we are told, was only too happy to be rid of Richard too. The war makes that wish come true. And it is not the only time that the good captain demonstrates an odd disdain for the dead. Consider the mass death that is figured in such a light-hearted way by the hazel-nuts that lie scattered about Captain Wentworth and Louisa Musgrove’s feet during their walking party near Winthrop. Firmness of mind and resolve of character, Wentworth says, with “playful solemnity” (16), are like the hazel-nuts that weather the “autumn storms” (16) and remain intact, “while so many of his brethren have fallen and been trodden under foot” (16). The allusion to the war dead and specifically to the desecrating massification of their deaths is unmistakable, and not only because these words are put in the mouth of an officer of the line who has seen and survived a very great deal of death, both “brethren” and not. To be sure, the recreational nature of the scene and the mock-heroic nature of the simile comparing persuadable characters to marred and trampled hazel-nuts holds the last likeness—trodden corpses—away at a distance. But the remains of remains haunt this chattily bucolic moment in the novel, even as the prospect of more war and more war deaths trouble the narrative’s otherwise lovely concluding scene. Wentworth’s rhetoric of “fallen” “brethren” manages to be at once remarkable and unremarkable—grimly resonant, but also overheard amid a rustic setting and a flirtatious conversation that is nothing if not mundane. Perhaps it is total war and the unique disorientations of Romantic wartime that force the commonplace to carry the weight of the extraordinary, and commands the familiar to share the same space as hints of the cadaverous. But what to make of the ways in which Wentworth makes light of what is so burdensome? How to read the unselfconscious ease with which his silly pronouncement, spoken by a man who, unlike “poor Richard,” is still standing, treads on the already trodden dead? Easy-going words prove capable of telling a horrid story and risk slighting it; this is a misalignment between saying and meaning in the presence of the abandoned war dead that we will also see at work in Felicia Hemans’s poem, “England’s Dead.” In the wake of the defeat of Napoleon’s armies at Waterloo, the dishevelled condition of the remains of soldiers was for some spectators as shocking as it was disgraceful. Abandoning the dead to the elements and the scavengers meant that England had too easily abandoned the sanctity of life. In the third canto of *Childe Harold*, for example, Lord Byron writes forcefully about the “the unreturning brave” (3.27), who, by the evening of the day of the battle, find themselves “trodden like the grass” (3.27), their blood and bodies mixed indiscriminately with the horses, pack animals, and the sod. The poet is appalled by the wastefulness of the campaign, and the desecrating indifference of the war effort to the singularity of each life and each death—a horror that J. M. W. Turner’s *Field of Waterloo* also captures. Perhaps no painting imagines the dehumanizing trampling of the war dead, the basaltic piling of bodies upon bodies, more vividly than this canvas, shown once and then never again during the artist’s lifetime, presumably because the ignominy of the scene was too much to bear (Figure 2).

Wentworth’s rhetoric of the “trodden” carries this sobering weight with a disarming weightlessness that is not, I will wager, reducible to his forgetfulness, thoughtlessness, or repression. A process that is other than psychologistic and characterological appears



Figure 2. J. M. W. Turner, *The Field of Waterloo* (1818). Reproduced with permission from Tate Britain.

to be at work. On the face of it, his simile gives him a teachable moment with Louisa while also demonstrating his capacity to be wittily self-deprecating. Wentworth laughs at himself, just as the narrator asks us to smile knowingly at him; he grasps the ridiculousness of his comparison (“all the happiness that a hazel-nut can be supposed capable of” [22], he adds), even if for the narrator the ridiculousness of his ridiculousness says more about him than he knows or can be corralled under the aegis of his rather slight self-consciousness. His amusing analogy is after all half serious too, since at this point in the novel his investment in his theory of the virtue of steadfastness remains almost as inviolate as the hazelnuts that he praises and, let us be clear, *steps on*. But can he be thought to know what he is saying when his turn of phrase also recalls the specter of mass death—recalls without necessarily remembering? Yes and no. We are learning something here about Wentworth and perhaps about the war he has brought back to the homeland, but also about the impersonal and atmospheric wartime in which *Persuasion* is immersed and to which its narrative is so complexly answerable.⁹ Tellingly, Wentworth’s lesson immediately falls flat: “He had done,” the narrator intones, “—and was unanswered” (131). What is it that is unanswerable here, held in abeyance by a comma and a dash? Louisa may at first have nothing to say because there is something happening in the narrative at this instant that is not part of the conversation. Perhaps the momentary muteness that descends on the narrative is the book’s way of pointing out that the other likeness in this unlikely series of analogies (persuadable character/marred hazel-nuts/trodden corpses) is not unspoken as much as not taken up, or “owned,” as we might say today. It floats in the narrative, as it were, without a readily available ascription. The image of demeaned corpses, indistinguishable one from the next, like so much organic debris, does not lurk in the unconscious depths of Wentworth’s psyche, waiting to rear up like a slip of the tongue, but rather functions as a kind of open secret, known or at least felt, yet unacknowledged in the to and fro of conversation. The figure of the massification of death, as it were, is heard to flow impersonally

through him. It insists itself in the narrative as if the novel were at this moment momentarily vulnerable to the incursions of the trauma of history for which the heaping of the war dead is a figure and something more than a figure. After all, *Persuasion* is not itself a hazel-nut, far from it (the novel, by definition, is a dialogically unsealed form), but hospitable in its own ways to several species of the worst: the death of a beloved if fitfully remembered son before the narrative of the novel begins, a death that shapes *Persuasion*'s primogeniture plot from afar; the deaths and disfigurement of other sons scattered across the globe, the war's relentless and anonymous sifting of those who fall on the battlefield and those who survive to tread; and the proleptically haunting prospect of more deaths, and the "the tax of quick alarm" (319) that they levy on those lucky enough to be living and thus in a position to pay it. Wentworth's sentimental language functions as a place-holder—useful precisely for being inert, unanswered—for the fields of broken and forsaken bodies upon which all the living, including Jane Austen, tread by virtue of being alive. In other words, Wentworth's language is not legibly about power; it is irreducible to Canetti's "sinister elation." I rather read the simile as formal rather than psychological, and as a figure for the living-on of survival. The novel itself is such a figure too, standing among the battlefield dead whose stripped clothes will go into the making of the paper upon which it is printed.¹⁰

4.

By way of conclusion, let me turn briefly to the work of Felicia Hemans, for whom the fate of the war dead offers an occasion to dissent from what Gary Kelly calls the "masculinist, unreformed, illiberal world" (61) in which Britons found themselves in the aftermath of the defeat of Napoleon. In "England's Dead" Hemans addresses the remains of the empire's soldiers scattered around the globe in unmarked graves that are not graves at all but unidentified places on land and at sea into which their corpses have been indifferently absorbed. "There slumber England's dead," the speaker says several times, remembering through a kind of anamorphic translation another poem, another sleeping spirit,¹¹ but where Wordsworth's meditation on the corpse is private and lyrical, Hemans's is public and anthemic. Wartime has made that translation necessary but the cultural and political milieu in which it takes place brings with it a host of problems for the poet and indeed for poetry. Both poems solemnly regard the passage from singular life to the earthbound anonymity of interment; but one is an act of disconcerted wonder, the other a wary memorialization—wary, because the far-flung dispersion of the empire's unattended corpses stands as a figure for the anonymization of death, an offence that no triumphalist language of "King and Country" can wish away. Dissolved into a sea of namelessness, the dead suffer a particular indignity without feeling a thing. And not only the dead; the living too seem numbed, insensate, and cadaverized. "Bodies are killed, no one dies, corpses are produced" (160), David Theo Goldberg remarks, but "in losing death, we cease to know life" (160). As the better craftswoman of the mother-tongue, Hemans must puzzle out her duty to bolster the hegemonic aims of the British state by helping families metabolize the loss of their sons to the great waste of the world. Yet as David Simpson points out, for Hemans "Globalization brings not peace but the sword. The untroubled sequence of familiar words tells a terrible story of how violence against strangers is also, eventually, violence against the homeland"

(177). “England’s dead” means that England too is dead: that is the mortifying titular declaration with which the poem begins, spoken with a directness that stands in sharp relief to the platitudes that follow, platitudes that function like empire’s predictive text by autonomously taking the place of thinking. What can it mean then to speak of the fatalities of global conquest not from the point of view of a confidently vital and virile homeland but from a place of pervasive fatality? England is dead: but what language does a corpse speak? The poem is conspicuous for letting the distant remains remain where they are, remembered but not subject to an irritable reaching after repatriation. The deictic “there” in the poem’s refrain, “There slumber England’s dead,” points us to the remotest regions of the empire’s oblations; but the same deictics also insist that the dead stay put, “*there*,” wherever on earth “there” is. . . and wherever on earth death is. Alert to the possibility of replacing one violating assimilation of the dead with another, the poem confronts a forced choice: abandoning the dead to the elements without the benefit of a burial and ceremonial commemoration *or* recovering the dead in memory for the purposes of a homeland that the poem has pronounced dead before it is even underway. Do we leave the dead, inert yet spinning “round earth’s diurnal course” (Wordsworth 71), or do we demand that they live-on in an encorpsed after-life, put to work shoring up an idea of global hegemony that is inured to the faceless numeracy of death—both the death of strangers and of England’s own—and so itself lifeless? The tissue of jingoistic sentiments and sentimentalizing turns that made the poem a beloved consumable in the imperialist nineteenth century are the key: in their flatness and familiarity, these easy stereotypes or blocks of words and thoughts respond to the choice at hand by not making it.¹² The text’s triumphalism, the quality that led to it being taken up as “a virtual British national anthem” (Wolfson), is thus not a false consciousness awaiting its knowing, historicist correction, but an example of several calibrated distancing strategies at work whose function it is to evoke the war dead without appearing too assiduously to disinter them or figuratively to return them to England’s custody or safekeeping. There is a way in which the poem leaves the dead where they are, lost, possessed in the delicate form of a kind of permanent dispossession, England’s to have, yes, but in the mode of not-having. We are reminded that a desecration can, in certain circumstances, also be a kind of fidelity, and that the distinction between honoring the dead and abandoning them can be finer than one of contrast. The impersonality and abstraction of the clichés, the disconnect between what the poem says and what it describes, makes this faithless faithfulness possible. The pleasing words offer an evacuated place for the placelessness of Empire’s lost corpses. Hemans’s dis-arming language (both agreeable and pacific) commits itself to the memory of the dead and to their awful deaths while also holding them away at a deadeningly prettifying distance. That is why Hemans’s corpses feel both unlocatable and on the move; the dead are at rest, the poem’s confident refrain tells us, until the concluding verse, when we are told they are “not.” The becoming thing-like or what might be called the *cadavarization* of poetic language is key. Hemans in effect warns us that if England too is dead, then among the casualties must be counted the language of the poem called “England’s Dead.” Perhaps in a world that starts to feel like a mass grave, dead to England’s very door, declamations of virile sacrifice and imperial accomplishment must give way to risky wagers with the language really spoken by women, or certain women, and with the right of a corpse, as it were, to be a corpse, and perhaps never more so than when the mourning-play of sovereign

power is responsible for producing it. It can mean writing poetry in an inter-mundia or in-between space, hovering indeterminately between the unselfconscious use and the self-conscious mention of the clichés of empire. In the spectralizing wake of the lost dead, that gamble includes saying that nothing can go without saying by repeating, word for word, sentiment for sentiment, what is said by sovereign authority to go without saying, in the hope that an “untroubled sequence of familiar words” can come, corpse-like, to resemble itself, and appear, as if for the first time, as the nothing that it is. The nationalistic clichés proclaim the sanctity of the homeland, making noise about it but in an unabashedly ready-made and conspicuously citational way, as if marking time and filling in a space that awaits better words and more substantial thoughts about England’s dead and England’s death. The poem is, in other words, a theory of the corpse, seeking to do justice to the war dead rather than know who or what they are.

Notes

1. Several important texts on corpses and burial practices inform my essay. See, for example: Harrison, Laquer, and Martel.
2. I recall Didi-Huberman’s phrase describing the inability of German perpetrators to refrain from photographing the atrocities against Jews once photographing them was prohibited.
3. Much of my thinking about a “theory of the corpse” is activated by Blanchot’s “Two Versions of the Imaginary,” which is not so much an essay as it is an experience.
4. For a discussion of Bell’s work as a war surgeon, see, for example, Crumplin and Starling.
5. For a touchstone reflection on the nature of the “not” or “nothing” at the heart of representation, see de Man.
6. For a discussion of an afterness that is irreducible to belatedness and not derivative of what comes “before,” see Richter. I discuss Richter’s argument in my review of *Afterness* in *MLN*.
7. I recall here Blanchot’s statement that “The deceased cleaves jealously to his place, joining it profoundly, in such a way that the indifference of this place, the fact that it is after all just a place among others, becomes the profundity of his presence as deceased becomes the basis of indifference, the gaping intimacy of an undifferentiable nowhere which must nevertheless be located here” (256–7).
8. The question of grief and the heartlessness of the narrator regarding Mrs. Musgrove’s grief is well discussed in Austen criticism. See, for example, Graefe, Pinch, and Heydt-Stevenson.
9. For a discussion of Austen’s wartime, see Favret’s “Everyday War.”
10. Favret draws our attention to this use and abuse of the war-dead in *War at a Distance* 47, 101.
11. I am of course recalling Wordsworth’s “A slumber did my spirit seal.”
12. My remarks about Hemans’s jingoism are indebted to Wang’s immensely generative work on the *cliché*.

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