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## Insurgent Testimonies

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## **Traumas of Nation and Narrative: Legal and Literary Witnessing in Rebecca West's Wartime Writings**

Rebecca West was a prolific Anglo-Irish writer whose work appeared in diverse venues across the twentieth century, from books brought out by the Hogarth Press, to the Vorticist magazine *Blast*, to the *New York Herald Tribune*. Her novels, short stories, literary criticism, travelogues, reviews, and trial reports form an impressive body of transdisciplinary literature that often features an interdisciplinary approach to the topic at hand. Several of West's pieces center on events frequently viewed as the most extreme, and exemplary, ruptures of modernity—the two world wars. Among these are the novel *The Return of the Soldier*, which was composed during the first, and trial reports collected in *The Meaning of Treason*, composed in the aftermath of the second. The testimony to trauma that each work enacts demonstrates, as Bernard Schweizer argues, that “West cuts across traditional ideological categories, being neither wholly a conservative nor entirely a progressive thinker.”<sup>1</sup> But testimony in each writing also challenges Schweizer's assertion, echoed by other scholars, that West's oeuvre displays “a syncretic blend

of political ideals emphasizing stability, tradition, loyalty, and nationalism, as well as anti-imperialism.”<sup>2</sup> In distinct, even contrasting ways, *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Meaning of Treason* relate that anti-imperialism cannot be syncretically blended with stability, tradition, loyalty, and nationalism. In both works, anti-imperialism disrupts narratives that enable and sustain these ideals.

Like Conrad’s essay “Poland Revisited” and novel *Under Western Eyes*, which Chapter 1 examined, West’s novel about a shell-shocked English soldier and her coverage of the trials of the “Irish revolutionary” William Joyce encourage us to expand and revise critical understandings of British modernism as a literature that imagines a transnational ethics and politics of community and that arises out of historical traumas of modernity. As is the case with Conrad’s writing, West’s is often associated with modernism but not considered the most canonical example of it. West employed some of modernism’s stylistic techniques and broached modernist subjects in her works but also became increasingly wary of forms of leftist internationalism shared by Bloomsbury and other modernist vanguards. West’s commitment to feminist and socialist principles early in her career did make her critical of patriarchal, bourgeois ideologies that writers such as Virginia Woolf argued were of a piece with imperialist and nationalist discourses. As decades passed, however, West’s politics separated her ever further from modernist peers. One reason for this is that by the 1940s, as Marina MacKay points out, West found the literary left’s critiques of nationalism generally an expression of Western privilege. She developed this position in part through encounters with the history of imperialist repressions of diverse nationalities and nationalisms in her trip to the Balkans during the 1930s. West documented these encounters in the magisterial 1941 travelogue *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*. Like Conrad’s, however, West’s perspectives on imperialism and resistance to it are not consistent across her oeuvre, or even within a single work. Responding to a shifting global order of the present and to colonial traumas of the past, Conrad attacks Russian imperialism throughout his writing but does not subject British imperialism to this same assault; similarly uneven treatments of imperialism occur in West’s fictional and nonfictional responses to wartime presents and colonial pasts. Testimony in her World War I novel subtly nudges readers toward a critique of narratives of modernity that underwrite British imperial nation-

alism and that its plot, characters, and narrator express. The deployment of such narratives in *The Meaning of Treason* indicates that by the end of World War II, West is more capable of criticizing Eastern imperialism than British imperialism and that her sympathy for nationalist movements in the Balkans does not extend to those in British colonies. Although their perspectives on imperialism and nationalism diverge more than converge, both wartime writings' modes of witnessing help dislocate Eurocentric responses to trauma in literary and cultural studies that focus on the two world wars.

Testimony in *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Meaning of Treason* suggests that because the wars threaten the stability of empire, state, and nation, they elicit narratives of modernity that obscure structural violence shaping high and late imperial eras. By elucidating how the grammar of connectivity and rhetoric of continuity molding such cultural, socio-scientific, politico-economic, and legal narratives—and critical models that consolidate them—conceal forms of repression that contour and drive them, these works dispute representations of the European wars as ruptures of otherwise stable and peaceable eras. I explore, first, how *The Return of the Soldier* asks readers to situate World War I trauma writing in wider contexts than that of the nation and European continent and within a longer historical trajectory than that of the twentieth century. I then analyze how the report entitled “The Revolutionary” in *The Meaning of Treason* obliges—rather than asks—us to situate the writing of West's middle period in the context of two co-implicated processes often treated separately in literary studies, World War II and imperial retrenchment.

### *Conflicting Scenes of Trauma*

*The Return of the Soldier*, first published in 1918, tells the story of a soldier who returns home an amnesiac as the result of shell shock. This work has attracted renewed interest in recent years in part because it centers on trauma and memory loss, issues of concern in contemporary criticism, but also because it explores the war's effects on women as well as men. The novel therefore supplements, by adding to and exposing a lack within, the literary and literary-critical canon on World War I trauma, which has long been dominated by a focus on masculinity, often through masculinist interpreta-

tions such as those of Paul Fussell and Samuel Hynes.<sup>3</sup> Although the novel features a wounded soldier, the domestic sphere and not the military theater takes center stage. It relates how amnesia prompts the male protagonist, his wife, cousin, and former lover to return to the past and reexamine love affairs and filial attachments from before the war, and, moreover, it employs a female witness to tell this story. For these reasons, the novel might contribute to what Margaret Higonnet calls an “alternate history of World War I traumas” that would restore voice to female witnesses of the period 1914–1918, who were silenced by modernist literature and criticism alike.<sup>4</sup> Testimony in this novel does articulate an alternate perspective of a period, but more than World War I, that period is what Eric Hobsbawm calls the “age of empire.”<sup>5</sup> This is the era in which England’s economic and political power as a nation is sustained through imperial and quasi-imperial exploitation and uneven gender and class arrangements.

This claim contradicts the novel’s plotting, characters’ statements, and critical interpretations, which identify the war, and war wounds, as the text’s organizing traumas. Attending to the novel’s formal staging of testimony reveals a more diffuse conceptualization of trauma, one that locates its sources beyond French and British soil and battle wounds. To trace the indirect articulation of historical trauma by concentrating on the rhetorical itinerary of testimony is to break with contemporary approaches to trauma that analyze it as a clinical affliction of character and an explicit focus of war narratives. A conflation of trauma with battle wounds has dominated writings that reference the war, such as Hemingway’s, Lewis’s, Woolf’s, and Brittain’s, and the category of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is sometimes invoked to understand literature of this period.<sup>6</sup> Fragmented language and other modernist formal devices become legible as reflections of a clinical condition of war rather than self-conscious strategies that emerge in response to wider literary and cultural histories. In *The Return of the Soldier*, it is these devices, which elaborate a crisis of memory through testimony, that challenge interpretations of trauma as an individualized affliction with a single cause—war—and trouble claims that the work mourns an idyllic Victorian past.

Because it is written under the pressures of a nation rendered vulnerable by war and imperial unrest, however, West’s novel presents conflicting articulations of trauma and incompatible stagings of collective memory. On the one hand, it plots trauma as an illness suffered by a soldier in battle that

causes him to yearn for a reputedly stable Victorian past. This plotting consolidates entrenched approaches to trauma in modernist studies that envision the twentieth century as a rupture in former national and historical stability. On the other hand, the formal enactments of testimony situate origins of trauma beyond a war fought on European terrain, and they trouble the narrative of historical rupture the novel plots. Testimony indicates that in a climate of national anxiety, vulnerability, and retrenchment coincident with war, nationalist and metropolitan focalizations become resolute, and other traumatic histories both within and without the boundaries of the nation-state become impossible to witness and archive. This warning remains pertinent today, because literary criticism continues to center the European war as the site of trauma in modernist literature, neglecting Anglophone modernism's imbrication in the economic and cultural imperialism from which it emerged and includes within itself, Fredric Jameson famously contended, as a structuring absence.<sup>7</sup> By foregrounding testimony's unverifiability, its literarity, the novel invites readers to become active witnesses to—by becoming facilitators of—the precarious emergence of a counter-representation of England's past. This counter-representation problematizes critical narratives that posit the war as the central crisis of modernity, the event that constitutes a break from earlier historical moments, and retroactively define the prewar past as static and stable.<sup>8</sup>

*The Return of the Soldier* is a novel about mourning. The losses in the novel seem to accumulate or “condense,” but they also appear to substitute or displace one another, making an original loss difficult to identify. The text calls to mind Freud's observations regarding mourning, and pathological mourning particularly. “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal.”<sup>9</sup> Freud points to the conundrum that a loss generating pathological mourning, or melancholia, poses. In these “other cases,” he writes, “one feels justified in concluding that a loss of the kind has been experienced, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost, and may the more readily suppose that the patient too cannot consciously perceive what it is he has lost.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, pathological mourning produces an interpretative crisis not only for the analysand, the witness who “experiences” the loss without knowing who or “what it is he has lost,” but also for the analyst, a witness whose task it is to facilitate the analysand's ne-

gotiation of this unconscious loss.<sup>11</sup> In its articulation of British modernity through a vexed narrative of loss it depicts as characterologically *and* textually unconscious, the novel produces a crisis of interpretation for both its internal witnesses and external witnesses, or readers.

The theater in which this crisis unfolds confounds the divide between fiction and history, signaling to readers a rift in historical claims the novel will locate there. That locus is Monkey Island, the site of an idyllic interlude in the plot in which the story of the male protagonist's past, before he has suffered shell shock, is related. The portrayal of Monkey Island illustrates the modern novel's attempts to consolidate fragments of space, as landscape, into a unified whole and figure the nation as a cohesive topos. Depictions of landscape convey completeness and tranquility: "The whole world seemed melting into light. Cumulus clouds floated very high, like lumps of white light against a deep, glowing sky, and dropped dazzling reflections on the beaming Thames. The trees moved not like timber shocked by wind, but floatingly, like weeds at the bottom of a well of sunshine."<sup>12</sup> The oxymoron "well of sunshine" is representative of the island. Oppositions dissipate into specular identification; from the height of the heavens to the subterranean depths of the Thames, everything there neutralizes its other, coinciding with itself. It is a spatial figuration of a time of pure unity, Victorian England bathed in the master trope of light, untouched by the "shock" of later years.

Monkey Island is part of the novel's fabula, but it is also real, an actual place whose idyllic surface covers over personal and collective unrest, even trauma. West visited the small island in the Thames with her lover H. G. Wells, claiming it as a favorite place, but it might have functioned as an ambivalent site also, the locus of escape, refuge, perhaps even exile. When West became pregnant with the married Wells's child, Wells requested she avoid their social circle. She retreated there, where Wells would join her, and Monkey Island allowed the lovers to avoid the pressures of London society, for which, however, West's letters suggest she yearned.<sup>13</sup> Monkey Island is also a site whose history and topology are thickly layered. According to records, the island was first used by monks fishing on the Thames. By the fourteenth century it had become property of Canonesses of Burnham Abbey, a mile north. In 1723 it was purchased by Charles Spencer, Third Duke of Marlborough, who erected its first buildings, a pavilion and temple. Com-

missioning a French artist to paint the pavilion with figures of fully dressed monkeys engaged in human activities—shooting, fishing, and boating—he gave Monkey Island its most famous feature, which, as the aleatory effects of language’s materiality would have it, obscured the origin of the island’s name. “Monkey Island” derives not from the paintings in the pavilion, now the inn, but from the earlier, old English *Monks Eyot*, or Monk’s Island. The Monkey Island of the duke’s day, West’s day, and today owes its existence to a catastrophic event in history, the Great Fire of London in 1666. The island was employed as a dumping ground for the rubble carried away from the burned city. This waste provided a solid foundation for building and the elevation necessary to prevent flooding.<sup>14</sup> Monkey Island’s literal foundations are the ashes of England’s capital, the future metropolitan center of the empire. The traces of the dead and a national traumatic past lie buried beneath its charming inn, manicured lawns, and temple.

The novel appears to contrast England’s long period of national and imperial peace in the nineteenth century it figures through Monkey Island with ruptures and violence that emerge in the twentieth and to mourn the loss of this peace.<sup>15</sup> The present is 1916, and Chris Baldry returns home with amnesia, the consequence of an exploding shell. He remembers nothing after 1901, neither his marriage to upper-middle-class Kitty, nor the death of their son Oliver, but only his love affair with working-class Margaret, which in fact ended in 1901. Samuel Hynes notes that Chris’s amnesia eclipses not only this affair’s end but the dawn of the Edwardian age, a tumultuous time. Increasingly powerful pressure was exerted on Britain in the decade before the war, as social, economic, and political unrest grew at home and abroad. In England, the agitation of mass labor movements coincided with the growing popularity of the Women’s Social and Political Movement, the suffragists, and, after the return to power of the Liberal Party in 1906, with violent public demonstrations by its radical factions up to 1914. Indian nationalist demands for self-rule strengthened with the outcry against the colonial partitioning of Bengal in 1906. Demand for home rule in Ireland regained momentum even after its attempted quashing through the Irish Land Acts, the latest implemented in 1903. And in another “peripheral” nation that the novel specifically references, Mexico, nationalist unrest over foreign control of land had culminated in revolution by 1910. Although Mexico was not a British colony, longstanding British commercial interests were threatened by revolution. The text, we will see, underlines this.



*The Return* seems to join the many modernist works that critically register the transformative effects of the long nineteenth century on English topography and culture through its protagonist's reaction to this period of unrest. "Chris's amnesia has taken him back to the time before change," Hynes contends. "Other Englishmen yearned back, too, to an innocent, unspoiled England that had been lost, not because of the war alone, but because of the whole disfiguring process of modern change."<sup>16</sup> Expressed here is the dominant narrative of the transition from the Victorian to Edwardian eras. According to this view, the former, reputedly belle époque was a time before rupture in the longue durée of English stability, before "modernity" and its attendant modifications, or "disfigurations," of English landscape and social life. Allegedly responsible are not only civil, labor, and colonial agitation but also the decline of an agrarian economy, the rise of industrialism, and the ecological violence accompanying technologies of industrialization, warfare, urbanization, and suburbanization.

There are biographical as well as textual reasons to suspect the novel's endorsement of this narrative of a fall from stability and pastoral plenitude into twentieth-century trauma, however. A feminist, suffragist, and socialist with Anglo-Irish parentage, West also attacked British imperialism, denying the distinction between Britain's benevolent imperialism and malevolent imperialism.<sup>17</sup> In her monograph on Henry James, published in 1916, West criticized James for mythologizing a national past shaped by historical struggles. In *The Passionate Pilgrim*

you have the first statement of the persistent illusion, to which he was helped by his odd lack of the historic sense and which confused his estimate of modern life, that the past would have been a happier home for those who like himself loved fastidious living. . . . He was always being misled by such lovely shells of the past as Hampton Court into the belief that the past which inhabited them was as lovely. The calm of Canterbury Close appeared to him as a remnant of a time when all England, bowed before the Church, was as calm; whereas the calm is really a modern condition brought about when the church ceased to have anything to do with England. He never perceived that life is always a little painful at the moment, not only at this moment, but at all moments.<sup>18</sup>

By claiming that a lack of "historic sense" misreads conflict as a peculiarly modern condition, this passage illustrates that appropriating a single moment as the origin of trauma generates fiction as history. It also suggests

that, as Dominick LaCapra points out, if “one assumes that there was . . . some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity that others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated and thus made ‘us’ lose . . . to regain it one must somehow get rid of or eliminate those others.”<sup>19</sup> West’s words indicate that fictional representations of idyllic national pasts entail the violence of erasure.

*The Return* attacks the normative narrative of a “fall” into modernity that Hynes’s introduction conveys and that her criticism of James would seem to reject, but it also expresses it. In the episode recounting Chris’s affair with Margaret on Monkey Island fifteen years earlier, the novel converts the absence of an Edenic, prewar era into a loss while concealing the effacement of those who threaten this idyllic image. *The Return* appears to ratify the narrative of loss most intently in the interlude recounting Chris’s affair with Margaret on the island fifteen years earlier. The text presents this time that escapes Chris’s amnesia as memory. Later, when familial, social, and economic obligations arise, their love will be thwarted, but in 1901, on Monkey Island, no such conflicts exist, and division and discord are declared absent. Even the island’s name, which West opens to interpretation by forgoing mention of the monkey paintings, figures a “prehistorical” moment, before humans acquire language, marking their fall into separation and their perpetual attempts to bridge the distance that language opens between them. However, the novel also disturbs this image of an uncontaminated Victorian nation through testimony, which operates as a vehicle of aesthetic contestations over national histories.

The framing of the section on Monkey Island in terms of psychoanalytic treatment throws into relief the conflicting interpretations of trauma the work elaborates while troubling the coherence, unity, and reality of the supposedly prelapsarian national past.<sup>20</sup> This framing operates in friction with the novel’s critical assessments of psychoanalysis in its concluding pages—the plotting of trauma ends by rejecting the possibility of a talking cure. A cure is found not through methods advocated by the doctor loosely modeled on Freud but through Margaret, whom the doctor approaches “as though she were the nurse in charge of the case” (73). After the doctor searches into Chris’s Oedipal past for the cause of amnesia, the text dismisses the value of testimony while mocking the analyst for his “glib assurance, his knowingness about the pathways of the soul” (81). “What’s the use of talking? You

can't cure him" (81), Margaret tells the analyst, and then she brings Chris's memory back not by listening to him speak but by showing him an object that recalls to him the death of his son. The introduction of the episode on Monkey Island, however, pushes against Margaret's dismissal of testimony as talking cure. Here we find another nurse and the miming of a psychoanalytic scene that both suggests that the novel attempts to bring something beside the son's death to consciousness and that doing so requires the facilitation of a witness, a listener, a reader. Chris's cousin Jenny, the novel's narrator, is cast as analyst to Chris's analysand. The narrator recognizes that in returning to Baldry Court in 1916, Chris enters what for him is a fantasy world, because his reality is 1901. "He was like a patient when tiring visitors have gone and he is left alone with his trusted nurse; . . . I watched him vigilantly and was ready at that moment when thought intruded into his drowsings and his face began to twitch" (32). The medical attendant, "nurse," reads the language written on the "patient's" body, interpreting physical symptoms as signs of inner conflict. She then intervenes by promoting the talking cure and establishing herself as listener: "'Tell me what seems real to you,' I begged" (33). Chris responds, "Why, Monkey Island's real. But you don't know old Monkey. Let me tell you—" (33). The narrator interrupts where Chris's speech cuts off, claiming, "I have lived so long with the story which he told me that I cannot now remember his shy phrases. But this is how I have visualized his meeting with love on his secret island. I think it is the truth" (33).

The choreography of this scene does not pinpoint the source of amnesia in either war or shell shock, or where the doctor, Margaret, or the cure locate it—in Chris's relationships with a cold mother and jealous father and the death of his son. Neither, however, does it situate trauma entirely outside of history and representation. The scene's structure disputes what Jenny and Chris declare. The past on Monkey Island is not "real" but a belated invention through narrative of a moment that can never be grasped as itself. Because it formally configures the episode on Monkey Island as an unverifiable testimony to trauma, or, in Freud's words, *Nachträglichkeit*, the novel presents this episode as an event that calls for representation and clarifies that such representation can only occur through an interaction between text and reader, a witness who will help translate it.<sup>21</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* we find the most oft-cited definition of *Nachträglichkeit*, literally

“carrying-afterness,” translated as “aftereffect.” The traumatic neurotic [*traumatisch Neurotiker*] suffers from a paradoxical aftereffect, a compulsive return from the past of a self-differing event. The event differs from itself because its origin is unavailable, and it returns only through displacements, interruptions, or transfigurations.<sup>22</sup> In the novel, the story of Monkey Island is never supported by an omniscient or third-person narration but instead undergoes multiple translations, from Chris’s memory, to language, to Jenny’s memory, to Jenny’s visualization, and, finally, to the words on the page framed with an oath: “I think it is the truth.” Because the oath is a performative utterance it is heterogeneous to either truth or falsity. The past it dispatches to readers is therefore necessarily discontinuous with verification. This testimonial framing of Monkey Island hence disrupts the narrative of modernity that locates loss and rupture with the turn of the century and the war while placing readers in the role of facilitating this disruption.

The significance of testimony in the novel, then, is not that it recovers historical truth or that it fails to because it is “false.” It is, first, that as an unverifiable mode that is (also) literary, testimony provides the lineaments of a collective past that cannot emerge through the discourse of psychoanalysis that the text parodies as a science of family romance, or through the clinical discourse of PTSD that would explain Chris’s trauma as the effect of battle wounds. Second, testimony foregrounds the need for reader-witnesses to enable the submerged past to surface. Finally, this abyssal framing highlights that because testimony remains disconnected from both source and destination, author and receiver, it “must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths, the *possibility*, at least, of literature.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, to portray the so-called real past the novel paradoxically deploys testimony’s parasites, literature, even fiction. Although West includes elements of the historical Monkey Island—Lord Marlborough, the pavilion-turned-inn, and the temple—she replaces its most famous feature, the monkey paintings, with literary works that share its own concerns: Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* and Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.” Both question the capacity of memory to access the past. The engagement with these literary works suggests that the national anxiety coincident with war produces collective amnesia. Inviting readers to trace the indirect emergence of trauma through interruptions, displacements, and transfigurations, the novel conveys that the rhetorical details that compose

Monkey Island provide clues about what other histories must be obscured for the normative narrative of loss to cohere.

*The White Hawthorn and the Magic State*

The first reference *The Return* makes to another literary work, one published just five years before the novel, is through the white hawthorn. The white hawthorn, like the madeleine, is an important element in *Swann's Way*, authored by the only modern writer whose "greatness," West declared, "cannot [be] exaggerated."<sup>24</sup> I would argue, however, that Proust's white hawthorn is important to the novel not because it functions as a symbol that provides access to *memoire involontaire* but, on the contrary, because it frustrates the act of symbolization and memory, troubling attempts to attain a correspondence between nature as object and the mind of the subject contemplating it.

In West's and Proust's novels, the relationships between art and artifice on the one hand and nature and reality on the other coalesce around the figure of the white hawthorn, which both texts inscribe into a literary history of the symbol. In both novels, the rhetorical mode of symbol is also deposed by allegory. Allegory, Paul de Man demonstrated, operates in aesthetic and ideological struggle with symbol throughout literary history.<sup>25</sup> Through symbol, the poetic subject claims to exceed finite limits and attain mastery over himself and the objective world. Symbol's materiality evanesces, providing unmediated access to truth or the real. In contrast, allegory is a debased mode that forces unbridgeable distance between subject and world, because allegory is pure mediation and figuration. Symbolic achievements are illusory, however, and allegory persistently displaces this valorized mode by exposing its reliance on mediation. These displacements are often instances of intertextuality that arise at the point at which symbolic truth is purported to occur. Through the allegory of the white hawthorn, West's and Proust's writings challenge symbol's mastery while betraying anxieties of memory peculiar to twentieth-century history and literary history.

The recurring mention of the white hawthorn implies its "immense significance" (35), as well as the significance of tracking rhetorical figurations outside of the main plot or action, for the hawthorn plays no part in these.

First, after describing the pathway leading toward Monkey Island, West writes, “between the two [poplars]—he [Chris] described it meticulously as though it were of immense significance—there stood a white hawthorn” (35). The second mention of the plant provides more direct reference to Proust’s novel. When the hawthorn appears again, so does the titular figure of *Swann’s Way*, his proper name transformed into a common noun, highlighted through an alliteration that makes it difficult not to stutter over, or at least notice, the word.

Past the spit of sand at the far end of the island, where a great *swan swanked* to the empty reach that it would protect its mate against all comers, the river opened to a silver breadth between flat meadows stretching back to far rows of pin-thick black poplars, until it wound away to Windsor behind a line of trees whose heads were bronze with unopened buds and whose flanks were hidden by a hedge of copper-beech and crimson and white hawthorn.

(39, my emphasis)

Invoking another fiction, West’s novel challenges, by ironizing, claims that Monkey Island is real. More ironic, or rather allegorical, is that this particular allusion directs us to passages that refute Monkey Island’s past unity. Proust’s novel portrays the white hawthorn as a figure of disunification, as what creates distance within and between self and world. Marcel is frustrated by his inability to get beyond unsignifying nature in order to turn it into a symbol, as Chris Baldry says of the white hawthorn, of “immense significance.”

But it was in vain that I lingered beside the hawthorns—inhaling, trying to fix in my mind . . . , losing and recapturing their invisible and unchanging odor, absorbing myself in the rhythm which disposed their flowers here and there with the lightheartedness of youth and at intervals as unexpected as certain intervals in music—they went on offering me the same charm in inexhaustible profusion, but without letting me delve any more deeply, like those melodies which one can play a hundred times in succession without coming any nearer to their secret. I turned away from them for a moment so as to be able to return to them afresh.<sup>26</sup>

Marcel turns back to them but again is frustrated by their inability to enlighten. His turning is also a troping, which, in the passage that follows, is disclosed as irreducible. For the hawthorns will not reveal their “inner es-

sence,” “offer no enlightenment.”<sup>27</sup> The problem cannot be resolved, for the white hawthorn alone holds the secret of truth Marcel pursues: “I could not call upon any other flowers to satisfy this mysterious longing.”<sup>28</sup>

These passages enact a thwarting of symbolic by allegorical discourse. They illustrate the white hawthorn’s refusal to submit to the self that contemplates it as if symbolic, preventing the male protagonist from identifying with the real, or natural, world. Marcel takes recourse to metaphors of artistic production at moments he seems to describe its opposite, nature. The flowers’ refusal to reveal their secret is likened to “melodies” one plays to solicit their inner meaning, but without success. Later, he frames them as art, a “masterpiece,” metaphorically and literally.<sup>29</sup> Still, they fail to signify other than themselves, nor do they allow unification of feeling and object. Employing a rhetoric of artifice to portray the real manifests the figurative deposing of nature by art and underscores the overcoming of symbolic by allegorical diction.

This intertextuality projects an allegorical structure to the white hawthorn in West’s novel. The blossom can no more bridge a distance within the self and between the self and the natural world for Chris on Monkey Island, where he attempts to transcend his distance from the “real” past through the white hawthorn as symbol, than it can for Marcel. Proust’s text indicates that the unity of the national past Monkey Island figures is illusory, that it is *already* marked by separation and loss. Allegory intimates the gap between history and memory, the past and its belated reinvention.

The third mention of the plant reveals how the dominant narrative of loss obscures uneven gendering and class formations in England’s past. The struggle between allegory and symbol questions whether the hawthorn can overcome the distance not only between memory and history but also between men and women of different classes. Jenny finds it “strange” (49) that both Margaret and Chris “should describe meticulously the one white hawthorn that stood among the poplars by the ferryside” (49) but then surmises, “I suppose that a thing that one has looked at with somebody one loves acquires for ever after a special significance” (49), which suggests the blossom’s reality *and* symbolic force, its capacity to bind Chris and Margaret. However, because the white hawthorn is located on Monkey Island, it is situated outside of reality, and thus its binding of these two is predicated on illusion. “It was strange that both Chris and she spoke of it [Monkey Island]

as though it were not a place, but a magic state which largely explained the actions performed in it" (49). If Monkey Island is a "magic state," a fantasy, as is the white hawthorn within it, the latter can bridge the distance between Chris and Margaret only through fiction. "State" doubles its referent here; in addition to a quality of feeling, it designates a sociopolitical entity. Magical Monkey Island is a figure for England before 1901, a phantasmatic geopolitical topos.

Allegory's deconstruction of symbol in passages that present Margaret as an aesthetic object illustrate that the narrative of loss is marked by fiction and that it censors heteronormative and patriarchal policing of masculinity and femininity, classes, and sexualities. These passages parody late nineteenth-century academic art, which revived neoclassical motifs to figure the female body in painting and sculpture, as well as aesthetic discourses that emerge in the 1870s and become more reactionary in relation to social purity movements of the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>30</sup> Just as this testimony misreads the white hawthorn's significance as symbolic, a dematerialized and transcendent access to truth, so it treats Margaret as a symbol, dematerializing and disfiguring her. Symbol is exposed as allegory again, however, revealing that this Margaret is created from textuality and artifice. Recycled fictions and art of the past shape her as a reactionary, patriarchal ideal of the late Victorian period, the epitome of feminine modesty and chastity. The imagery of classical Greece and the language of the medieval chivalric code, whose intimacy with the religious practice of object worship is ironized, portray Margaret as divine symbol, beyond the reach of everything human and "base"—beyond figure, figuration, and thus allegory.

He drew her out into the darkness . . . to a circle of smooth turf. . . . On this stood a small Greek temple. . . . He had never brought Margaret here before because Mr. Allington had once told him . . . it had been built by the Dook for his excesses, and it was in the quality of his love for her that he could not bear to think of her in connection with anything base. . . . He lifted her in his arms and carried her within the columns and made her stand in a niche above the altar. . . . He could not tell if her hair was white as silver or yellow as gold. . . . His love was changeless. Lifting her down from the niche, he told her so.

(41)

The lower-middle-class female body operates as the site of a fetishistic reaction, the production of the upper-middle-class male's erotic investment



and denegation at once. The realist conventions persistently used to portray Margaret as utterly material, *too* material, throughout the novel indicate the need for this effacement of the body. She enters Baldry Court with a “deplorable umbrella, her unpardonable raincoat” (14), “muddy boots,” and “a seamed red hand” (10). A “stain” (16) on the English drawing room and the English garden, both metonymic of the English nation, Margaret possesses “the gift of animals and those of peasant stock” (14), the “heaviness of the draught-ox or the big trusted dog . . . repulsively furred with neglect and poverty” (10). A belated invention of an unmarked Margaret, a lack of “historic sense” that positions the working-class woman as an immutable symbol of a masculinist ideal of femininity, divesting her of materiality and historicity, enables Margaret and Chris’s relationship to form in 1901. The doubled articulation of Margaret—she is all too material, historical, and “scarred” on the one hand, and not material at all, lacking a relation to time, history, and sensuousness—is paradigmatic of many philosophical and literary representations of women in Western modernity.<sup>31</sup>

This allegory of Margaret can also be read as West’s indictment of the discursive management of the laboring female body in the last decades of the nineteenth century. A host of phenomena contributed to variegated social purity movements: the perceived but by no means actually widespread liberation of women from monogamous, patriarchal, reproductive, and heteronormative constraints, for example in the form of “free love” practiced by women and men in socialist and intellectual circles; the rise in popularity of neo-Malthusian justifications for contraception; the change in legal statutes granting unmarried women property rights and protecting married women against marital rape; and calls for the protection of lower-class and working-class women and prostitutes, whose regular, even organized sexual exploitation by middle- and upper-class males was journalistically decried.<sup>32</sup> A biopolitics devoted to regulating the desires of middle- and upper-middle-class young men like Chris Baldry by inculcating self-discipline or “manly purity” through a language of chivalry in educational and religio-medical tracts was one dominant strain of these. The social discourses of chivalry of the 1880s and 1890s also affected aesthetic deployments of the female body, and specifically working-class female bodies, such as artist’s models’, dancers’, and performers’ bodies. As one art historian explains, “the association made by purists between vice and upper-class morals did much to discredit the nude in the domain of high art. . . . In the 1880s the artistic nude was de-

nounced, alongside *tableaux vivants* and billboards advertising dancers, actresses, and acrobats, as a demoralizing influence."<sup>33</sup> West's own politics and behavior, her affair with the married Wells, and the highly eroticized exchanges with him as "Jaguar" and "Panther" arguably place her on the other side of this biopolitics and aesthetics of male chivalry and its accompanying effacement of female desire and sexuality. West's essay "1900" also castigates the hypocrisy of the era in which middle-class men regularly engaged prostitutes while women of all classes were denied sex outside of marriage. She points out that most of the art and literature of the time was "restrained by formal manners and religious practice" while in fact "the pudency of the age was . . . absurd."<sup>34</sup>

When the aesthetic ideology of symbol betrays anxieties toward the female body, allegory indicates that Margaret and this past are fictions taken for history. The ironic portrayal of the episode in the temple conveys that Chris, like Henry James, is "always being misled by such lovely shells of the past . . . into the belief that the past which inhabited them was as lovely."<sup>35</sup> Only by misreading fiction as history and effect as cause can Chris believe that Monkey Island, a shell of loveliness containing another shell, the Greek temple, held a past as lovely. His scene of religious worship obfuscates its history. It was never employed for physical denial and spiritual purification, only for sensual indulgences, those "excesses" of the aristocratic male that social purity campaigns targeted by regulating the impulses of young men. That Margaret scandalizes Kitty and Jenny at the end of the novel by remarking on Chris's pronounced sexual drive when they were together at this earlier time gives the lie to this symbolic staging as well.

The novel suggests that the narrative of loss articulated through these aesthetic practices, and the drive to symbolize, results not only in failure but in the disappearance of women as witnesses to history. By literally and figuratively "exulting" as a mythic object and by metaphorically freezing, or "friezing," Margaret by lifting and making her "stand in a niche above the altar" like a *statue* of a goddess in this Greek temple, Chris evacuates her of her human, material form, her gendered and classed subjecthood, to render her transcendent and inanimate. The testimony concludes with Margaret's literal disappearance: "And as he spoke her warm body melted to nothingness in his arms. The columns that stood so hard and black against the quivering tide of moonlight and starlight tottered and dissolved" (41). Margaret

dissolves “as he speaks” twice—testifies to and through his proxy—because this speech turns her into a symbol. The testimony implies that women can be included in the master narrative of the Victorian era only in objectified, dematerialized, and fictional form.

*“Tintern Abbey” and Colonial Trauma*

If the intertextuality of Proust’s white hawthorn illuminates that the narrative of Victorian stasis that the war inspires relies on the occlusion of struggles over gender, sexuality, and class relations, the deployment of Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” illuminates how the stability of England’s past is constituted through the instabilities generated by imperialism and anti-imperialism, which the narrative of loss marginalizes. *The Return* enacts what Edward Said identifies as the European novel’s consolidation of imperialism. Analyzing its deployment of “Tintern Abbey” also enables a “contrapuntal reading”<sup>36</sup> demonstrating how the novel resists the imperialist logic it apparently underwrites. The text implies that colonial space is the supporting but excluded structure of the metropole, what Fredric Jameson contends remains unconscious in English modernism. Modernism will “always have . . . a privation that can never be restored . . . an outside . . . it constitutively lacks, and which can never be made up or made good.”<sup>37</sup> West’s novel departs from literary examples that fit neatly into Jameson and Said’s models, however. Rather than (dis)articulating a dependency of metropole on official colony, this work encodes a space with a more complex politico-economic connection to Britain: Mexico. Perhaps because Mexico did not have a formal colonial relationship to the British state, Britain’s imbrication in the trauma of land relations there is even less represented in British modernism than that of official colonies, histories already displaced. Situating Mexico at an oblique but pivotal point in the narrative construction of trauma indicates its limited visibility textually as well as historically. The novel’s reappropriation of “Tintern Abbey” attempts to bring this constitutive lack to consciousness, paradoxically by manifesting it as unconscious.

Like the staging of the white hawthorn, that of “Tintern Abbey” also disturbs the narrative of loss and illustrates an alternative vision of the col-

lective past. The novel guides readers toward the poem, not the abbey itself, by framing memory as Wordsworth does: as a work of art. The artwork in the novel is even oriented from the same vantage point as in the poem, which is “Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.” The painting *The Views Overlooking Tintern Abbey* appears twice. It hangs on the otherwise unadorned walls of Monkey Island Inn in 1901 and in Margaret’s terraced house in 1916. The recurring mention of a temporal interval also points to the poem, specifically the incipit, which details the time since the poet’s return to Tintern Abbey: “Five years have passed; five summers, with the length/Of five long winters!”<sup>38</sup> In the novel, five years have passed since Chris’s son Oliver’s death, but five years also separates every date in the novel, moments significant, and dated, because each figures a transformative event: 1901 is when Chris’s memory ends; in 1906, he marries Kitty; in 1911, his son dies; and in 1916, Chris suffers shell shock.

Although their publications are separated by over a century, both novel and poem are written in the midst or recent aftermath of an event of great interruptive force that called into question the future of Europe and the conventions, traditions, and philosophical premises of the past on which its politics and cultural formations were structured: the French Revolution and the First World War. One might expect their historical contexts to induce them to enact what LaCapra diagnoses as a compensatory movement caused by a traumatic event. Faced with radical uncertainty of the future and the crises in witnessing posed by such events, they might manifest a desire to escape the instabilities of the present by retreating into a past of their author’s invention, one that offers an illusory stability. But even if such authorial desires were operative in these texts’ composition, both works’ articulations of memory expose such a compensatory movement as ultimately insupportable.

Through their memories, both the poetic persona of “Tintern Abbey” and Chris Baldry revisit a space unmarked by modernity. The “I” of the poem returns to the pastoral scene on the banks of the Wye after five years, although he has often returned before, through the faculty of memory. The poem represents this return as an escape from the tumult of contemporary life. The poetic voice relates that “mid the din/Of towns and cities” (66, lines 25–26) and “when the fretful stir/Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,/Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—/How oft, in spirit,

have I turned to thee, / O Sylvan Wye!" (67, lines 52–56), in order to recall the "beauteous forms" of the Wye valley (66, line 23). Both the poetic subject and Chris seek to take refuge in the idyllic space-time of memory when modernity, or the "fever of the world," becomes too great.

The poem's orchestration of this past and the subject's relation to it reveal, however, that this space-time is more likely a belated invention, an instance of *Nachträglichkeit*, than reality. By bracketing the natural world from the subject's conscious experience, or cognition in the Kantian sense, Wordsworth intimates that this past self had an inauthentic relation to the place and time "Tintern Abbey" describes. Then, nature "To [him] was all in all" (68, line 75). Consequently, he could not experience nature as it was because he failed to employ the faculties of mind that come later, with maturity, when he has "learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth" (68, lines 88–90). Toward the end of these lines, one might hear the influence of Coleridge, and his debt to Schelling, when Wordsworth writes: "Therefore am I still / A lover of the meadows and the woods, / And mountains; and of all that we behold / From this green earth; of all the mighty world / Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create, / And what perceive" (68, lines 102–107). Earlier, nature was only what the subject could see absent the intervention of cognition, thought, or understanding. Later, he recognizes what he sees in nature is not the world as it is, without mediation, but the product of an interaction between mind and external phenomena. The senses, "eye and ear," do not passively receive images, "perceive," but also "half create." By making this distinction between childhood and adulthood, Wordsworth suggests this subject will always remain barred from the world of his youth because his experience of nature was not comprehended. It escaped the mind's cognitive faculties, was shaped by a "thoughtless" youth, and therefore is without foundation in reality.

Moreover, while this earlier time purportedly lacks the anxieties coterminous with modernity, the poem renders untenable this temporal opposition. Even in the past, nature functioned as refuge from reality. The poem relates that the feeling that prompts the subject to return to this pastoral scene in his memory also occurred in the past. Then, too, he sought to escape from "the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" (67, lines 38–40) cannot be lifted without the "gift" of a "blessed mood," by taking flight into nature. "Like

a roe/I bounded . . . /Wherever nature led: more like a man/Flying from something he dreads than one/Who sought the thing he loved" (67–68, lines 67–72). The subject confesses he has entered this pastoral scene not to search for what he loved but to flee from what he feared—the end of childhood, mortality, death, an anxiety without an object that can be posited: “dread.”

The novel intimates that for Chris, too, the natural world operated as an escape from reality even before 1916. In his youth, a retreat into nature was an escape into the imagination. Chris has always projected his desires onto natural objects, evading life’s mundanities, anxieties, and disappointments. Jenny remarks, “he had always shown great faith in the imminence of the improbable. He thought that the birch tree would really stir and shrink and quicken into an enchanted princess, that he really was a Red Indian . . . with a stronger motion of the imagination than the ordinary child’s make-believe” (7). Like Wordsworth’s poetic persona, Chris also has limited access to the natural landscapes of his past. That he treated the woods in his childhood as a supernatural place through imagination suggests that soon he would treat Monkey Island similarly. It will become the site of his fears transformed by fictions created to avoid the dread confronted as a young man, which eventually become sedimented as truths. Reading the novel’s and poem’s articulation of returns as homological, we can infer that Chris goes to Monkey Island *not* to seek out “what he loves” (Margaret), as he attests, but more “like a man flying from something he dreads.” The fears that drive him to a fictional world are similar to those from which the voice of “Tintern Abbey” fled, the end of childhood and transition to adulthood.

Unlike Wordsworth’s poem, however, West’s novel ties this transition directly to economic and political vicissitudes; intertextuality stages capitalism and imperialism as traumas, interrupting the plot’s substitutive designations of trauma. Adulthood means becoming an English patriarch, “gentleman,” and capitalist, the inheritor of an overseas mining firm. This is a transition to which Chris cannot bear witness, an impasse—a trauma. The day he leaves to embark on this new life is where his memory abruptly ends. Attempting to learn why she is “barred out” (38) of the last day in Chris’s memory, Jenny thinks back to a spring “fifteen years ago . . . Chris had lingered with Uncle Ambrose in his Thameside rectory as he had never lingered before, and old Mr. Baldry was filling the house with a sense of hot, apoplectic misery” (52).

Eventually Mr. Baldry does send for Chris, who has retreated from reality to Monkey Island. Jenny announces, "I had got the key at last":

That night he talked til late with his father and in the morning he had started for Mexico, to keep the mines going through the revolution, to keep the firm's head above water and Baldry Court sleek and hospitable, to keep everything bright and splendid save only his youth, which after that was dulled by care.

(52–53)

Through its homologies with "Tintern Abbey," the novel opens onto a politicohistorical situation outside the plot and diegetic space of England. Becoming the English gentleman means exploiting the resources of a comprador state and functioning as stopgap to the effects of a revolution against a dictatorship.<sup>39</sup>

Chris participates in the counterrevolutionary movement, expanding English wealth by exploiting the resources of foreign soil while helping render its people landless and indigent. The novel makes the causal logic clear while undermining the image of the healthy English soldier who heads into battle in the European War. This quasi-imperialism has already damaged Chris Baldry *before* the war. British firms benefited from Porfirio Diaz's dictatorship in the latter half of the nineteenth century and had much to lose in a revolution that would overthrow him. By giving enormous land concessions to foreign speculators who greatly increased gold and silver production in Mexico, Diaz bankrupted a majority of rural farmers by 1910. The Mining Law of 1884 was particularly significant, producing long-term effects, such as the growth of the foreign-owned oil industry and the removal of lands from common ownership by Mexicans. As Peter Calvert writes,

Common rights in the subsoil, including vital water supplies, were replaced in the Mining Law of 1884 by the concept of private ownership of irreplaceable minerals being vested in the ownership of the surface. In the poorest parts of the country, rich foreign colonies suddenly appeared, offering high wages which might cease at any time when the deposits ran out.<sup>40</sup>

British investment was concentrated not only in mining but in industry and railways, which also contributed to the traumatic effects of land enclosures in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century. Land held by village communities in common ownership since precolonial times was opened by the

government to enclosure by plantation owners and foreign corporations, and as a result “more than a quarter of the land surface of Mexico passed into the hands of not more than 834 men. . . . Of all these factors in the growth of pre-revolutionary discontent, it was agrarian revolt against enclosures that was to have the most significance for the internal history of Mexico.”<sup>41</sup>

By suggesting this historicopolitical situation is what Chris flees, what drives him to an invented world and to inventing this world, the novel indicates that England’s economic dependence on foreign soil and labor generates a phantasmatic pastoral nation-state: Monkey Island, a figure for England itself. The textual site mirrors the historical site. Undergirding both idyllic places are traumas. Although the Mexican conflict induces Chris to escape the “misery” of the law of the father as (neo)imperialist by retreating to Monkey Island, this “retreat” is actually a running toward “what he dreads”—the trauma of imperialism appears excessively displaced across the island. We see this through associations that repeatedly recall the Mexican mines, the whiteness of silver and references to gold and copper: Margaret, “a girl in white who lifted a white face or drooped a dull gold head” (38), a “white figure” (38) whose “white dress shone like silver” (39), her hair “white as silver or yellow as gold” (41); the poplars’ “silver spires” (35); the clouds, lumps of “white light” (38); chestnut candles, “no longer proud flowers, but just wet white lights” (37); Mr. Allington’s boots, “white ducks” and his “copper-coloured hair” (37); the inn, a “low white house” (35); the “silver breadth” of the river (39); and the high trees “whose heads were bronze . . . whose flanks were hidden by a hedge of copper-beech” (39). And of course, the white hawthorn.<sup>42</sup> Monkey Island is the chronotope of the Victorian era as the age of a displaced colonial trauma.

By figuring Monkey Island as this chronotope, the novel sends a warning. Staged as a missed encounter with history, a “key” event that cannot be recalled, imperialism’s effects are traumas in danger of succumbing to collective amnesia in twentieth-century wartime and postwar narratives of modernity as loss. The testimony relates that in the midst of the contemporaneous international crisis and reactionary nationalist retrenchment, England is in danger of forgetting past historical moments in which the suppression of others are enacted in the consolidation and perpetuation of British empire and wealth, which relied on the appropriation and exploitation of natural resources and labor power by the 1890s in Africa, India, the Caribbean, and



South America. By generating formal parallels with "Tintern Abbey," the novel recalls that colonialism and capitalism function as supporting structures of England's prewar peace and stability. Allegory and intertextuality reveal the violent underpinnings of "Pax Britannica."

*Reading Beyond the Cure*

Whether colonial complicity is the key to Chris's amnesia remains the site of narrative contestation, however. This uncertainty has enabled readers to locate the cause of trauma in war and shell shock, or outside of history and representation, or where the plot locates it by providing a cure to amnesia: the death of Chris's son. When Margaret returns memory to Chris by reminding him of Oliver's death, the novel contradicts the testimony's designation of colonial complicity as the key to amnesia. But by correlating the departure to Mexico with the end of Chris's memory, the final day in his recollection, the text produces a narrative manipulation of "consecution" into "consequence."<sup>43</sup> The departure to Mexico offers an explanatory power other diagnoses lack. Yet Margaret's is the last word on the matter because it resolves the organizing conflict, even though the doctor cannot explain why recalling the son's death should cure amnesia: "I don't know why [it matters so much]. But it does" (82), he tells Kitty. The cure suggests that the loss of the patronym's power, survival through the male heir, is what Chris mourns and is the trauma perpetuating his amnesia. By relating that Kitty cannot have another child, the novel supports this interpretation.

The testimony's interrogation of the narrative of loss seems subsumed by the cure's closure. The working-class woman and the upper-middle-class man become sutured not through an illusory white hawthorn that reveals political, economic, and social inequities and discontinuities concealed by a nostalgic image of Victorian stability but through their failure to secure through social and biological reproduction what is now imputed as England's former stability. Both Chris and Margaret have sons who die, and this represents the fragmentation of life in the Edwardian age, the disruption of national continuity and genealogical futurity. "It's as if . . . they each had half a life" (77), Margaret muses. If, as Freud contends, the melancholic may know who has been lost but not what he himself has lost thereby, Chris's

cure relates that what is lost is the possibility of reproducing the name of the father and ensuring the nation's future. This resolution makes Margaret's role primarily reproductive, maternal (just as Jenny does throughout the novel). Although Margaret fails to secure the patronym and the nation's future through her own child, who dies, by curing Chris she enables the soldier to return and secure that future through war. The novel of course indicates that the cure is poison because it returns Chris to the traumas of the front; however, even if the cure ironically comments on the reality to which the soldier is made to return, by displacing colonial trauma, the closure it provides apparently supports Jameson's hypothesis that life in the colonies cannot be included consciously in the modernist novel and must remain part of the textual unconscious.

Yet the novel departs from this paradigm of modernism's relation to imperialism through its highlighting of the unverifiable and literary structure of testimony. Testimony persistently asks readers to bear witness to the textual unconscious, to address the incompatible staging of trauma the novel cannot resolve within itself. Although the exposure of colonial complicity and uneven class and gender arrangements shaping the nostalgic narrative of loss is jettisoned by the plotting of cure, testimony's intertextuality interrupts narrative closure by directing readers' attention to the lacks that enable that closure. By troubling the historical narrative of the fall into a fragmented Edwardian age and war-torn modernity, testimony does not merely invite but indeed requests that readers imagine alternative versions of England's past scripted by those who have been expelled from the Garden but cannot be banished from history.

West's other work that illustrates how war induces amnesia toward Britain's past is *The Meaning of Treason*. The differences between the novel and the report's negotiation of colonial trauma demonstrate the effects of changes that occur between their publications. The trial reports are written after the process of imperial contraction has greatly accelerated and after the conditions of warfare have dramatically shifted from a soldier's battle fought at the front to a "People's War" that brings death home in unprecedented ways. Like *The Return of the Soldier*, *The Meaning of Treason* also relates how dominant narratives obscure histories of violence, but the World War II text conveys a stronger desire to secure the nation than the World War I novel. It therefore mobilizes those narratives rather than calling attention

to their coercive effects, which, in turn, interrupt its articulations of law and justice.

### *Blackout as Juridical Unconscious*

*The Meaning of Treason* earned West the title of “The World’s Number One Woman Writer,” bestowed by the magazine *Time*. West began reporting on trials in 1945, a labor for which she professed little love but continued to perform. Over the next decade she would cover the Nuremberg trials, murder trials in Britain and the United States, and treason trials, which were collected in *The Meaning of Treason*, later developed and revised as *The New Meaning of Treason*. “The Revolutionary,” the first part of *The Meaning of Treason*, initially published in the *New Yorker* in 1945, focuses largely on the trials of William Joyce. Joyce, or Lord Haw Haw, as he became known, traveled on a British passport to Germany, where he broadcast Nazi propaganda into England over the radio. The great interest the Joyce trials held for legal and lay communities alike was due to the technical question at their center. Joyce’s English mother and Irish father traveled from Ireland to the United States and were naturalized before Joyce was born. The family returned to Ireland and eventually settled in England; Joyce learns during the trials he is an American citizen by birth. If Joyce is not legally a British subject, could he be guilty of committing treason against the British state? How will the court define treason in this case? Over the course of three trials, the court decides that because Joyce lived under the King’s protection for thirty years and traveled on a British passport, he owed allegiance to the state. By becoming naturalized as a German citizen during the war, he commits high treason for which he is served the death penalty. By crafting the Joyce trials into something more and other than a documentary report, West attempts to dress the wounds England suffers as a result of World War II and imperial contraction. She shapes these legal events into a narrative of development and rehabilitation of a colonial subject who tries and fails to become an English citizen.

Recently, critics have sought to bridge the apparently oppositional forces of antifascism and anticommunism, nationalism and anti-imperialism at work in West’s interwar, wartime, and later writings.<sup>44</sup> Not sufficiently ex-

amined, however, is how British imperialism particularly is implicated in the network in which her criticism of fascism and communism, and her support of national rather than transnational alliances, cross. West's political views shifted during the interwar period. West became a vocal antifascist but also an emphatic nationalist and intense critic of communism over the next decades, which separated her further from a modernist grouping to which she had never really belonged and also helped marginalize her postwar writing for decades. Reconsiderations of her work, however, have led critics to assert that West's writings that emerge on the cusp of the postcolonial era are prescient of postcolonial critiques and that they critique as well the rise of an English bureaucratic state that betrays the promises of the nation. Marina MacKay argues that in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West's most celebrated work of the interwar/wartime period, the author motivates nationalist ideals toward a "tentative post-colonial sensibility" that demonstrates, as West puts it in the travelogue, that "one empire is very like another." MacKay contends that West does not dwell on British imperialism because by the end of the 1930s it is no longer an issue; "she writes as if the empire were already thing of the past."<sup>45</sup> But *The Meaning of Treason*, published six years after the travelogue, shows that the affective force of empire has not yet settled into the past, that it is reactivated by war and the ramifications of imperial decline. The effects of these pressures on the report's form question Patricia E. Chu's compelling argument that West presents Joyce's story as an encapsulation of "the difficulty of defining the British subject . . . as national definitions were fitted to the needs of the bureaucratic welfare state" and that she lays bare the divide between national affect as imaginative and flexible and "a state that imposes 'durable' identities amenable to state administration."<sup>46</sup>

The report does expose a breach between nation and state and attests to the difficulty of defining the British subject. I contend, however, that rather than sympathetically portraying Joyce's desire to become English and criticizing the bureaucratic state for denying his national aspirations, as Chu argues, West condemns the state for potentially enabling Joyce to pose as English. Instead of countering the state's imposition of durable identities with a flexible model of national belonging, West deploys narratives that serve imperial and ethnonationalist aims to correct for what she perceives as the state's failure to secure national identity and community. She also at-

tempts to correct for the state's increasing separation from the missions of an organic nation by reestablishing English law as the means for carrying out those missions. These textual strategies, I maintain, are reactions to complicated historical traumas of war and imperial retrenchment.

While trauma in West's reports on the Nuremburg trials has been examined, overlooked is how trauma deforms the treason trial reports.<sup>47</sup> In "The Revolutionary," trauma is translated into a problem of restricted vision, or "blackout." Blackout refers to material, epistemological, and political phenomena that together crystallize England's interrelated struggles with fascism and its colonies during World War II. On the most basic level, the report responds to the blackout of information caused by the wartime economy. In *The New Meaning of Treason*, West explains the origin of the first version: "I was encouraged to make a book about [Joyce, John Amery, and other World War II traitors] by an eminent lawyer who was concerned because the shortage of newsprint due to the war meant that these trials were either not reported, or were reported too briefly for the public to gain any real information regarding a significant tendency."<sup>48</sup> *The Meaning of Treason* centers on that significant tendency, a "force" that returns and refuses to settle into the past. "When I began my book I was under the impression that I was dealing with a spent force only interesting as part of the past," West writes, "but when I was halfway through it Alan Nunn May followed William Joyce into the dock of the Old Bailey, and I became aware that the force still lived, and that its significance was even more grave than had been supposed."<sup>49</sup> The report aims to fill in the gaps produced through the blackout of information by making the compulsive repetition of treason comprehensible, but struggles with other forms of blackout hamper its efforts.

Blackout structured life and literature during the war in at least three other ways. It was a literal phenomenon that harkened the arrival of bombings; it was an effect of propaganda, of which Joyce was a notorious wartime practitioner; and, finally, as Patrick Deer has shown, it was experienced as curtailed surveillance of geopolitical boundaries, a lack of *oversight* of a decentralized empire whose "fronts were everywhere," which made the English isle, and the British empire, vulnerable to enemy forces.<sup>50</sup> The trial report mentions the first sense of blackout only once and registers the after-effects of the other two through narrative strategies that (dis)avow England's

limited sight and foresight during the war. These strategies react to the failure to oversee the empire's many fronts, but especially those within the English nation, whose porous boundaries, its airwaves, make it vulnerable to the invisible migrant William Joyce.

The opening pages of *The Meaning of Treason* relate that England confronts blackout in the form of Joyce's voice. According to the court, Joyce commits a crime against the British state, but according to West, he commits a crime against the English nation as a filial and cultural formation. Joyce's crime is a scandal to Englishness itself, "for throughout history treason has always been the crime most abhorred by the English, as parricide has been . . . by the French."<sup>51</sup> Joyce "sinned that sin which is the dark travesty of legitimate hatred because it is felt for kindred, just as incest is the dark travesty of legitimate love" (3). Likened to a violation not of just any law but the law on which law and culture is founded and exogamy secured, Joyce's crime threatens a regression to nature and lawlessness that undoes "England-as-family," a formulation West expressed in her letters.<sup>52</sup> Joyce incestuously penetrates the English body politic; his voice "climbed into the ears of frightened people" (28). The first sentence names the desire that drives the report, to *see* what has never been seen before and could not be "foreseen."

Everybody in London wanted to see William Joyce when he was brought into trial as a radio traitor, for he was something new in the history of the world. Never before have people known the voice of one they had never seen as well as if he had been a husband or brother or close friend; and if they had foreseen such a miracle they would not have imagined that the familiar unknown would speak to them only to prophesy their death and ruin.

(3)

The disembodied voice questions limits between the known and unknown, proximate and strange. A "dark travesty" (3) who evades surveillance and makes England the object of surveillance, Joyce is literally part of the family—a "familiar unknown" (3)—but also a *rupture*. Radio technology compounds blackout by compromising borders that would secure national community and makes Joyce into "something new in the history of the world," a "miracle," a "hideous novelty" (3).<sup>53</sup>

To confront these threats, "The Revolutionary" tries to establish a stable legal foundation by which to judge Joyce that would simultaneously differ-

entiate the English state from (post)revolutionary, fascist, and anticolonial formations. In its elaboration of English law generally and the treason trials specifically, however, the report illuminates what Shoshana Felman calls the juridical unconscious. Felman argues that “despite its conscious frames and rational foundations, the law has quite conspicuously and remarkably its own structural (professional) unconscious.”<sup>54</sup> Trials translate trauma into “legal-conscious terminology” to reduce its disruptive force, but trauma can recapture trials, revealing the law’s unconscious. “The Revolutionary” discloses the problematic of the juridical unconscious as the ineluctable return of blackout. Law must contend not only with the unforeseeable and violent Joyce but must also wrestle with its own partial vision, even its own violence—a fact the text continually suppresses after regularly bringing it to light.

Joyce’s exposure of the state’s instability leads West to safeguard the *nation* from the masquerading “Irish revolutionary” by staging England as an impermeable cultural formation. The ethnographic strategies she uses to bolster England and Englishness illustrate the importance of examining how events often disaggregated in literary study—World War II and imperial decline—are in fact imbricated.<sup>55</sup> During the era of imperial retrenchment, West’s contemporaries, such as Woolf, Eliot, and Forster, repurposed ethnographic discourses to restore national integrity in response to the “the over and under-determined nature of Englishness”<sup>56</sup> while rejecting the ideologies of race and ethnicity that characterized Nazi Germany. The over- and undetermined nature of Englishness to which West’s report reacts, however, is as much the result of wartime treason by a subject who confused the distinction between Nazis and British citizens as it is imperial retrenchment. Consequently, although West employs ethnographic discourses to consolidate Englishness, she does not repurpose them to avoid ethnic absolutism but to insist on absolutes. She responds to the People’s War by writing against the legal category of the traitor as intimate enemy, a man of and against the people. The report’s ethnographic eye materializes the ephemeral and spectral by making Joyce’s body visible and portraying his crime as a violent rupture orchestrated by a failed Englishman only English law can cure. But although the report strives over and again to fortify and protect both state and nation from blackout and violence, the juridical unconscious relentlessly returns and thwarts its efforts.

*Law, Vision, and Violence*

In a highly influential essay, the legal scholar Robert Cover writes, “Neither legal interpretation nor the violence it occasions may be properly understood apart from one another.”<sup>57</sup> Cover explains that legal decisions on violence are authorized by and practice violence. “A judge articulates her understanding of a text, and as a result, somebody loses his freedom, his property, his children, even his life. Interpretations in law also constitute justifications for violence which has already occurred or which is about to occur.”<sup>58</sup> Christopher Menke expands Cover’s argument but also qualifies it, arguing that “every attempt at defining the relationship between law and violence must start with two tensely related, if not blatantly contradictory,” premises:

On the one hand there are the *discourses of the legitimation* of law, according to which legal verdicts are justified verdicts and thus, no matter how harsh they may be for those sentenced, they are not violent. For violence—in the relevant sense of the term—is not the same as restriction or even violation. Violence is a restraint or violation imposed by somebody on somebody against their will. But if the legal verdict is justified, it is valid also for the person sentenced, and insofar as it is not against her will, it is not violence. On the other hand, there are the *discourses of the critique* of law: legal verdicts are enforced by exerting or threatening violence. There is no law—and this holds also for post-sovereign law that has given up on the cruel celebrations of punishment and torture—that does without violence. Even the justification of the legal verdict does not change this: neither the legitimation by (just) purposes nor by (conventional or fair) procedures can free law from its violence.<sup>59</sup>

West’s report runs together discourses of legitimation and critique of law. By highlighting law’s belatedness and limited vision, “The Revolutionary” discloses that violence underpins the British state and empire as well as revolutionary regimes, entities she assiduously seeks to differentiate.

The report argues that partial sight accompanies and even enables the emergence and conservation of social and political formations, from the British state to African tribes to nomadic groups across Asia. As a foundational act of ordering and constituting the *socius*, law is both universal and universally lacking a fully rationalized foundation. No society can comprehend and envision the conditions of its emergence.



The law is a force which has never yet been finally analyzed. To make laws is a human instinct that arises as soon as food and shelter have been ensured, among all peoples, everywhere. There have been yellow people who have flashed on horseback across continents, apparently too mobile to form customs, apparently preoccupied with slaughter and destruction; there have been black people who have squatted on their thin haunches unchangeably through the centuries, their customs drooling to superstition round them. These have been thought by men of other kinds to be without law, but it was an error. Both societies had reached a general agreement as to how to order their lives, and ordained penalties against its violation. But neither they nor any other society could define exactly what they were doing when they were making that agreement and ordaining those penalties.

(62)

West employs Eurocentric axiomatics of race to contest Eurocentric axiomatics of race that claim that non-European societies lack law, while comparing the English nation-state with those formations. She then inverts the gesture that typically attends such imperialist formulations: Rather than cast these societies as enlightened because they found community through legislation as Europe does, she subjects Europe to darkness. European law mirrors other laws not because they are grounded in reason or natural justice—how English common law has always defined itself—but because all law is blind and lacks a firm foundation. No “society could define exactly what they were doing when they were making that agreement and ordaining those penalties.”

Using metaphors that assert affinities between the seemingly disparate domains of law and art in “The Revolutionary” (affinities her other reports also assert),<sup>60</sup> West relates that the limited vision that accompanies the law that institutes the *socius* also accompanies the laws that conserve it, and she suggests that Joyce’s case lays bare the imperative built into all law. The relationship between art and law “The Revolutionary” proposes complicates paradigms in critical legal and literature and law studies, which often treat art as the repressed of law that returns to interrupt it from the outside. Dismissing the intricate legal arguments about the nature of allegiance as “filigree work” (27), describing the trials as “an Irish drama” (6), “tragedy” (73), “cinema or concert” (29), and “three performances of the same piano concerto by the same conductor and the same soloist but by three separate

orchestras" (43–44), West argues that legal and artistic interpretation alike endlessly confront an "inevitable time-lag" (63):

The law, like art, is always vainly racing to catch up with experience. Life is always unpredictable. At every turn of history it presents the citizen with new obligations, and renders dangerous the exercise of his liberty in some sphere by suddenly rendering that exercise an affront to the liberty of others. It is the task of judges and legislators to alter the law that it may cope with these capers of time . . . they run as fast as the hands of the clock, reaching out to the present with one hand, that they may knot it to the past which they carry in their other hand. There are always lapses in time when the present and the past are not joined, and it is these which Englishmen such as wished Joyce to live loved to exploit.

(63–64)

Art and law labor to make historical time continuous while remaining always provisional. Structured by limited vision and belatedness, racing "vainly" against the march of time, both demand persistent self-alteration. Art, including literature, thus does not expose law's bad conscience from the outside, therefore; rather, as Mark Sanders explains in his study of law and literature, "the self-othering that can be termed 'literary' (allegory, irony, for instance) does take place *within* the operations of the law, . . . is not separate from it."<sup>61</sup> Joyce's case seems exceptional but is actually exemplary. Both unique and general, it demands that law forge a passage across the interval between past and present by repeating while "altering" precedent.

This elucidation of the limited vision and internal irony of law creates an irreducible commonality between things West wants to keep separate: the English state and revolutionary and fascist regimes. For it is the limited sight and foresight of the French and Russian revolutions that led to their ironic interruptions. "The scaffolds of Paris took, in the end, all those that set them up; and of the actual engineers of the Russian Revolution, all but a handful were hoist by their own petard" (114). Joyce's trials threaten that English distribution of justice might come to resemble Nazi violence: "England was anxious to see Joyce suffer the just penalties of the law, but it was very anxious, too, that no penalty should be inflicted that was not just." To this end "people were asking themselves whether the trial was perfectly fair and whether we were being careful to be loyal to our tradition of impartial

justice and to escape the Nazi contamination of our troubled times” (48). The report has shown, however, that it is not only these “troubled times” that raise the possibility of “contamination” of just by unjust dispensations of power. The potential for this contamination is ever present given the abyssal, blind, and repetitious structure of law at the root of all social and political formations. By disclosing this, “The Revolutionary” raises a question West would rather not: how does one distinguish between “the force of law of a legitimate power and the supposedly originary violence that must have established this authority and that could not itself have been authorized by any anterior legitimacy, so that, in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal—or, as others would quickly say, neither just nor unjust”?<sup>62</sup>

West’s descriptions of the origins of the state and law’s potential for contamination resonates with Jacques Derrida’s reading of the “contamination”<sup>63</sup> of state and revolutionary violence in his analysis of Walter Benjamin’s *Critique of Violence* (*Kritik der Gewalt*). Derrida explores how violence not only attends revolutions but founds and preserves the polis and law, or *droit*. Pressing on the double meaning of the German term *Gewalt*—both “violence” and “sanctioned authority”—Derrida theorizes that the force or “violence” that founds a state and law erupts in an interval between past and future. States analeptically interpret this force of law as legitimate, but it is neither legitimate nor illegitimate in essence because this positional act generates the conditions for determining (il)legitimacy. Revolution projects a new order, proleptically legitimating its own destructive force, but because the order it seeks to institute does not yet exist, this force, too, is neither essentially legitimate nor illegitimate. Therefore, “the foundation of all states occurs in a situation that we can thus call revolutionary.”<sup>64</sup> Yet the state fears revolutionary situations that threaten it through “founding violence, that is, violence able to justify, to legitimate (*begründen*, to found, p. 283), or to transform the relations of law (*Rechtsverhältniss*), and so to present itself as having a right to law” [*un droit au droit*].<sup>65</sup> The foundations of authority are hence “mystical” and prohibit all nonviolent or neutral interpretation and justification. Benjamin wants to maintain a distinction between founding violence and conserving violence, violence that “ensures the permanence and enforceability of law,” but this distinction cannot hold, Derrida argues. On the one hand, every positional act of ordering encodes within it the call to conserve. Its origin is divided, fissured by the promise of repetition and

conservation. On the other hand, the force that conserves and enforces law always refoinds it, because “the decision of a judge . . . must not only follow a rule of law or a general law, but must also assume it, approve it, confirm its value, by a reinstating act of interpretation, as if ultimately nothing previously existed of the law, as if the judge himself invented the law in every case.”<sup>66</sup> Derrida concludes that a “différentielle contamination”<sup>67</sup> relates conserving and instituting violence.

Had West pursued the implications of her analysis of law, she might have glimpsed in the foundation and conservation of the English state the force she condemns, which is embodied in the French, the Russian, and what she calls the “Nazi Revolution” (114). Her description of the act instituting the social order implies that no interpretive metalanguage can rigorously justify either revolutionary violence or state authority because no society “could define exactly what they were doing when they were making that agreement and ordaining those penalties” (62) that constitute it and its law. She also rejects the distinction between founding violence and the laws that conserve the state, to which Benjamin imputes permanence, by proposing that historical change demands that law suspend, repeat, and alter itself. Because belatedness and necessary lack of foresight must underlie founding as well as conserving violence, states, like revolutions, cannot rigorously legitimate their orders through retrospective and projective justifications. According to her own analysis, therefore, England is not fundamentally different from postrevolutionary states such as France, whose “increases of liberty, equality, and fraternity [were] no greater than were won by other nations untouched by revolution” (114).

The Joyce case is disturbing because it continually illuminates uncanny resemblances. For example, in revealing the shifting ground and limited vision of English law, the case of this “familiar unknown” defamiliarizes the familiar, raising to the surface the revolutionary tendencies of a people “untouched by revolution.” West derides the “vast number of English people” who cheer men like Joyce and Horatio Bottomley for exploiting the legal time lag, condemning their “winking admiration for the rogues” who “travel through life with a criminal purpose” yet maintain legal innocence (64). Versions of what Benjamin calls the “great criminal,”<sup>68</sup> they expose how the legal system falters. The mass pleasure at their “rogue” acts derives from these acts’ exposure of law’s belatedness and blindness. Both men “exploit

[an] unforeseen situation” and in doing so “opened to all of them [the English people] the prospect that one day they might find some such opportunity of gain easier than honest and unpunishable” (64).

West employs tenets of natural law to cover over the instabilities Joyce’s case elucidates and to distinguish English law from revolutionary force. Countering her insight that the founding and conserving of the state is never entirely rational and that all law is subject to an “inevitable time-lag,” West writes, “Pagan and Christian alike realized that the law should be at once the recognition of an eternal truth and the solution by a community of one of its temporal problems, for both conceived that the divine will was mirrored in nature, which man could study by the use of his reason” (62–63). English law has its source in “eternal truth,” reason, and divine will, which are also “written into nature” and secular life in the form of “service of humanity, the rights of the state, the sovereignty of intelligence or moral sense” (63). Revolution assaults the order that supposedly endures even among those states not necessarily erected upon the pillars of reason, truth, and natural justice that support England. The revolutionary “wants to overthrow the existing order which exists and which may be the only order capable of existing. But he risks the annihilation of all order only because he believes he can evade that disaster and can substitute for an existing order another which he believes to be superior” (113). Repeating the root “exist” to the point of absurdity desperately (and paradoxically) endeavors to bestow duration and permanence upon the state, which the report has already argued relies instead upon instantaneity for its origin and persistent interruption and repetition for its conservation.

The other ways the report denies the abyssal foundation of English authority it exposes indicate that West responds to blackout and war’s threats not only to the endurance but also the legitimacy of Britain’s rule over a large swath of the world. West delegitimizes colonies’ increasingly strident and powerful claims to self-rule by identifying anticolonial agitation with revolution rather than autonomy or nation building and by defining post-revolutionary states—and, by extension, future post-colonial states—as the product of unconscious, compulsive repetitions of violence. She maintains that English law repeatedly but consciously alters itself and, in doing so, foment historical change, whereas states “touched by” revolution lack rational necessity and testify to a death drive in European history:

Perhaps the revolutionary is not really treating order as an end in itself but is using it as the means to an end. Perhaps he is really preoccupied with the establishment of a balance of forces within the sphere of his being: that balance which alone can restore nothingness to a world so obstinately created, so irretrievably stuffed with things. . . . In revolution there is a vast explosion of the creative powers, and nothing is created; nothing is even altered. So the appetite for death that is in us all is immensely gratified.

(113)

Revolution in France and Russia initiates the blind, compulsive reenactment of the political violence/legitimate authority of a previous order, for “when the dust settled, France was ruled by a self-crowned emperor who wielded power more absolute than any French king had ever been given by the priests that crowned him,” and Russia “slowly reconstituted the Tsardom it destroyed, identical in spirit, and reinforced in matter” (113–114). Revolutions not only repeat the orders they overthrow, but each other. Among the French, Russian, and “Nazi revolutions” the main difference is “the expenditure of blood” (114). Fearing “violence able to justify, legitimate . . . or to present itself as having a right to law,”<sup>69</sup> West suggests that anticolonial insurgency is the most recent manifestation of this death drive. Although she grants “the severance of England and Ireland as an historical necessity” and concedes that the counterinsurgency was of such violence that “even those who thought that England should not have relinquished Ireland were ashamed at this reminder of the impudicity of the conqueror’s sword”(17), she portrays Irish anticolonialism as criminal, not entirely conscious, or even sane, thus without right to law: “the furtive slouching of a peasantry distracted with poverty and revolutionary fever” (16).

As the oscillating and contradictory depictions of English law and authority convey, however, the report is divided on the subject of imperial legitimacy. A writer ambivalent toward her own Irish ancestry,<sup>70</sup> West delivers her strongest and most disruptive claims about the violence inhabiting English authority when she diagnoses the root cause of Joyce’s treason: British imperialism. West translates Joyce’s trauma into the narrative of the alienated colonized intellectual. Like so many other historical cases, decolonization of the Irish state does not amount to decolonization of the heart and mind. Colonization persists as a wound well after Ireland gains home rule and Joyce commits his crimes against Britain. Raised as a loyalist by his father while Ireland was under British rule, both men, father and son,

turned against “their own kind and worked with the alien oppressor” and were “passionately sincere” (16) in this. As a teenager Joyce fought with the counterinsurgency Black and Tans, professing not mere loyalty to but even love for England, and “it was this love, slanting across time, which made him a Fascist” (18). England betrayed Joyce by granting Ireland independence, and “this meant an actual, material betrayal. The family had to leave Ireland. . . . William Joyce found himself exiled from his real motherland, Ireland, which his blood must have loved, and confined in England, for love of which he had betrayed Ireland, and which showed no gratitude for that sacrifice” (18–19). As in the cases of the Russian and French revolutionaries, so too in the case of the Nazi revolutionary Joyce does the law fail to alter itself while repeating the violence of the (colonial) past; “inexorably the law that to him hath it shall be given would have come into operation again” (112). This law determines his “completely unnecessary death” at the hands of the British state, which results from the desire to identify with the colonizer, “his own and his father’s lifelong determination to lie about their nationality” (28), to claim British citizenship. But it also results from the love of Ireland programmed into his blood, which makes Joyce hate the colonizer. West elucidates that the divided self created by colonialism causes his treason when she considers Joyce’s reaction to the traitor John Amery, another propagandist during the war who was an English citizen by birth:

When Amery was tried for high treason there were eight counts against him in the indictment. In Joyce’s indictment against Amery there were four. First, Amery was an Englishman, and the conflict between England and Ireland had never quite resolved itself in Joyce’s mind. He adored the English, he had fought for them as a boy, or had at least performed some services which he thought of as fighting for them, and he genuinely believed that as a Fascist he was laboring to confer benefits on England. All the same it was to England that he had come as a boy and had been sniggered at as a queer little bog-trotter with a brogue, it was in England that he had been denied the power and position which he felt to be his right by virtue of his intellect; and ancient hatreds, however much they be adulterated, often return under stress to their first purity. When William Joyce cursed the raiders who were bombing Berlin, he cursed them as an Irishman cursing the English.

(139)

The return of the repressed “ancient hatreds” ultimately leads to the event that launches the trial report, the penetration of the English people. Like a boomerang, the force that returns to generate World War II trauma, there-

fore, is British imperialism, the source of crimes by the revolutionary—"the sublime example of this extreme type" (115).

By inserting Joyce's case into a narrative of imperial history, West depicts treason's assaults on English national integrity as the manifestation of Britain's death drive, imperialism's boomerang effect. Joyce's crime was not a rupture, this argument states, but prepared for by the long history of British control over social, political, and economic forces. In making this argument, West mobilizes narrative critically, illustrating the importance of story making not for clinical healing of individual trauma but for a postcolonial politics of historical memory. Trauma studies has long focused on how traumatic events resist discourse, and narrative in particular, while debating the politics of representing the unrepresentable. While some, perhaps most famously Theodor Adorno, argue that certain aesthetic modes cannot do justice to the traumatic event in its alterity because they give meaning to what evades meaning, make it consumable, and too neatly clear up the past,<sup>71</sup> others have emphasized the importance of narrativizing what denies sequential logic and sequencing and thus of breaking protocols of veridicality.<sup>72</sup> West breaks documentary protocol when she fabulates a narrative of trauma induced by imperialism—Joyce never testified that he suffered the wounds of the colonized intellectual and that this is what drove him to deliver Nazi propaganda during the war. This constructed psychobiography offers a counternarrative of British history that never appears in the court. Though it is not strictly "correct" or historically verifiable, it puts the state on trial.

But once the juridical unconscious returns in the form of West's statement that British imperialism developed the revolutionary whose voice makes it impossible to envision nation and empire as integrated wholes, it is buried again. Not only does West abandon the narrative of colonial trauma she invents; she also revives another narrative in order to refuse Joyce entry into it. Unable to secure the state from the boomerang effects of imperialism and the blindness of English law, both of which facilitate Joyce's crimes, she attempts to secure the nation by employing a narrative whose aim is to produce the citizen-subject while projecting the nation as the "highest and most natural form of human sociality"—that of *Bildung*.



*Failed Bildung: Mimicry, Physiognomy, and Resistance*

Whereas *The Return of the Soldier* challenged the continuity of the narrative of loss in World War I to reveal the imperial ideology of traumatic rupture, *The Meaning of Treason* institutes a narrative defined by continuity and harnessed by imperial ideology to stage as rupture the colonial subject's treason during World War II. The revolutionary's story is that of failed *Bildung*. As Joseph Slaughter explains, the *Bildung* narrative is both antirevolutionary and reformist, and, by formally emphasizing the values of continuity and development, has been used to justify colonialism as civilizing mission.<sup>73</sup> The narrative through which man is turned into "man," *Bildung*'s "historical social work was to patriate the once-politically marginal bourgeois subject as national citizen." In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "the *Bildungsroman*'s progress narrative represents a German cultural nationalist counternarrative to the violent eruptions of the modern French nation-state,"<sup>74</sup> and to achieve its ends, the narrative uses a grammar of "amplification and expansion rather than . . . substitution."<sup>75</sup> This form is reactivated in cultural practices and throughout literary history and often in response to disturbances of the stability of the nation-state. "The Revolutionary" deploys the *Bildung* narrative to show how Joyce resists it, but in doing so, it disrupts its own formal continuity, its staging of amplification and expansion. The report shifts from fleshing out a story behind Joyce's acts to foreclosing it. This shift transforms Joyce into a scarred mimic who in turn scars the report's coherence.

Whenever "The Revolutionary" probes the origins of Joyce's treason, it modulates from specificity to abstraction and transposes from what Roman Jakobson calls the associative, metonymic pole of language—a move, however minor, toward narrative expansion—to the redundancy of the metaphoric pole of substitution. Metaphor and metonymy designate expressive modes here; tendency toward positional similarity and replacement or tautology defines the first, and semantic contiguity, expansion, and combination, the second.<sup>76</sup> West continually replaces referents, concepts, and events that plot treason within a historical trajectory with metaphors that substitute the tautology of mystery for narrative causality. She claims, for instance, that the trial centers on the "fantastic and ironical story of a family who, for obscure reasons springing from one convulsion of history, engaged in

disingenuous conduct which, long after, brought their dearest member a peculiarly nonsensical doom in another convulsion of history” (8). “Convulsions of history” obscures the reenactment of colonial trauma in Ireland in England during World War II. Citing “obscure reasons” for the Joyces’ behavior masks what West narrativized as a typical effect of colonial subject formation. A “peculiarly non-sensical doom” pretends the British state did not shape Joyce’s life and death, first through colonization and then through the death penalty. And a “fantastic and ironical story” disguises that many other Irish concealed their nationality and fought on the English side, some for monetary reward, but “many were people who honestly loved law and order and preferred the smart uniforms and the soldierly bearing of the English garrisons and the Royal Irish Constabulary” (16). This tautology of mystery manifests again when West asks why this American by birth masqueraded as British and regrets that “in the third trial, as in the first and the second, that question was never answered” (43), insisting “this mysterious imposture, and this alone, brought Joyce to the gallows” (43). Legal narratives fail to explain anything: “The arguments of his counsel could not disguise the ineluctable process” (43).

“The Revolutionary” asserts that treason is the effect of inexplicable physical abnormalities and idiosyncrasies—that Joyce’s body *is* metaphor, resistance to narrative. West transfers onto Joyce the traumatic effects of limited vision that Joyce inflicts on England and English law, when fragmented prose “explains” treason through tautology and redundant metaphors: “there was at some point a partial blackness, as if a perforated ear drum or a detached retina, and the consequence was barbarity. This was apparent even when the unscarred side of his face revealed his humor and acuteness, to a degree that was remarkable” (41). The first sentence not only refuses to narrativize treason as effect with historical cause but, by expelling the grammatical subject as passive recipient of the wounds, it even refuses to complete the narrative of treason as physical trauma. The passage confuses the physical and historicopolitical, and Joyce’s body becomes at once unreadable and immediately readable. Rather than a metonym that points elsewhere, to a colonial past, Joyce’s “wound” refers back to itself as absolute resistance, legible as illegibility. The abstract phrase “partial blackness” denotes a psychic condition that invites narrative expansion, which a simile appears to provide through concrete referents. Instead of explaining

the abstract, however, these concrete, physical afflictions entirely supplant it. Mystery substitutes for explanation, redundancy for contiguity. Consequently, the scar on Joyce's face does not operate as a sign of the political effect, "barbarity," but is conflated with it. Physical ruptures, a "perforated ear drum, a detached retina," transform from figural analogies into literal causes of treason. Making treason the effect of chance bodily rupture tightens the tautological circle that articulates revolutionary violence as blackout, blindness, the fall from culture into nature. In attacking England, Joyce attacks "the complex social organization of Western civilization" (115).

By treating his body as that of a scarred mimic, the report forestalls Joyce's insertion into the *Bildung* narrative and thereby recodes England from a territorial state vulnerable to boomerang effects of imperialism incarnated in the intimate enemy it hosts into a cultural formation secured from the colonial outsider within. Although Joyce was an American citizen, he testifies that "we were generally treated as British subjects . . . we were always treated as British during the period of my stay in England whether we were or not" (11). The state issued him a passport, enabling him to travel to Germany and broadcast propaganda, but also, by providing him an extensive education, first in the sciences and then the humanities, it allowed him to become, in theory, a member of the English nation, a "brother." By insisting that he was incapable of being remade by this English education, West consolidates a legacy of philosophical nationalism summarized in the Fichtean concept of the separation and subordination of the machine state to the living, organic nation, whose development relies on education as acculturation.<sup>77</sup> By casting Joyce as a desiring but aberrant subject of the *Bildung* narrative of development, whose end is the civilized, or civicized, individual,<sup>78</sup> West corrects for the laws that enable Joyce to pass as English and turns England into a national culture secured from a revolutionary death drive. As Pheng Cheah writes when glossing Fichte's nationalism, "when the nation's physical borders have been penetrated, it must preserve its invisible spiritual borders to avoid total destruction. The alien power may have overcome political borders, but as long as the cultural borders remain, the seeds of resistance are preserved."<sup>79</sup> To preserve resistance, West devises a discursive strategy in which the colonized becomes "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English."<sup>80</sup>

Here, as throughout literary and cultural histories of colonial representation, the civilizing education of a colonial subject does not create an English person but a farcical double, a buffoon. “Passionately he longed to enjoy certain things which are the fruits of a highly developed civilization” (41), but Joyce’s extensive education fails to surmount his shortcomings. “It had not mattered . . . how he cancelled the disadvantages of pygmyhood by courage and learning. . . . There was something there which would have been a bar between him and advancement, whatever he made of himself” (41). This mysterious “bar,” the “illiterate quality never dispelled by his University education” (181), emerges throughout the text. Joyce shifts from *almost* part of the English family, “*as if* he had been a husband or a brother” (3, my emphasis), to radically other. This radical alterity is figured, for example, through West’s invocation of the shibboleth, evidence of a physical resistance to acculturation, as well as buffoonery. The shibboleth leads to his arrest in Germany, for “he among men spoke with the blended voices of Tamerlane and Punchinello, and . . . whatever he said he also said ‘I am William Joyce’” (178). Soldiers jeer him, “crying out, ‘This is Jairmany calling.’ This must have been the first intimation to him that he was considered by the British public as a comic character” (178), hence his farcical title Lord Haw Haw. By mocking his voice, however, West contradicts her claims that it allows him to pass as English and that it was dangerous and tempting rather than comical.<sup>81</sup>

Staging Joyce as mimic disrupts the report by generating not only contradictions, tautologies, and redundancies but also a residual “scientific” system whose premises conflict with ideals espoused and practiced in West’s other writings. The act of subjecting the colonized to a civilizing mission that refuses them Englishness is often menaced, Homi Bhabha writes, by the colonized’s “displacing gaze” on the level of form. This displacing gaze inspires “pseudo-scientific theories . . . spurious authorities, and classifications” that constitute a “desperate effort to ‘normalize’ *formally* the disturbance of a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality.”<sup>82</sup> If the mission of the *Bildung* narrative is to repair the divide between citizen and subject, West revives a pseudoscience to prove that this divide cannot be repaired in Joyce’s case, that he could never be (English) citizen, only (colonial) subject. His stunted development, “infancy”(115) and “adolescence” (82), is realized through a rehashed Vic-

torian criminal anthropology and its taxonomy of social types, which charts Joyce's transition from mimicry, "a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to *menace*—a difference that is almost total but not quite."<sup>83</sup>

High modernists employ ethnology to produce more ethical cross-cultural encounters, and late modernists employ it to imagine Englishness on shared cultural values rather than race.<sup>84</sup> Yet West does neither. In an effort to restore national integrity by denying colonials culture, her deployment of ethnology in fact menaces her own modernist theories and practices. West departs from the principles of character and subject formation that appear in her most extended work of literary criticism, *The Strange Necessity*, published in 1928. Like Woolf in "Modern Fiction," West criticizes the Edwardians Galsworthy, Bennett, and Wells for focusing, in Woolf's words, on the "body" more than the "spirit." West contends that Wells reduces the variegations of characters' thoughtworlds by "flat statement" of innate traits. In *Lord Raingo*, he "gives no explanation of the girl's cruel desertion of her old lover for death except an innate melancholic taint, acted upon by the appearance in the casualty list of a former lover."<sup>85</sup> Suggesting that these traits are not legible on the body, she also implies that a character cannot be reduced to a social type based on physical appearance. "Never once," West chides, "does he invent the phrase, the speech, the incident that would be the right hieroglyphic to stamp on our minds forever the conviction that this creature, though young and beautiful and passionate enough to make an aging man feel that his age was an adjustable defect like something a little wrong with the eyesight, had nevertheless looked on the waters of life and seen them dark."<sup>86</sup> Attention to the outwardly visible, the physical, elides the complexities of Lord Raingo's mental theater, too. Although "the physical circumstances of his death are magnificently described," physical appearance cannot on its own tell us what occurs within; "the obvious poignancy of his mental situation, the despair which must have crept over the old man . . . is simply not stated."<sup>87</sup> Compare these articulations of (literary) character that emphasize the discrepancy between exterior features and interior world to what serves as her theory of (historical) character in the trial report.

Men who are perfect specimens of a type feel pleasure in their representative perfection, even though the type itself is not happy. . . . A work of art gives satisfaction to the artist and the spectator because it analyzes an experience

and synthesizes its findings into a new form that makes people eager for fresh experience. It is natural enough that something of the same sort of satisfaction should be enjoyed by a human being whose character lies limned before the eye with the particularity of an anatomical drawing, so that it can be comprehended as never before, and judged.

(187–188)

The model of character representation, “an anatomical drawing,” describes the representational system that makes Irish subjects objects of comprehension and judgment in this work. “The Revolutionary” details Joyce’s stalled development not merely “with the particularity of anatomical drawings” but actually *through* a form of anatomical drawing: physiognomy.

West draws from the imaginary of physiognomy—an ethnology that, more than others, obtains energy from visual analysis—to racialize Irish subjects and make English culture and civility unavailable to them. Physiognomy taxonomizes social types based on the premise that physical features mirror innate traits, make visible the invisible. Deployed during the nineteenth century to identify criminal types, it also classified Irish and English into separate and unequal races.<sup>88</sup> Among these Victorian ethnologists who helped transform popular understandings of race was John Beddoe, a founding member of the Ethnological Society and president of the Anthropological Institute. Through his “Index of Nigrescence,” Beddoe used “science” to contrast the lighter-skinned upper classes and darker lower and working classes of the British Isles, positing an “Africanoid” Celt, a “Celtic Caliban.” Physiognomy was later discredited, and this image recedes by the 1920s, but it reemerged in English popular media such as *Punch* at moments of Irish anticolonial revolt. The Celtic Caliban does not appear in its exactitude, but its lineaments are visible in descriptions of Joyce and other Irish “revolutionaries,” or British fascists.

Men of violent and unhappy appearance, with a look of animal shyness and ferocity, and, in some cases, a measure of animal beauty, they were for the most part darker in complexion than one would expect in subscribers to the Aryan theory. One especially, looked like a true gipsy. Most of them had an Irish cast of feature, and some bore Irish names. It must be remembered that these men were not followers of Sir Oswald Mosely, who picked a more varied and more cheerfully brutal type. Joyce had seceded from Mosely’s movement some years

before the war and started his own. This was his private army, part of his individual hell.

(8)

Shifting between desire for (“animal beauty”) and fear of (“animal shyness and ferocity”) the other, this passage expresses the ethnological vision of the Irish as closer to ape than human and more negroid than Caucasian. More important than whether it presents the Irish precisely as Beddoe describes, however, is that it enacts a residual epistemic that ossifies the Irish into an immediately legible “type” based on “cast of feature” and denies what West articulates in *The Strange Necessity*: the gap between outward appearance and inner worlds. To be guided by this epistemic is to refuse the possibility of development on the grounds of perceived physicality. Indeed, “the net effect of Victorian ethnology . . . was to undermine the environmentalist view that Englishman and Irishmen were fundamentally alike and equally educable.”

That this physiognomic discourse is a response to blackout and constitutes an effort to the defend the English nation from colonial masquerade during war and imperial decline seems clear when one compares “The Revolutionary” with West’s other reports on trials where issues of race are at the center, but not Englishness or Irishness. Consider, for example, the report on the 1947 trial in which white taxi drivers stood accused of lynching the African American Willie Earl in Greenville, South Carolina. Although West refers to the defendants as a “type,” it is a professional type (a more specific marker than class). West does not racialize or nationalize their character and asserts that environmental factors played a part in their crime.<sup>89</sup> She condemns the racist attitudes of white attorneys.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, however, when she attacks the argument that racial struggles do not exist outside the United States by citing European and British cases, she refers to Germany and South Africa. She only mentions England in order to analogize intra-U.S. relations, and she does so, ironically, by emphasizing England’s difference from Ireland. By proposing that the gap between the northern and southern United States “was a breach as divides England and Ireland,”<sup>91</sup> West insinuates a racial character to this latter by analogizing it to the U.S. North and South. In the Nuremberg trial reports, West does not racialize German fascists by treating them as animals, as she does the Irish fascists in “The Revolutionary.”

She depicts them as humans, a status they of course denied their victims based on their alleged racial compositions.

In both the Nuremberg reports and “The Revolutionary,” criticism of anti-Semitism might occasionally function as a foil for colonial racism informing depictions of the Irish. In the former, West recalls an encounter with a German woman—critical of the Nazis—who mistakes the British chief prosecutor for a Jew because she “has seen him” and because his name is “David.”<sup>92</sup> West and her companions correct her, noting that Scots can physically resemble Jews and that David is a common name in Britain. “Oh, you English are so simple; it is because you are aristocrats. A man who called his son David might tell you that he was English, or Scottish, or Welsh, because he would know that you would believe him,” the woman replies. “But we Germans understand a little better about such things, and he would not dare to pretend to us that he was not a Jew.”<sup>93</sup> West’s choice to present this reply without comment proves the woman’s point. The English would not make judgments about race based on sight and name; only the Germans would. Highlighting Joyce’s anti-Jewishness in “The Revolutionary” serves a similar self-exonerating purpose. West recalls a broadcast “of the familiar and ill-advised type” she implies is authored by Joyce: “Next time you travel by train or bus and one of your companions is obviously a Jew, I want you to observe his actions. You can hardly mistake their dominant characteristics—their coarse, greasy hair, their greasy foreheads, their negroid lips—but their actions betray their race more than their appearance” (131). Joyce’s deployment of the physiognomic in his Nazi propaganda distracts from West’s deployment of it throughout the report.

The discourse meant to establish Joyce’s mimicry repeatedly menaces the report’s coherence, however. These textual disturbances challenge the validity of the epistemological system on which the denial of Joyce’s access to acculturation rests. Commenting again on his “resistance” to the narrative of development, West muses,

it also appeared that Joyce’s body had the same resistance to culture as his mind. He was a graduate with honours of London University, but there was a quality about all his sayings and doings which suggested illiteracy; he was good rider, he swam and dived to Polytechnic Standard, he had tried hard as a featherweight boxer, he fenced, but his body looked as if he had been a poor child without exercise.



This passage struggles, and fails, to create a seamless parallel between the body and soul of the desiring subject flung back from English acculturation. The semicolon after illiteracy suggests that West will prove how his mind and body, “saying and doings,” resist cultivation, but she proves the opposite by cataloguing how he cultivates himself as an effective athlete. The fastening of these examples of athleticism to the final clause, therefore, is also a breach in logic as well as a departure from expectations. Because she inadvertently illustrates his successful acculturation, physical literacy in English sport, she undermines her aim while simultaneously attacking physiognomy’s premises: Outward appearance does not reflect inner world. The look of Joyce’s body does not testify to his resistance to culture but, on the contrary, testifies to the discrepancy between physical appearance and reality. Such logical ruptures undermine the representational system on which the report’s protection of English national integrity relies.

Yet faced again with the specter of violence inhabiting English law—and this time legal violence in its most naked form, the death penalty—West finally does allow Joyce to succeed in the narrative of development, if only for a moment. Crafting a narrative of rehabilitation, West has the trials tame Joyce’s Irish “animal ferocity” and make him into a man. The cost of orchestrating this rehabilitation narrative is that Joyce becomes an English citizen rather than a colonial mimic. The gain is that the apotheosis of English state violence can be converted into the climactic victory of legal reform, or *Bildung*.

### *The Rehabilitation of William Joyce*

West’s presentation of the trials creates a narrative arc, a story with a plot, protagonist, conflict, and resolution, elucidating further affinities among artistic and legal practices. West does not simply impose literary conventions onto law, though, for law relies on narrative. As Kieran Dolin remarks, discussing Robert Cover’s contributions to the study of law and literature, trials are “contests over narrative, not just at a surface level of evidence presented and contradicted, but at a deeper level of established versus alternative social visions.”<sup>94</sup> The Joyce trials rehearse the contest between a social vision of English law as the triumph of a civilizing mission and an alternative vision of English law as a form of retributive violence. Extracting from the piece-

meal and interrupted trials a connected story, the report, like law, marshals “formulas . . . to impose form and rule on stories,”<sup>95</sup> finessing the violence of both Joyce and the English state.<sup>96</sup>

The narrative of law’s rehabilitation of a “demonic” Irish soul is a story of the trials’ illumination of darkness and its restoration of physical and spiritual fulsomeness. The legal process makes Joyce’s trauma visible as physical affliction rather than historical phenomenon, for “whoever followed William Joyce from the Old Bailey to the Law Courts found themselves thinking of him no longer as base and shabby, but as damaged and deformed” (41), and then ministers to the wound. “Time had acted on him during the trials . . . strongly. . . . At the Old Bailey he had seemed meanly and repulsively ugly. At the Law Courts, where he appeared before the Court of Appeal he was not so . . . the alteration in effect was in part due to a considerable improvement in his health” (40). The law cares for and transforms not only biological life but mental and spiritual life. It acculturates the revolutionary: “Here at the house of Lords he had endured a further change. . . . He still followed the legal argument with a bright eye. But the long contemplation of death had given him a dignity and refinement that he had lacked before” (42). Though Joyce’s crime originates—mysteriously—in a moment of “disaster, when a demon entered” into him and he said “yes” instead of “no” (185), after the first trials, “he changed to the man we saw at his later trials, who seemed no longer to trouble himself about his demon’s unfortunate reply, but to ponder on an answer he must shortly make to another question” (185). Stimulating in Joyce a “process of enlightenment” (43), the trials theatricalize English law’s rationalism and continuity, embodied, for example, in the Lord Chancellor, “the symbol of the continuing rule of law” (51).

The rehabilitation narrative also relieves anxieties about the growing legitimacy of anti-imperial movements around the world. Fearing that the courtroom might erupt in violence by imperial subjects, West turns it into a forum in which British civil and civic structures are honored and desired. Among the trials’ spectators were many “Negroes and Hindus,” and “nothing seemed more unhappily clear than that these must be discontented members of the British empire’s subject races, sympathetically attending the trial of a fellow-rebel” (33). By “eavesdropping” (33), however, West gathers with relief that no sympathy for Joyce exists among them. The trial’s draw is not that it offers an occasion for alliance against the imperial power but that

it offers instead an appreciation for its institutions. These Africans and Indians “belonged to that large class of person, to be found in all races, which delights in the technicalities of Western Law for their own sake, and would exchange a native dance or the Taj Mahal any day for a good tort” (34). And rather than serving as a rallying point for a worldwide anticolonial insurgency, Joyce fragments and divides it. The trials are a theater for colonial masochism and sadism, for “subjected races” to dramatize the enjoyment of their own and others’ oppression: “they were interested in Joyce only as a golfer might be in a ball that has taken up an unusual position in the rough” (34). Shattering any “fellowship” among the “rebels,” this remark pits colonial subjects against each other as one becomes the plaything the other strikes for sport while the colonizing power referees.

By rehabilitating Joyce’s body and soul, however, the courts destroy the “bar” that prevents the civilizing and civicizing narrative from accomplishing its work, turning Joyce into an English person. To resolve this intolerable situation, West ensures that Joyce’s transcending of that bar coincides with his death, which allows her to recode the death penalty as nonviolent, just, and legitimate simultaneously. West disputes the popular and professional sentiment that prevailed at the time, now widely accepted, that the Joyce trials were a miscarriage of justice and the death sentence an excessive use of force. Among laity and legal professionals alike, the trials were accused of marshalling state power as a form of vengeance. In his report for the *Notable British Trials Series*, the law reporter J. W. Hall criticized the prosecution’s methods and argued that death was not a punishment commensurate with Joyce’s crime. Alan Dershowitz also writes that the trial “succumbed to the passions of the day” and asserts that it “shows the British legal system in far from its best light.”<sup>97</sup> West rejects such positions, censuring the “vehemence” of Hall’s preface to the trial and contesting his insinuation that the law was operating in “haste and venom.” She also disputes the position voiced not only by Hall but many legal professionals that the sentence was unjust and motivated by passion and emotion. Recall Menke’s observation about discourses of the legitimation of law: “violence—in the relevant sense of the term—is not the same as restriction or even violation. Violence is a restraint or violation imposed by somebody on somebody against their will. But if the legal verdict is justified, it is valid also for the person sentenced, and insofar as it is not against her will, it is not violence.”<sup>98</sup> West transforms

state killing into nonviolence while articulating the execution as the climax of the *Bildung* narrative, the transformation of subject into citizen.

The sentence marks the victory of reform over revolution because it reflects Joyce's own desires and is proof of English law's natural justice, which is accessible to the "finite mind" through the moral sense. "In the infinite mind there is reconciled justice and injustice. The moral sense of a man is clairvoyant: if he chooses to love rather than to hate he shall be right both in time and eternity" (184), West maintains. By defining treason as a strike against "his own flesh," the report asserts that the trials have transformed Joyce—soul *and body*—into an English citizen, made him part of the body politic. The trials create a moral sense in him, which enables him to see that an Englishman turned against himself is unjust: "William Joyce, knowing that he had struck against his own flesh, had written it down that every time he had broadcast he had committed treason. He took a short cut to the same conclusion reached by the lawyers who knew so much about him that he did not" (184). At the moment the report converts Joyce and reveals a death drive at work in what is rhetorically constituted as an English citizen, it simultaneously articulates English law's death dealing as nonviolent. Capital punishment is not violent or unjust if Joyce's moral sense makes him agree with the court, makes it "valid" for him. Moreover, it cannot be violent if he accepts it without coercion, even if not for the right reasons. Dying would mean "an end to mediocrity" and resolve the "war between the forces in himself which desired to live and those which desired to die" (196). Execution "was the beginning of such distinction as would ideally be conferred on him in a society which believed that a man's soul was immortal and precious to the higher powers. Thus made serene (for all who saw him would concede his serenity), he waited his time" (196–197).

The need to assure readers of his serenity by parenthetically invoking other witnesses signals West's struggle to prove that the death sentence is both nonviolent and just, however. The social vision of the trial as rehabilitation rather than retribution is punctured when blackout again reveals the sentence as a form of legal violence discontinuous with reason and natural justice. Efforts to distinguish the English distribution of justice from violence and limited sight strain under the language of abyss, repression, and mystery. West criticizes the logic of calculation or measurement of guilt and punishment in Hall's claim that Joyce should not have been hanged be-

cause the sentence was not commensurate with the crime. In doing so, however, she admits that one can never verify if the (death) penalty is just: “The mind seeking justice envies such measurement, but must content itself with erecting on the edge of an abyss signboards crudely warning of disaster” (61). “Abyss” refers both to the beyond of legal knowledge as well as Joyce’s crime, which exceeds law’s ability to justly measure and which execution can only “crudely signpost.” West also defends the punishment by maintaining that a double repression shapes criticism of the death penalty, but at the same time, she admits without admitting that law is violent and that law’s relation to justice remains inaccessible to vision and reason.

Like the journalists, like the public, [the lawyers] felt distaste for any attempt of the law to lay hands on Joyce which proceeded from the emotions and did not consult the intellect until it was asked to furnish an explanation for its own vehemence. They felt it more sharply and personally, because it was their *mystery* which being *profaned*: and as they, as all of us, are forced sometimes to doubt whether *the mystery of the law* is not itself a *profanity*, since we live in the New Testament world, and justice has been blown upon by mercy. This reluctance has forgotten its cause, since we are no longer Christian. Hence, it remains as an arbitrary awkwardness about inflicting punishment, which is the more passionate by reason of its puzzled ignorance of its origin, and which reverts to the fiery prejudices of the Old Testament without regaining the caution which is characteristically patriarchal. One cannot live to be a patriarch without being careful as well as violent.

(58, my emphasis)

This passage relates, without ever directly stating, that law was originally violent and that Joyce’s sentence is a repetition of violence. Diversionary tactics displace legal violence onto critics of legal violence. The report manages the abyss it generates between law and justice and violence and mercy through chiasma in order to achieve rhetorically a symmetry between logically asymmetrical terms. Lawyers criticize the passion of Old Testament violence in the name of mercy; mercy is justified by recourse to the passion of Old Testament violence. Law profanes the mystery of justice; the mystery of justice profanes law. These neat reversals distract from the discrepancies dividing each term in the set: the difference between the instrumental violence of “passionate” and “fiery” criticism of the death sentence and the

performative violence of a death sentence—words that actually kill—and the difference between the profanation of law’s mystery and the profanation of justice’s mystery *by* law. The second chiasmus obscures that the term “profane” bears two separate meanings in usages here. The lawyers fear that the law (“their mystery”) will be *desecrated* by violence, but “the mystery of the law” is a profanity because it is a *curse*. West implies it is a curse because its relation to justice is inaccessible to knowledge and cannot be grounded in reason. The justice of legal punishments, repetitions of divine violence, cannot be verified, remain a “cautious” mystery. Justice is incalculable.

The trials’ civilizing and civicizing of Joyce enables West to have it both ways. The legal institutions accomplish the reform that colonial trauma prevented (and caused), but at the moment this is accomplished, Joyce has to die. He is only a good English citizen insofar as he is a dead one. Through narrative and ethnography, the report tries to establish a legally and culturally stable English community and identity in the wake of communism and fascism’s rise on the one hand and the imminent end of empire on the other. Attesting to individual and collective historicopolitical crises with colonialism at their root, *The Meaning of Treason* marks a continuity and a break with *The Return of the Soldier*. The novel contends that the narrative of an insular, idyllic English nation and Pax Britannica relies upon the interment of structural violence, the uneven social and economic formations within England and abroad generated by colonialism and capitalism. The trial report attempts to establish an insular, organic nation by suppressing colonial and state violence through a vindication of English law. In the next chapter, we shift focus to Jamaican authors who confront colonial trauma from within the colony rather than metropole. In their own ways, they, too, endeavor to vindicate English law.