Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond

Grappling with Ghosts

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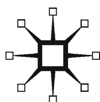

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Dedicated to my father George James Johnson
And in memory of
Andrew Brink (1932–2011)

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Illustration 0.1 Sir Thomas Brock, R.A. "Aid for the fallen"

A soldier kneels and supports his brother-in-arms as he lies, his body twisted where he has fallen. The soldier has placed his hand over his friend's heart, since he is wounded and dying. The above illustration, Sir Thomas Brock's First World War drawing, "Aid for the fallen" (1914) captures essential features of *Mourning and Mysticism*. Brock's picture depicts a paradoxical moment, of intense bonding between two comrades, but also the breaking of that bond, the moment of its being severed, with sorrow and grief glimpsed in the grim expression on the bereaved soldier's face. And yet, in the ambiguous setting, with a shell burst, or a sky clearing in the left-hand background and deepening shadows towards the right, we might imagine these men in a no-man's land or even a purgatory, waiting for the next stage. If we do, then we are perceiving a mystical quality to this image, an effect enhanced by its loose style, giving the impression of a hurriedly drawn, unfinished sketch. *Mourning and Mysticism* probes such mystical responses to death.

Brock's drawing is appropriate in another sense as well in that it represents the unseen for those at the home front, like Brock, who was sixty-seven when the Great War erupted and who did not visit the front. It was forbidden to take photographs of dead allied soldiers, and soldiers were prohibited from carrying cameras at all after the Christmas truce of 1914 (van Emden 149). The scene thus belongs to the realm of the imagination – a reconstruction of the moment of death as any mother, wife, or other relative would have wanted for their dying loved one: being cared for and comforted by another. Some men did receive this blessing – on the battlefield loyalty and compassion could be limitless. Wilfred Owen, one of the subjects of this book, records cradling his batman "Little Jones" after he had been shot through the head, the blood remaining "crimson" on Owen's shoulder (Owen *Letters* 580). "My senses are charred," was his terse remark (Hibberd 348). Richard van Emden details a case of a German soldier, Emil Loose, who held a British soldier, Raymond Wilson, in his arms as he died. A strange meeting indeed. Loose then wrote to console Raymond's father and eventually met up with him (294–96). Most men, however, did not receive such solace, their bodies being blown to pieces or buried by exploding shells, caught in no-man's land, or destroyed in any number of horrific ways; they died "as cattle," as Owen so ruthlessly put it. These men's bodies – nearly half of those killed – were never recovered, and this distressing situation encouraged mystical responses to loss.

Brock's sketch serves to illustrate another feature of *Mourning and Mysticism*. Brock was a sculptor in the grand, heroic style, most famous for creating the Victoria Memorial in front of Buckingham Palace, as well as Prince Albert for the Albert Memorial and many more. He sculpted memorials of Imperial might and grandeur, but in "Aid for the fallen" he chose to express an intimate emotional moment in shades of soft charcoal, the opposite of austere, colossal statues in stone and bronze. This shift perfectly reflects the main focus of *Mourning and Mysticism* on intimate, emotional, imaginative, transformative responses to loss rather than officially encouraged responses to state sanctioned monuments that sprang up after the war, from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to the War Memorial in every Commonwealth village, no matter how small. For a significant minority of people, including most of this book's subjects, such imaginative responses as Brock's proved more effective, ethical, and in some cases therapeutic than stone memorials, designed to evoke abstract values of courage, sacrifice, and honor. Finally, Brock was never considered a war artist in any sense, and neither were most of the subjects in this book considered war writers,

with the exception of Wilfred Owen, although several visited the front, and one, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, wrote a six-volume history of the war. Brock's was an individual response, a first response, in that it appeared in *King Albert's Book*, published after the occupation of Belgium in the fall of 1914, alongside many other artists, musicians, and writers' initial responses, including several under study here: Rudyard Kipling, Oliver Lodge, and May Sinclair.

When an entire culture responds to trauma and loss in mourning, as in First World War Britain, what forces shape that mourning? How are responses to war loss conditioned by earlier responses to loss or by beliefs about the afterlife? What roles do writers play in articulating grief, in mediating collective trauma? When writers express feelings of loss in memoir, fictional or poetic form, how does that affect the mourning process? *Mourning and Mysticism* probes these questions among others. All of the writers in this book grappled with ghosts, most from an early age. Several of them were driven to discover evidence, make arguments for the survival of personality beyond death, and proselytize extensively about their findings and beliefs. They were not alone, since ghosts were thick on the ground in the years leading up to the war, ethereal expressions of a neo-Romantic revival, which renewed interest in philosophical Idealism, with its contention that the Absolute might be glimpsed. However, these were not "the violent old ghosts," as Virginia Woolf put it, of sensational gothic fiction, but those with a psychological dimension, which may or may not "have their origin within us," depending on one's mystical stance (Woolf *Essays* III 324). One only needs to think of the James's ghost stories (Henry and M. R.), or Thomas Hardy's elegies on his first wife, "Poems of 1912–13." The writers in this study wrote out their ghosts in various literary forms and for several purposes, but most often to renegotiate severed relationships, memorialize lost loved ones, and even expunge obsessive or unacceptable memories. In this sense their writing was therapeutic, at least temporarily and partially, but it was not just this, since they brought their talent and skills as artists to bear on their traumas, in order to transcend and transform them. *Mourning and Mysticism* empathetically portrays their sometimes monumental struggles to manage mourning creatively.

This book evolved over many years, but I felt its implications much more deeply after the death of my mother, Eleanor Johnson, in 2009, and then the death of my father-in-law, Alvin Reimer, a few weeks later, when I lived through the emotions of mourning in a way I had not before. To my artist mother I owe the drive to bring this project to

completion. I have drawn on my mentor Andrew Brink's pioneering work of applying object relations and attachment theory to literature, and miss our wide-ranging conversations, including those about my plans for this book, after his death in 2011. My father has always been a mainstay in my scholarly work and I owe him a huge debt of gratitude. I have traveled through grief and joy and everything in between with my wife Nina, and thank her for her participation in this project, with ever perceptive comments, and for her patience as I immersed myself in the War and mourning during the months leading up to completing the book. Our children, Sophia and Benjamin, also deserve my sincere thanks for their patience in dealing with a somewhat scattered and, need I say it, preoccupied Dad during the writing months. I learned so much from their response to the loss of their grandparents, and continue to learn every day from their experience of life unfolding.

I also want to recognize the help of my friends and colleagues Genevieve Later, Daniel McBain, Cam Grant, and Leslie de Bont in reading and commenting on parts of this book. I am grateful to Jeffrey Berman for his appreciation of my aims and his perceptive comments as external reviewer for Palgrave Macmillan. Thanks as well to Paula Kennedy, Publisher of Literature and Head of Humanities publishing at Palgrave Macmillan, with whom I worked on my first book for Palgrave, *Dynamic Psychology in Modernist British Fiction*, and who had the faith to give me another crack at publishing with Palgrave. Ben Doyle, Commissioning Editor, and Tomas René, Editorial Assistant have been wonderful to work with in bringing this project to completion smoothly and efficiently. Thanks also to Jo North for conscientious copy editing. For several grants as well as sabbaticals during 2010–11 and the latter half of 2014 that provided some much-needed time to research and write this book, I am grateful to Thompson Rivers University.

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Earlier versions of several sections of this book have appeared as follows: "'Purgatorial Passions': 'The Ghost' (aka Wilfred Owen) in Owen's

Poetry." *The Midwest Quarterly* 51(2) (Winter 2010): 152–68; "Unresolved Mourning and the Great War in May Sinclair's *The Tree of Heaven* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*." *May Sinclair: Moving Towards the Modern* (London: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 83–98. I am grateful to these publications for permission to reproduce material.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my nearest ancestors who fought in the Great War, and somehow survived it: Frank Cooper Johnson (Divisional Supply Column); my great-grandfather Thomas James (120th Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders); his younger brothers Cornelius (133rd Battalion) and William James (86th Machine Gun Battalion); and Francis Claude Oliver (102nd Battalion) who did not.

George M. Johnson

Introduction: Attachment, Mourning, and Mysticism

"Then came a War when, bombed and gassed and mined,
Truth rose once more, perforce, to meet mankind,
And through the dust and glare and wreck of things
Beheld a phantom on unbalanced wings…"

Kipling, "A Legend of Truth,"
Debits and Credits (1926) 383

"Sadness is necessary sometimes – like an operation; you can't be well without it. If you think about her, Anthony, it'll hurt you. But if you don't think about her, you condemn her to a second death. The spirit of the dead lives on in God. But it also lives on in the minds of the living – helping them, making them better and stronger. The dead can only have this kind of immortality if the living are prepared to give it them."

Mrs Foxe to Anthony Beavis in Aldous Huxley's
Eyeless in Gaza (1936) 108

"Oh yes, all you English are like that. You lock up your affection, and you sometimes lose the key."

Moonstone channeling Raymond Lodge. Lodge,
Raymond (1916) 135

In 1915, a distinguished-looking man in his sixties sits with his wife in the deepening shadows of the drawing room of Mariemont, his home near Birmingham. He is bearded and balding, his remaining white hair swept back along the sides of his head as if he is bracing against an invisible force. Eyes heavily-lidded, the man leans forward, shoulders

stooped, tapping his fingers together. His wife places a hand over his, bringing his tapping to an end and drawing his glance. Her lips are pursed and upturned, giving the slightest hint of hope. They await a communication from their son, Raymond.

Some seven years later, at Crowborough in Sussex in a large gabled house called Windlesham, another man in his sixties, this one with a drooping moustache, sits beside his wife on a sofa. It is December and a log fire flickers in their music room, pushing back the gloom. When an ash-flake flutters free of the grate, the couple, eyes unfocused, do not notice. They are preoccupied with thoughts of the man's son, Kingsley, whose message they anxiously await. Another woman sits with them, muttering to herself. Suddenly a voice, a strange voice, an uncanny voice intones, "Jean, it is I." The wife galvanizes her attention, her hands shaking, as she calls out, "It is Kingsley." The man tentatively asks, "Is that you, boy?" The voice whispers intensely, "Father!" and then, "Forgive Me!" The father clasps his forehead with both hands and says, "There was never anything to forgive. You were the best son a man ever had."

The first father is Sir Oliver Lodge, eminent Edwardian scientist. He received dozens of communications from his son Raymond – an unexceptional experience, except that they were received, not through the Royal Mail, but from the beyond through mediums after Raymond was killed in 1915 in the First World War. The second father, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, physician and eminent Edwardian author, also received dozens of messages from his soldier son Kingsley – again nothing unusual in that – except that the messages were similarly sent through mediums, as well as Doyle's wife Jean's automatic writing and speaking in the voice of Doyle's guide, "Pheneas," after Kingsley's death in 1918 from Spanish flu. I have here adapted a "conversation" with Kingsley that Doyle recorded in a letter to Oliver Lodge (Lellenberg *Letters* 654). Dozens more could be added to these examples of spiritualism – the practice of contacting the dead through a medium, and to these could be added other forms and techniques of mysticism from automatism to table tilting, widely practiced from the Victorian to First World War era and beyond. Does Doyle and Lodge's involvement in spiritualism represent an unfortunate lapse of judgment, mere eccentricity, even delusional behavior? Was the Edwardian era and its aftermath a culture in the grips of religious crisis, a society made credulous by a desperate need to believe in something?

The cultural historians of these periods tend to think so. Samuel Hynes in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* writes that Lodge's book of

communications, both earthly and unearthly, from his son, *Raymond* (1916), is "sad reading," evidence of

> the credulity of belief and of nothing else; and the exposition of Lodge's own theories of life and death are depressing, coming from a man who had once made valuable contributions to scientific knowledge. The book was attacked by scientists as a scandal to the profession, but it had a wide circulation among persons bereaved, as Lodge had been, by the war. (145–46)

Janet Oppenheim in *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* operates from the assumption that spiritualism and even its more respectable cousin psychical research lured otherwise discerning people who could not "accept God's absence from the universe" (4) before these fields were "rightly" exposed as pseudo-sciences.[1] Most recently, Marina Warner in *Phantasmagoria* writes "that super-rationalist Conan Doyle['s]" "adherence to Spiritualism confounds belief" and that Lodge's faith in survival operates "at a pitch of wishful thinking that is painful to read now. Taking strength from this form of spiritual consolation diverts energy from attacking the cause of the young men's deaths, even in the midst of the most acute suffering" (244). All of these historians – and many more could be cited – assume that their society and they themselves personally have progressed toward enlightenment, rendering the earlier era limited in its understanding. In back-projecting their assumptions and values, they risk misunderstanding and distorting the phenomena under study.

I want to take a different, more sympathetic approach and to argue that the attraction to mysticism in all its varied forms made perfect sense within a culture of mourning, of large-scale loss and bereavement, such as in the aftermath of the Boer War, retreat of Empire and particularly during the First World War and the influenza epidemic that followed close on its heels. It must be kept in mind that the medical profession of the time tended to be suspicious of psychological, introspective approaches to mental health. Bereavement counseling had not developed as a field, psychotherapy was in its infancy and available only to the privileged few, and shell shock (now termed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), despite being widespread, was only beginning to be understood as a psychological condition (cf. Johnson *Dynamic* 52, 92). Some forms of mysticism offered a therapeutic means of dealing with the trauma of loss, and so my focus will be on the emotional and psychological reasons why the culture embraced mysticism; thus I will draw on

the insights of psychological theories that developed out of the context of this bereavement. An important goal will be to illuminate similarities in responses to loss by the individuals under study, and to show how the resulting collective biography can throw light on hitherto shadowy aspects of this society, as a whole. While some back-projection of values and insights is inevitable, I will attempt to tell the story of this culture of mourning as it unfolded, on its contemporary terms.

Modern warfare and its consequences began at the turn of the twentieth century for the British. The Anglo-Boer war of 1899–1902 arguably represented a watershed war in that the British faced modern guerrilla tactics of warfare and serious questions were raised about the British treatment of prisoners of war that had resulted in high death rates; the war lost popular support and this signaled the retreat of Empire. However, the number of British that perished in that conflict – approximately 22,000 – paled in comparison to the First World War, in which between 722,785 and 744,702 British men died (depending on the historian consulted). A staggering three million Britons out of forty-two million lost a close relative, son or brother (Jalland 35). The secondary bereaved comprised virtually the entire population. British families could barely bring themselves to cast their eyes over the 'Roll of Honour' published daily in the newspapers. In his "Preface" to *Raymond*, Oliver Lodge lamented the appalling "amount of premature and unnatural bereavement at the present time" (vii), and Wilfred Owen famously evoked "each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds," indicating yet more lost lives ("Anthem for Doomed Youth"). Add to this another 200,000 victims of influenza in 1918–19 (and over 20 million worldwide; Jalland 8), and the magnitude of human loss becomes difficult to comprehend. Perhaps Lady Asquith put it most poignantly when she wrote in her diary in 1915: "before one is thirty, to know more dead than living people" (as quoted in Jalland 36).

The largest-scale response might be termed mysticism in its broadest sense. Mysticism has always been a nebulous term, "so irresponsibly applied in English," often with contempt, as Caroline Spurgeon lamented (1). Nevertheless, it can be defined as an experience of the spiritual life, more particularly the achievement of union or at-onement with God. During the Edwardian period fascination with mysticism rose, in the wake of psychical researcher Frederic Myers's and others' probing of psychical phenomena, and his conception of the subliminal (cf. Chapter 1). William James in his ground-breaking psychological study of religion *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) argued that all forms of mysticism emanated from "that great subliminal or

transmarginal region" (426), which needed to be explored further. Evelyn Underhill, the English guru of mysticism, in one of her many books on the topic developed a broad definition of mysticism:

> The expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood. This tendency, in great mystics, gradually captures the whole field of consciousness; it dominates their life and, in the experience called "mystic union," attains its end. (*Mysticism* x)

For her, it is "a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation"; in other words it deeply engages the emotional life and ultimately leads to union (*Mysticism* x). The novelist and philosopher May Sinclair, one of the subjects of this study and a friend of Underhill's, distinguished two types. She characterized the old type as being possessed of a diseased asceticism, a denial of the body: "its more abhorrent psychological extravagances are the hysterical resurgence of natural longings most unspiritually suppressed" (*Defence* xviii). Sexual energy is transferred from a human and bodily object to a divine and spiritual one without being transformed; in other words, the instinctual energy is imperfectly sublimated (*Defence* 257). The "New Mysticism," however, she saw arising through the coming together of Eastern and Western mysticism and the maturing of the Western mind: "it has put the disease of asceticism behind it; it is a robust and joyous Mysticism, reconciled to the world" (*Defence* 307). In this form, "Mystic passion embraces while it transcends the whole range of human passion. Like human passion, it works through body, heart, and soul" (*Defence* 311). It reveals separation as illusion and thus surmounts it (*Defence* 315). The "New Mysticism" engages the "psychic powers," involving what psychical researcher Frederic Myers called supernormal phenomena – those which transcend ordinary experience but obey natural laws. She praised "the admirable work done by the Society for Psychical Research … in collecting and sifting material for Psychology to deal with" (*Defence* 294). In particular, the Society's findings convinced her of the reality of telepathy and mental suggestion, by which "the ordinary methods of communication by speech and sign are 'transcended'" (*Defence* 298–99). Thus, for Sinclair mystical experience could be a sinking downwards, a turning backwards (the old mysticism) or it could be a rising upwards, an accessing of the "untrodden country" of the future, a portent of mankind's spiritual evolution (the new mysticism), or it could be both (*Defence* 292).

Within this definition spiritualism can be included, although Sinclair did not go so far as to accept that there was substantial enough evidence of communication with the dead (*Defence* 351). Spiritualism is a lower form of mysticism in that it involves sensory experience and a dialectic relationship with the being manifested, as Aldous Huxley recognized: "Mystical experience is beyond the realm of opposites. Visionary experience is still within that realm" (*Doors* 110; Sawyer 209), and this is affirmed by contemporary psychologists Edward F. Kelly and Emily Williams Kelly, who demonstrate the importance of mysticism for a twenty-first century psychology based on Myers's conception of the subliminal (524–25). I have adopted this inclusive definition of mysticism rather than employing the term occultism because, as Alex Owen has suggested, occultism generally referred to "the study of (or search for) a hidden or veiled reality and the arcane secrets of existence" (22). This pursuit tended to be intellectual, esoteric, and elitist. The new mysticism, on the other hand, tended to involve synthesis and emotionally engage a wide range of people, both on the home and battlefronts. Evelyn Underhill in her popular book, *Practical Mysticism*, which appeared just after the First World War broke out, wrote that the need for mysticism was even greater during wartime. She noted that,

> it is significant that many of these experiences are reported to us from periods of war and distress: that the stronger the forces of destruction appeared, the more intense grew the spiritual vision which opposed them. We learn from these records that the mystical consciousness has the power of lifting those who possess it to a plane of reality which no struggle, no cruelty, can disturb: of conferring a certitude which no catastrophe can wreck. (ix)

Writing in 1917, May Sinclair argued that the highest state of mystic certainty could occur when the soldier "faces death for the first time. There is no certainty that life can give that surpasses or even comes anywhere near it. And the world has been full of *these* mystics, *these* visionaries, since August 1914. Sometimes I think they are the only trustworthy ones" (*Defence* 302). She might well trust these mystics since she had experienced something similar at the battlefront, as we shall see.

Though there has been some excellent work done on mysticism in war from a cultural studies perspective, including Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning* and Jenny Hazelgrove's *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars*, on which I have drawn, my focus will be on

eminent and not so eminent late-Victorian, Edwardian, and Modernist writers. From numerous candidates, I've selected a range of writers who engaged in a mystical response to mourning, from those like Frederic Myers who died well before the First World War but whose uncanny influence persisted, to fathers or surrogate fathers who lost sons during the war, such as Oliver Lodge, Arthur Conan Doyle, J. M. Barrie, and Rudyard Kipling, to the sisters and friends of soldiers killed, including May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf, to a front-line soldier, Wilfred Owen, and even to a writer disqualified for military service, Aldous Huxley. All of them grappled with ghosts, heard well-remembered voices of those no longer living and had to come to terms with their experiences. Exploring their struggles and solutions will bring into dramatic relief the dilemmas and anxieties of the era. My aim is not to pathologize these writers but to view them as wounded healers whose anxieties and sorrows tap into, reflect, shape, and give voice to socially disruptive group fantasies, to the culture's trauma. English culture became one of mass bereavement and mourning, was under extreme duress and harbored enormous anxiety about the fate of combatants, the threat from its adversaries, and the future of its nation. Myers, Lodge, and Doyle in particular played key roles in extending the possibilities for mourning beyond traditional Christian conceptions through their prolific popular writings. They conveyed evidence for potential psychical extensions of personality, including telepathy, clairvoyance, and automatic writing, phenomena which supported the possibility that personality survived death. All of the writers in this project acted as mediums in the metaphorical sense that Paul Levy describes:

> If we are able to channel and creatively express the spirit of the age from which we are suffering with consciousness, however, we become the "medium" through which the spirit of the age reveals itself to us so as to potentially transform itself, the world around us, as well as ourselves. (3)

As "mediums," they brought their message of the possibility of survival to a wide audience, increasing its horizon of expectations, and they brought the weight of their respectability, in some cases their status as cultural icons, to bear on this question.

But why? Why persist on this quest in the face of ridicule, derision, and damage to that respectability and reputation? I would argue that the source is in their responses to profound early losses, and even in some instances trauma. These responses established a pattern that

persisted into adulthood, sensitizing them to later losses and making them not only receptive to, but driven to probe whether communication with lost loved ones was possible. Two overlapping theoretical frameworks, with plenty of empirical evidence to support them, can help us understand the psychological dynamics involved.

Object relations theory and attachment theory, though not a coherent whole, are ideally suited to dealing with the issue of responses to war losses since, in contrast to orthodox Freudian theory, these theories shift the emphasis from psychosexual stages of development to patterns in attachment and responses to separation and loss. As developed by British theorists W. R. D. Fairbairn, D. W. Winnicott, and others, object relations theory proposes that a child's inability to manage adaptive separation from the original caretaker, typically the mother, which serves as a prototype for all subsequent bonds with other people and with the world at large, will lead to later maladaptations and even psychopathology. Negligent as well as over engaged and over controlling caretaking will result in a child internalizing the unsatisfying aspects of the caretaker. According to Fairbairn (1994b), the internalized "object" will be split into exciting and frustrating aspects (170). These conflicting aspects, which arouse love and hatred, will be repressed, split off from the main core of the internalized object, while that core is idealized and is present to consciousness. Fairbairn (1994a) describes this internal configuration as the schizoid condition of withdrawal of affect (25–26). The most traumatic source of the failure to adapt is the death of either of a child's parents, which frequently leads to later depressive episodes.

D. W. Winnicott's concept of the transitional object contributes to our understanding of the separation process. Normally these objects, represented in a concrete form by infants' special toys and in a symbolic way as an intermediate area of experience reflected, for example, in a child's babbling, provide a bridge between the mother and the outside world, or between the familiar and the unfamiliar. These objects, and the accompanying symbolic activity, play a comforting role when the mother is absent and so facilitate the separation process (Brink *Creativity* 64–65). However, in individuals whose early object relations have been disrupted, transitional objects can counter depressive feelings of body disintegration and loss of self. They may become the focus of particularly intense and ambivalent, divided feelings of hatred and love toward the lost person. In imaginative individuals the transitional experience sparks off exceptionally creative symbolic play to heal those divisive feelings and to control depressive anxiety. In later life, art forms can become transitional objects (Rose 354). These theories are also

particularly apropos because they developed in part as an attempt to deal with responses to Second World War trauma.

Interestingly, even as far back as the Edwardian period, anthropologists Robert Hertz and Arnold van Gennep started to view death itself as a transitional experience. In 1907 Hertz argued that funeral rites served to transition "the status of the dead from the realm of the living into an afterlife; the identity of the deceased was not lost, but, rather, reconstituted into something meaningful" for the society (Strange 16). Van Gennep in 1909 suggested that the corpse possessed an intermediary status before burial and immortality. Mourners underwent transitional experience from the world of the living to a separate state of mourning and then a return to the society of the living once the rites of disposing of the dead were complete (147–48). In object relational terms we could argue that transitional experience learned as a child comes into play again when imagining the transition of the loved one from alive to the intermediary state of being a corpse to this person's status as immortal or beyond earthly existence.

John Bowlby also began to develop attachment theory in the context of mass bereavement, but in post-First World War Britain (Newcombe 2). Based on evolutionary biology, attachment theory postulates that forming emotional bonds is fundamental to human behavior (and can be observed in neonates) and that it is an adaptive strategy (Bowlby *Secure* 120–21). Infants form attachments initially for protection, and in maturity the attachment extends to reproduction, the two major organizing functions of human behavior (Crittenden *Assessing* 36). Attachment theory, as elaborated by Mary Ainsworth, Mary Main, Patricia Crittenden, and others, furthers our understanding of the connection between childhood separation anxiety and traumas in attachment, and adult attachment patterns and complications in mourning. Based on study of infant–caretaker interactions and on longitudinal study of patterns of attachment into adulthood, these researchers have discovered that initial caretakers, typically mothers, tend to "transmit" their attachment patterns to their infants (Crittenden *Assessing* 38). The pattern a child learns and adopts tends to persist into adulthood through internal working models that a child develops, which "contain *expectations* and *beliefs* about (1) one's own and other people's behaviour; (2) the lovability, worthiness and acceptability of the self; and (3) the emotional availability and interests of others, and their ability to provide protection" (Howe 35). Adults tend to impose their pattern on any new relationships they might develop (Bowlby *Secure* 127). These clinicians delineated three major infant

attachment patterns that can predict later behavior: Secure (designated by the letter B), Anxious Avoidant (A), and Anxious Resistant (C). According to Andrew Brink in *Obsession and Culture*, creators typically manifest a more complicated avoidant-resistant (A/C) pattern, a classification developed by Patricia Crittenden (25). These complicated but enriched individuals are dominantly avoidant (in adulthood termed dismissive), but also show resistance. Crittenden claims that this more sophisticated group employs self-protective strategies that alter according to conditions (*Assessing* 230).

In childhood, the insecure avoidant pattern (observed in approximately one-third of infants according to Crittenden [*Assessing* 32]) develops when a parent's love and acceptance is conditional as long as the infant does not make too many demands (Howe 44). The infant learns to minimize overt shows of attachment behavior and displays of negative affect, which only result in a parent's "irritable attempts to control, deny or dismiss the infant's need or anxiety" (Howe 44). These children learn to defend against frustration in attachment by dismissing attachment, suppressing feelings, and relying on cognition in relationships: "feeling is thus impoverished, dismissed into an inner world of thwarted attachments and angry resentment at unfulfilled needs" (Brink *Obsession* 24). Avoidant children typically develop considerable capacity to read others' emotional states for protection (although not their own; Howe 102). In adulthood, avoidant, or dismissive, "refers to both dismissing the perspective, intentions, and feelings of self and also preoccupation with the perspectives, desires, and feelings of others" (Crittenden *Assessing* 41).

However, those who manifest the avoidant-resistant (A/C) pattern also show resistance, manifested in marked ambivalence toward and manipulation of relationships, and preoccupation with past family relationships and experiences. They may have parents who present very different dangers to them and so they use a different strategy for dealing with each one. Another possibility is that one parent will present widely varying behavior, making a range of adaptive behavior necessary (Crittenden *Assessing* 234). Oscillating positive and negative feelings in early relationships may be exaggerated when a child is genetically predisposed to a disorder such as manic-depression, and/or suffers trauma (Crittenden *Assessing* 34).

William James wrote that "the great sense of terror in infancy is solitude" (as quoted in Howe 6), and the permanent loss of an attachment figure is a huge challenge for any child. Crittenden claims that, "loss is the universal and ultimate danger. Loss of an attachment figure during

childhood threatens personal survival" (*Assessing* 251). However, for those insecurely attached, loss or other trauma, including abuse, poverty, and severe illness can be especially difficult to cope with and "can lead to behaviours that are angry, obsessive and compulsive" (Howe 121). Repeated losses or trauma compound the difficulties. Patricia Crittenden claims that an "especially threatening" situation occurs when early danger

> is repeated at later ages. Loss of an attachment figure in childhood that was followed by loss of other attachment figures would be an example of an extremely and repeatedly traumatizing set of dangers that would require extensive effort to resolve, that is, to enable the individual to feel safe. The effect might be to exaggerate use of the individual's existing strategy by making it more rigidly self protective. (Crittenden *Assessing* 250)

Avoidant types tend to bottle emotions, but, in order to maintain composure, arousal and stress levels tend to be high and grieving remains unresolved (Howe 121).

However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that creative behavior can ameliorate the effects of repeated trauma from loss. In both object relations and attachment theory, infants first form symbols as a substitute when the care-giver is absent. If the care-giver and infant are emotionally mis-matched and disruptions in attachment are chronic, the infant feels anxiety. Imagination serves to counteract anxiety. In later life, the drive to control anxiety can result in obsessional behavior, even addiction to creativity itself, a compulsion to create (Kavaler-Adler, *Compulsion* 2). The less rigid and controlling a person is, the more potential there is for what Andrew Brink refers to as an open obsessional response (*Obsession* 16, 25). If a person develops the capacity to express feelings through words, then this can help increase flexibility and adaptability. Writing functions like play and can in effect become therapeutic, at least temporarily. Writers can develop the capacity to renegotiate severed or damaged attachments in the imagination and through creative expression. Early trauma sensitizes writers to loss, so that losses later in life will activate distressing and unresolved memories, causing them to erupt into present consciousness. Nevertheless, writers have the facility to manipulate imagery and symbol in order to manage anxiety by shifting it into fictional situations and in some cases onto fictionalized characters within the ordered form of a novel, play, or poem. A number of researchers have studied the significance of

early loss in future achievement, eminence, and creativity. Measuring eminence by inclusion in encyclopedias, Eisenstadt et al. found that, "by age ten 25.0 percent of the subjects had one parent dead, and by age fifteen 34.5 percent had one parent dead" (*Parental* 11) and this is more than twice the rate of parental death from the general population based on census data (*Parental* 19). Of 563 products of eminent subjects, 439 products were published or performed after the father died. Out of 516 creative products of eminent subjects, 312 products appeared after the mother died (Eisenstadt, *Understanding* 3). The implication is that creativity arose out of early loss or a later grief reaction.

All of the writers in the current study are Victorian by birth, the oldest, F. W. H. Myers, being born in 1843 and the youngest, Aldous Huxley, being born in 1894. His death, in 1963, is also the latest of those studied. With the relatively low life expectancy for this period, of 44 for males and 47 for females in 1900, though rising to over 60 by 1930 (Jalland 7, 5), one might expect that children would lose parents while relatively young, especially since the average age at first marriage was approximately 26 for women between 1900 and 1920, and for men 27.2 in 1900 rising to 28 in 1920 (Tomka 52–3).[2] Even so, there are an exceptional number of contemporary writers (British or living in the British Isles) who lost parents in childhood, including Elizabeth Bowen (1899–1973), Gerald Bullett (1893–1958), Thomas Burke (1886–1945), Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849–1924), Agatha Christie (1890–1976), Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), Caradoc Evans (1878–1945), E. M. Forster (1879–1970), Kenneth Grahame (1859–1932), Edmund Gurney (1847–1888), Rider Haggard (1856–1925), Radclyffe Hall (1880–1943), Frank Harris (1856–1931), A. P. Herbert (1890–1971), William Hope Hodgson (1877–1918), A. E. Housman (1859–1936), Laurence Housman (1865–1959), Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986), James Laver (1899–1975), C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), John Masefield (1878–1967), Somerset Maugham (1874–1965), George Moore (1852–1933), Edwin Muir (1887–1959), E. Nesbit (1858–1924), Mollie Panter-Downes (1906–1997), Eden Phillpotts (1862–1960), J. B. Priestley (1894–1984), Herbert Read (1893–1968), Dorothy Richardson (1873–1957), Henry Handel Richardson (1870–1946), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967), Henry de Vere Stacpoole (1863–1951), Frank Swinnerton (1884–1982), P. L. Travers (1899–1996), Mary Webb (1881–1927), and Francis Brett Young (1884–1954). Numerous others experienced differing forms of trauma including abuse or severe illness, such as Stella Benson (1892–1933), Robert Graves (1895–1985), and H. G. Wells (1866–1946). Of the writers in this study, Frederic Myers, May Sinclair, Virginia Woolf, and Aldous Huxley lost

a parent before adulthood. The others suffered a variety of traumas, including the loss of a sibling, in the case of Barrie – with a crippling effect on his mother; physical abuse at the hands of maternal substitutes or at school – extreme even for the period – as in the case of Rudyard Kipling, Oliver Lodge, and Arthur Conan Doyle; or trauma resulting from the need to suppress what was considered socially unacceptable and in fact illegal behavior, as with Wilfred Owen's homosexuality. With all of the subjects, trauma was enhanced and complicated by other factors including parental alcoholism in the case of Sinclair and Doyle, descent into poverty resulting in frequent moves and decreased familial stability, again in Sinclair's and Doyle's situations, workaholic parents in the case of Lodge's parents and Woolf's father, and sexual abuse, in Woolf's case.

One of the most significant features linking all of the writers under consideration is that they had already developed an avoidant-resistant pattern of attachment by the time trauma struck, making it a real challenge to surmount trauma, and especially repeated trauma. Nevertheless, this pattern of attachment offered them several advantages as they learned to transform trauma through imaginative writing. As Howe notes, "dismissing individuals are particularly vigilant in monitoring other people's facial expressions and body language for any potential sign of attachment relevant cues, particularly negative ones" (108). These skills of observation and awareness of conflict are essential tools for the writer. Since the nervous systems of dismissive types are over-sensitized or hyper-aroused they tend to be highly reactive, so that past "fears of danger, isolation and hurt" erupt into consciousness, but this also gives them access to these powerful emotions and the urge to manage them by fictionalizing them (Howe 185). Their considerable capacity for thinking about feeling is essential when transforming emotion recollected in tranquillity, as Wordsworth put it, into coherent fictional form. They also tend to maintain distance from intimacy as a defense against threat, giving them the solitude necessary for writing (Howe 106, 123).

Researchers determine attachment patterns in adults typically through interviews, such as the Adult Attachment Interview. This discourse is analyzed to determine patterns or constructs. A psychobiographer can similarly analyze patterns or constructs from a writer's oeuvre, though without the same precision that an interview with a living person can provide. Avoidant or dismissive adults have been subdivided according to dominant constructs within their discourse. One pertinent pattern, "Role Reversal, occurs when a subject recounts being endangered and needing comfort and protection, but being placed in the position of