A Visual Rhetoric of World War I Battlefield Art: C. R. W. Nevinson, Mary Riter Hamilton, and Kenneth Burke's Scene

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While rhetoricians have used Kenneth Burke's concept of scene to emphasize the moral, political, and cultural aspects of the verbal rhetorical situation, scene is also quite definitely a visual component of analysis, in that it implies space. In this essay, I argue that Burke's concepts of scene, actant, and action serve as useful tools for rethinking visual rhetorical studies and for explicating the work of the visual art of the First World War more generally. The premise on which this study is based is that certain paintings, while depicting what one might term the "still life" of the battlefield, also imply time and narrative. Images of the battlefield are representational, but should not be construed as mimetic. Far from being the "mute poem" of classical conception (Scholz 55), battlefield art of World War I tells stories about witnessing, trauma, and memory; not only do painters represent the spaces and personnel of war, but also they engage viewers in moral and political reflections on those crucial concerns of rhetorical study, cause, effect, protagonist, and drama. Here I examine two battlefield paintings, predominantly investigating the ways that the paintings work rhetorically; the first of these is by English painter Christopher R. W. Nevinson (1889-1946) and the latter by Canadian Mary Riter Hamilton (1873-1954). Burkean scene is the primary tool I use to articulate the rhetorical work of the paintings in calling into question attitudes about war. The end result is both a useful explication of these visual images of war and the cultural work they do, and a useful expansion of the critical range of phenomena available for analysis through the Burkean pentad. Aware that scholars of the "space between" are not necessarily familiar with the Burkean pentad, I hope this article can also model a new and dynamic kind of interdisciplinary scholarship, one that emerges when the vocabulary and methodologies of rhetoric, in particular Kenneth Burke's scene, are brought to bear on the art and culture of World War I.

Certainly, the visual culture of World War I presents an extraordinary amount of material to study. In addition to traditional and avant-garde paintings, the public was exposed to posters, illustrated war annuals, cartoons, and photographs. Thus, any study of World War I art must limit the field of possible visual artifacts. I have selected Nevinson and Hamilton because their work combines a commitment to representing place with a definite attitude toward the scene represented. Nevinson was unquestionably one of the key artists of the war era and his painting *Paths of Glory* (1917) is an oft-discussed and controversial image. Hamilton is less recognized; as a Canadian, a post-war visitor to the Western Front, and a woman, she painted from a position outside the direct experience of battle. Yet the two painters share similarities. Nevinson and Hamilton produced their work as official war artists, Nevinson working for the British War Propaganda Bureau (WPB) and Hamilton for the Canadian War Amputations Club. Both painters also engage everyday realities and recurring metaphoric themes in their paintings. Nevinson discovered that *Paths of Glory* treated an everyday subject about which the government was sensitive: timely clearing of battlefield casualties. Hamilton's *The Sadness of the Somme* (1920) recognizes that roads were the arteries of troops, supplies, and casualty movement. Metaphorically, Nevinson's painting invokes a far horizon, with only a thin blade of pale sky; the sky was a recurring motif in war literature, representing, as George Mosse writes, "a piece of eternity" (107). In its use of the road as motif, Hamilton's *The Sadness of the Somme* focuses on perhaps the most prevalent iconographic representation in literature and painting of the time. As Mary Borden wrote in her collection of short reminiscences of nursing on the Front, the road was "the place where they go to be torn again and mangled" (81).

In recent years, scholarly attention to the experience of place (which can also be construed as a recognition of theories of scene) have richly extended static notions of setting. This may be due to the developing concerns with visual culture studies, which, with its broad interests in art, popular media, architecture, and landscape, enables scholars to situate works of literature within a second field of visual artifacts. The field of visual rhetoric appropriates concepts from traditional rhetorical studies and applies them to still and moving visual images. As Lawrence Prelli points out, a visual rhetoric (or "rhetoric of display") involves the use of epideictic rhetoric, a "fundamental mode of rhetoric in human culture" (9-10) in which meaning is created through strategies of visual presentation (2). In particular, rhetoricians studying the visual are curious about the phenomenological effects of the created object on the audience. Images—both single images and those in a series—are examined for their persuasive qualities. Visual rhetoric encourages us to understand the cultural work that images perform in societies. Kenneth's Burke's pentad has been one of the most dynamic

tools for describing the cultural work of rhetoric and can be a powerful heuristic for the rhetorical analysis of the visual in these war paintings.

In the tradition of classical rhetoric, these war paintings can cross the boundary from the record of private vision and emotional trauma to public discourse, providing a forum for the ordinary person to speak out on issues of national importance. In other words, the paintings do cultural work. Nevinson's painting is political (following from the genre of deliberative rhetoric), commenting on actions taken in the past in order to question and determine future decisions; Hamilton's is commemorative (following the epideictic tradition), working to preserve national memory.

Nevinson's early paintings, those dating from the start of the war in 1914, embraced Futurism as the most suitable means to express the chaos and destruction of battle. Michael Walsh points out that Nevinson grew into a style that embodied less aesthetic concerns and more political discourse: "Later in the war, however, when he was an official government propagandist (1917–18), Nevinson's painting shifted in *raison d'être* to gravitate towards a penetrating realism, imbued with protest, for a war which, by this stage, had robbed that same generation of much of its brilliance" ("Nevinson: Conflict" 180). *Paths of Glory* dates from this later period. Perhaps even more so than his earlier paintings, we can identify it as the space of witnessing.

Hamilton's *The Sadness of the Somme* is, in contrast, the landscape of memory. Because Hamilton was working for a patron after the war—and with the dual purposes of commemoration and establishing a record of the battlefields prior to their restoration as farmland—she was actively invoking audience response. In Hamilton's *The Sadness of the Somme*, a pathway from the vantage point of the spectator leads to a far horizon. The edges of the picture fade into a haze. The image could be a dreamscape, a remembered road now devoid of travelers. The road is uncrowded; the mood is unhurried; the land is open. Nevinson's *Paths of Glory*, by contrast, crowds in on the spectator. The urgency of the brushstrokes and rapidly crossed lines of its cluttered foreground enmesh the spectator in the detritus and pain of the newly-ended battle. As rhetorical artifacts, Hamilton's paintings are works of memory, designed to record the specific places where Canadians engaged in acts of heroism or lost their lives. They are also works of national significance, marking the spaces in which Canadians were sacrificed.

Restoring the Sense of the Visual to the Burkean Scene

Rhetoricians who have used Burkean scene as a tool for rhetorical analysis have conflated it with the rhetorical situation, the stage or platform on which arguments are constructed. Burke's definition of scene is "the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred" (x). Judith Abrams glosses Burke's positioning of scene as situation, commenting, "Concern with the

scene or setting includes a concern not only for the orator's audience but also for the moral and political environment in which the orator speaks" (25). This cultural grounding of the speaker's utterance is unquestionably important, but it tends to limit the concept of scene to the temporal, philo-sophical, and cultural--the zeitgeist--and is, therefore, a diminishment of the power of the Burkean vocabulary.

I would like to suggest that an amplification of the idea of scene can occur when we think of it as Burke intended: dramatistically, rooting it in the spectacle of theater (or storyworld). In other words, when we equate scene or background with a visual, even tangible or geographical, reality, we can learn more about the term and its potential application. To rethink scene as a tool for visual rhetorical analysis is to animate it as a dynamic and fluid environment that interacts with other aspects of the pentad, in-cluding act, agent, agency, and purpose (Wolin 158). Scene is the landscape which drives action and motivates agents: "acts are caused by the scenes in which they arise," writes Wolin (158). In Burke's own words, "The act will be consistent with the scene," something of a point of origin (qtd. Biesecker 32). Furthermore, Burke writes, "There is implicit in the quality of a scene, the quality of the action that is to take place within it" (*Grammar* 6-7). In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke links the material conditions of war to the pentad, pointing out that scene is, for the solider, "a situation that motivates the nature of his training" (xx). Yet war is also the setting for that training to be enacted, the stage upon which training is performed, the map upon which battles are planned and engaged, the ground upon which soldiers fall.

J. Anthony Blair declares that the scene of a visual argument intro-duces "constraints and opportunities" for the rhetor and for the audience (59). Blair claims that a visual arguer's representation of the scene creates the possibility for meaning while also limiting vision in such a way that meaning is restricted. As a "scene" becomes conventionalized across time, it may become what Edward Said calls an "imaginative geography," through the processes by which a geographical location metonymically indicates a combination of "social, linguistic, political, and historical realities" (Said 50). The Western Front of the Great War is one such imaginative geography, a discursive formation of which topography or place is only one element. Physically located in the territories of eastern Belgium, France, and Italy, and abutting western Germany, the idea of the front is delineated by vari-ous descriptive genres, such as maps, photographs, film, diaries, memoirs, poetry, fiction, posters, and paintings. In the minds of the artists who rep-resent it and the viewers who consume those representations, the imaginary geography of the Western Front creates the possibility for meaning while also shaping interpretive possibilities.

Burke believed that when the "scene" is the dominant force on a rhetorical act, the result is determinism: the sense that the agent is unable

to act of its own volition, but is instead driven by outside forces. When all that a painting does is reinscribe the geography of place, one conception of the scene has dominated the visual arguer's work. But this essay will demonstrate ways that the experience of a visual argument, the phenomenology of our experience of a painting, can be a tool for complicating the power of scene in a painting. To some extent, the terminology one employs helps illuminate the concept. For one, Burke thought of scene as a dynamic, interactive, and one could even say *dialogic* exchange between the five aspects of the pentad, which he termed "ratios." Secondly, scene takes on further nuances when it is conjoined with Christopher Tilley's concept of "locale," which underscores the effects of lived experience and memory on place. In addition, and perhaps most importantly to visual argumentation, in terms of the rhetorical situation of battlefield paintings, there are three related temporal positions in which the image can be understood:

- the situation of the creator of the image, including the physical and geographical location represented by the painting (the time of creation);
- the visual storyworld: the situation of the protagonists within the narrative of the image (narrative time); and
- the viewing scene (outside the frame), such as the museum, catalogue, or text (diachronic time).

As we will see in these wartime paintings, there is a real possibility of interpretive tension across these three temporal positions, creating an opening for polysemous interpretation of images. "We understand the world by an explanation we make to ourselves for why an event occurred," writes Barry Brummet (186), an explanation that can be catalyzed by the complexity of our response to these works of art.

Burkean scene isn't sufficient for conducting a full visual rhetorical analysis. For that, we need to draw on the works of other writers and on traditional art historical analysis. Roland Barthes writes in "The Rhetoric of the Image" (1977) that discrete elements or *lexia* (a unit of meaning) "are fragments of a more general syntagm" (157). A message is created when the elements of the sequence are connected at the level of *diegesis*, the narrative or storyworld. In addition to Barthes' semiotic approach to units of meaning, we can add considerations of color, line, perspective, dominance, balance and proportion, drawing from the language of formalist art history. These are the tools with which we can analyze the images of war that follow.

Image and War

As landscape historian Christopher Tilley points out, "locale" has a particular psychological meaning: "Through an act of naming and through the development of human and mythological associations . . . places become invested with meaning and significance. Place names are of such vital significance

because they act so as to transform the sheerly physical and geographical into something that is historically and socially experienced" (18). The events occurring on the Western Front, even the homeliest acts such as shaving or eating, were marked as significant because of the extraordinary locales and disruptive circumstances. In addition, the acts of battle were determined by the terrain. Military action depends on scene. The geographical reality of the Somme—described by military historian Richard Holmes as "rolling chalk uplands, with nucleated villages and a sprinkling of big farms"—favored the defending Germans, as they occupied the higher ground and surrounded it with barbed wire and machine guns. Furthermore, the Germans were able to dig dugouts into the chalk hills offering their defense against Canadian and British troops a nearly impregnable fortress. The *political reality* of the Somme is still debated, with the British commanders, in particular, criticized for outdated military tactics and for slowness in forward movement (although a number of recent authors, including Peter Simkins, have noted that the popular conception that the generals were "donkeys" commanding "lions" ignores the significant military contributions of the generals to several campaigns). The first offensive took place July 1, 1916, the result of several months of planning, two years into the war. The battle itself waged from July to November; when it was over, the Canadians had lost in the offensive an estimated 25,000 personnel and the British over 400,000. Considered a military failure, the Somme conflict resulted in a loss of more than one million men from all sides.

In the case of World War I, landscape features (trenches, open fields, broken fences, blasted trees) are linked to human activity by powerful stories. Consider, in this regard, the following comment by Christopher Tilley: "If naming is an act of construction of landscape, constituting an origin point for it, then narratives introduce temporality, making locales markers of individual and group experiences. . . . Stories are intimately connected with physical places on the land, fused with geological elements" (33). Thus, the landscape depicted by the artists is inseparable from human action and memory, indeed, it is the lived experience of the artist that limns the landscape. A name—"the Somme," "Verdun"—refers not only to coordinates on a map, but also to individual and political histories.

Writing to Charles Masterman, head of the British War Propaganda Bureau (WPB), about his appointment as an official war artist in 1917, Nevinson reflected, "I hope I shall be able to make a fine record—that my pictures will give the civilian public some insight as to the marvelous endurance of our soldiers—the real meaning of hardships they are called upon to face." (qtd. Walsh, "Nevinson: Conflict" 194). Nevinson's word choice is intriguing; referring to his creative skills as a "record" indicates a documentary—even mimetic—desire on his part to copy or transcribe the reality of the scene. On the other hand, Nevinson was echoing the rhetoric of the WPB, and

specifically Sir Douglas Haig's desire for the artists to record "for all time the spirit of the age in which he has lived" and create "a permanent record of the duties which our soldiers have been called upon to perform" (qtd. Sillars 4). Sue Malvern points out that, despite their sometimes radical intentions and anti-war sentiments, the artists had "selected themselves for official employment" and thus "no work would be produced embodying values which repudiated those of their patrons" (508). In other words, the artists censored themselves in order to conform to their duty to the British government. Highlighting the communicative function of art as well as its psychic value, the scholar Stuart Sillars writes:
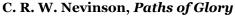
> The need to record, to order and contextualize these experiences of dreadful novelty and anguish, is thus basic to the war. In the widest sense, "art" in some form, be it poster, editorial, poem or easel painting, has a range of functions which are essential to the war as a means of comprehension and survival, whether concordant or dissentient with official attitudes and policies. (8)

Samuel Hynes points out that, in England, "most of the promising young painters were on active service" (194), spread across France and the Mediterranean. Masterman employed at the War Propaganda Bureau over 90 artists to represent the war to the British public, among them Paul Nash, William Orpen, and Nevinson. According to Hynes, he told the artists to "Paint anything you please" (195)—with the exception of dead bodies—and thereby Masterman established a "new realism" of war painting (199), what Hynes calls "the aesthetic of direct experience" (195). Ironically, the less representational and more stylistic and interpretive aspects of modernist Futurism and Vorticism embraced by artists in the early years of the conflict proved more realistic than traditionally representational modes. Modernism was able to capture the disorder and disruptive spirit of the war. "Futurist 'lines of force' and multiple motion are employed to convey a very un-Futurist sense of disillusion with the futility and waste of combat," writes Richard Cork ("Nevinson" np). *The Futurist Manifesto* by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1909) was hailed by British artists like Nevinson who interpreted the landscape of battle through the manifesto's masculine language of "snorting machines" and the puddles of the "factory gutter." Nevinson even went so far as to collaborate with Marinetti on a manifesto titled "Vital English Art: A Futurist Manifesto" that argued for "an English art that is strong, virile and antisentimental" (Marinetti). Yet, when he abandoned Futurism, Nevinson angered his employer Masterman, who complained that he had decided "to produce official (perhaps dull) pictures" and who encouraged him to produce work "however bitter and uncompromising" (qtd. Cork, *A Bitter Truth* 168).

Eventually, as the Great War that was supposed to be over by Christmas 1914 wore into subsequent years, painters recast their work in specifically rhetorical terms, as responses to the conflict and reflections on the loss of life. Michael Walsh notes that, Nevinson's contemporary Paul Nash "captured the feeling of many when he wrote from Passchendaele: 'It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless. I am no longer an artist interested and curious. I am a messenger. . . . Feeble, inarticulate, will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth'" ("Nevinson: The Modern" 18). Hynes interprets "trench-scapes" as "bitter comments on . . . Romantic vision, and on the whole Romantic tradition in painting" (192):

> On the Western Front, Nature was dead—not simply in the sense that growing things could not survive the destruction there, but in the sense that the Wordsworthian idea of natural benevolence had died. And if Nature was dead, then landscape-painting was dead too. The paintings . . . are more like elegies for the death of landscape. (199)

Hynes notes that landscape was "derationalized and defamiliarized" in the war zone and in the paintings produced through the auspices of the WPB. The "new tradition of war painting" was composed of three essential elements: "*disfigurement*, the gross violation of . . . natural beauty"; "*danger* and *desolation*, responses to the visual scene"; and "*ruin* and *chaos*," acknowledging "a formless, devastated earth" (Hynes 200, emphasis in original).

C. R. W. Nevinson, *Paths of Glory*

(518) *Paths of Glory*, 1917 by Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson (1889-1946)
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Returning to a point made earlier in this article, that the "act of naming" a place invests it with "meaning and significance" (Tilley 18), it is revealing to note that Nevinson's painting of the Great War dead refuses to name the place where the men's lives ended. As Joanna Bourke points out, in personal correspondence from soldiers, censorship "regulations forbade mention of where letters were written . . . , the morale and physical condition of the troops, casualties and any criticism of operations" (22). Nevinson's painting is in keeping with this silencing. This painting provides a significant example of scene as both a determining factor in the phenomenological experience of the viewer and a locale where "vacant and anonymous trenches" are given meaning by dissipated action and the memory of sacrifice. The title of the painting offers a sardonic commentary on an idea, for it was drawn from Thomas Gray's "Elegy written in a country churchyard" (ca. 1750), and quotes the verse, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." Nevinson's own *Paths of Glory* shifts the emphasis from the memory and acceptance of death in Gray's elegy to the recognition of the trauma of war. Yet, in his own act of refusing to set the scene, Nevinson at once denies to authorize the political (physical) reality of the location and simultaneously invests this scene with a sad timelessness and intentional placelessness of form-less earth. Appointed as an official war artist in April 1917, Nevinson visited France in July and August of that year, during the beginning of the Pass-chendaele offensive; also known as Third Ypres, the battle is remembered for the fighting in thick mud (much of which absorbed the dead) and as one that resulted in over 800,000 dead, wounded, or missing. Nevinson was known for painting from memory (Malvern 500) and for basing his work on "rapid short-hand sketches made often under trying conditions in the front line" (qtd. Cork, *A Bitter Truth* 169). In 1919, he recollected the background (the scene) for the painting:

> For an hour and a half the entire fearfulness of the
> German army and the most expensive ammunition
> were turned on us. . . . After that I could paint just
> exactly what it feels like to lie in a shell-hole. (qtd.
> Walsh, "Nevinson: Conflict" 198)

Nevinson called his painting one of his "honest performances, absolutely realistic" (qtd. Malvern 509). This locale, although specifically recollected by Nevinson, comes to represent the imaginative geography of "anywhere" on the Western Front in the viewer's present, the time of spectatorship. The absence of any particular geographical markers and the presence of the identifiable, ubiquitous barbed wire line indicate that these soldiers, despite their realism, are less particular men than collective troops. These soldiers are the Everymen of No Man's Land. The locale is animated by their sacrifice. What it lacks in geographical name, it gains as a marker of their individual pain and the collective suffering of the ordinary individual. If

Nevinson intended to use his official status to record "the real hardships of soldiers," he succeeded in demonstrating the effects of the conflict. Hynes's categories are evident: disfigurement of the land, dangerous conditions, the ruin of the soldier's lives, and the chaos of the battle's aftermath.

Two figures are positioned within a tense environment of destruction. They have fallen into a depression in the landscape, amid mud and debris, their forward momentum curtailed by shell- and machine gun-fire. Along the horizon, a strong fenceline of tangled barbed wire, demarcating No Man's Land, blocks the ironically blue eternity of the sky and landscape. In the foreground, additional broken fencing and wire separates the men from the relatively safe enclosure and temporary home of the trenches. The viewers, enveloped by the space of the fighting, occupy a vantage point so close to the dead that they could be one of the casualties. In Nevinson's words, the image created the feeling of what it's like "to lie in a shell-hole" (qtd. Walsh, "Nevinson: Conflict" 198).

The indicative elements of the scene can be isolated as identification markers: the fence line (marking the enemy from the soldiers), the uniforms, the landscape. Each of these lexia, as Barthes would term them, are denotative and can be described dispassionately. However, their position within the frame and their distribution throughout the scene work together to create the narrative. This method of isolating the elements of the image depends less on the specific elements that are selected than the ultimate goal of combining them to tell the story of the image. Once arranged for meaning, the lexia can be studied for their persuasive qualities. For example, the fence line remains firm against the horizon. In the foreground, the fence line is torn, but the severed wires may have been due to the soldiers own wire cutting tools rather than the destruction of shells. The horizon is, although literally marginalized, significant. Due to the irregular nature of the trenches, which were dug in zigzags rather than in straight lines, the soldiers were unable to see for long lines down the length of the trench. Furthermore, unless they were sent "over the top" and across No Man's Land on a raid, they were ensconced within the dirt walls of the trench. Poets often referred to the colors of the skies or the stars at night. John McCrae's famous poem "In Flanders Fields" references not only the famous poppies of the rows of war dead, but the sky in its lines "We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow." At times, the sky was the only landscape that was directly accessible to the combatants. Intelligence officer, press liaison, and official censor C. E. Montague wrote in a short piece titled "Trench Scenery" that "men in the trenches are cut off from the landscape with visions confined to the sky and the stars so that the rediscovery each year of the spring sunshine comes as a benediction and even, it is suggested, the promise of redemption" (qtd. Malvern 493). Thus, Nevinson's scene, in limiting the sky to a mere fraction of the painting, records the ubiquitous mud and trench that

was the soldiers' reality. The potential eternity of the sky is only a sliver of the scene, as if seen through a break in the mud walls.

The fencing serves a nationalistic function as well. Because these men are on one side of the trench, spectators recognize that they are combatants who served together. There is an inherent camaraderie in their deaths, for they fell fighting alongside one another. Furthermore, they are literally placed on "our side" of the fence. The audience recognizes, then, given the rhetorical situation (officially-appointed British artist painting the scene and exhibiting it to a London public) that the objects of the gaze are British war dead. Again, as Prelli and Blair note about rhetorical epideictic, the scene offers the possibility for interpretation, but also limits vision; display here "conceals alternative possibilities" (Prelli 2). The absence of German war dead implies the greater force of the Germans in "winning" this battle, but also eliminates the German dead from concern. Thus, despite its compassion for the dead of this unnamed battle, the painting ignores any consideration of German combatants and highlights the suffering of the British. Within the visual storyworld, the broken wire and ground that divides the soldiers from the trench also signifies within the viewing situation that the men are not able "to come home."

Another way of identifying these soldiers as British, is, of course, the uniforms. The men wear the iconic khaki of the "Tommy": the distinctive tan wool tunic and puttees and the metal helmet of the front line troops. With documentary realism, Nevinson also detailed some of the webbing equipment, including a waist belt and shoulder straps, a large pack on the back of the soldier to the right, and a small pack on the soldier to the left. The curious dichotomy between the detail of the uniform and the lack of detail of the face appears to indicate a degree of repetition in the troops. These are not particular men who fell in a particular battle, but the bodies of any man who was killed in the service of the war. The helmets, once identified as combat gear, may be further read for their ultimate lack of protection. They are upside down and several feet away from the men who they were intended to protect. The protective gear is impotent in its ability to keep the soldiers safe. A rifle lies smothered by the body of the soldier on the left, its muzzle covered by his outstretched body. As a means of protection and aggression, it, too, is powerless. Taken together, these elements of mute offence and defense imply a critique of the British government's management of the war. Costly mistakes, a disregard for individual human life, and ruinous battle plans drew the war into month after month of appalling waste, ruin, and chaos.

In keeping with the diegetic nature of the analysis, we may note as well that *Paths of Glory* also places viewers in time. Viewers understand that they look upon the past of battle—the aftermath—while also experiencing a present in which wars continue to destroy. Visual commonplaces lead to

challenging belief. In this case, Nevinson has not merely represented the world of war through a minimalist number of elements; he has presented the images with the intention of changing the conditions that lead to war. The acts of the soldiers are represented in the scene, thereby reflecting the acts of the commanders and the government. The painting also represents an artistic indifference to control by the censors.

The immediate history of the painting's display was marked by fears that it was, indeed, too specific and would negatively influence the public's wartime support of the war. The WPB forbade its painters from representing dead bodies; there was some speculation that any persons represented might be recognized by family members. The fact that the bodies were lying on the field of battle would cause concern as well, for a quick removal and burial of the dead was considered crucial for maintaining morale:

> Burials on active service had very great practical importance. In the first place if one had buried a man's body one knew for certain that he was dead. Secondly, nothing is more depressing to the living to see unburied dead about them. In some areas e.g. at Beaumont Hamel in the winter of 1916 the ground was covered with unburied dead and it became a matter of real military importance that the work of burial should be conducted. (Reverend E. C. Crosse qtd. Hodgkinson 38)

Furthermore, the dead and wounded of battle were construed as heroic and were often depicted with what Nevinson derisively called "a mock ambience of Lancelot" (Nevinson 163), and efforts to paint them as torn, dirtied, or brutishly objectified were viewed with disapproval. When Nevinson's one-man show opened at the Leicester Galleries in London in 1918, the War Office objected, going so far as to refuse to allow the show to open unless the canvas was removed (Cork, *A Bitter Truth* 169). Unhappily, Nevinson complied with the demand to remove the potentially inflammatory painting. He recalls in his autobiography *Paint and Prejudice* (1938):

> Under the belief that the censors would pass it at the last moment I had it hung and when permission was finally refused I pasted brown paper over it rather than leave a hole on the wall, and wrote "Censored" across it in the manner of French newspapers. (148)

Nevinson's cheek earned a reprimand from the War Office for publicly drawing attention to the government censorship. Thus, in the case of *Paths of Glory*, Burke's positioning of scene as situation, "the moral and political environment in which the orator speaks" (Abrams 25), demonstrates the complications that arise from a plurality of rhetorical habits: demands,

expectations, and interpretations. The Burkean scenes of *Paths of Glory* reflect and engage conflict: the WPB and government censors restricted the public display of certain images, thereby impinging on Nevinson's personal vision and his official and more public obligation to "make a fine record." With Mary Riter Hamilton's *The Sadness of the Somme*, a more unified need to remember and commemorate is evident in the scene.

Mary Riter Hamilton, *The Sadness of the Somme*

Not included in typical lists of World War I painters is the Canadian painter Mary Riter Hamilton, who was sent to France and Belgium in 1919 at the behest of the War Amputations Club of British Columbia to paint the battle-fields of the Western Front before reconstruction. Canada's official war artists during the conflict of 1914-1918 were managed by Sir Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook) who hired over one hundred artists through the Canadian War Memorials Fund to create a record of Canadian involvement with the war. Beaverbrook wrote that "only paintings could provide the most permanent and vital form in which the great deeds of the Canadian Nation in the war could be enshrined for posterity" (qtd. Tippett 23). Not one of the groups of eyewitnesses to battles during the war, Hamilton was hired to paint the aftermath and her mission reflected some of the same sentiments expressed by Beaverbrook: "enshrine for posterity" the sites where Canadians engaged battle. Working upon the assumption that many of her paintings would be published in the veteran's magazine *The Gold Stripe*, Hamilton produced over 300 oil and watercolor images of the war-ravaged countryside. None were offered for sale; some were donated to veterans' families; and 227 were donated to the National Archives of Canada in 1926. In the scant writing about Hamilton's work, the paintings are variously referred to as part of "the pictorial history of Canada's part in the Great War" (Davis 7), "a record of devastation and sadness" (Davis 8), and "impressionistic" (qtd. Davis 7). In other words, her paintings not only offer the evidence of war, but also unabashedly affirm emotional responses to the spectacle of destruction. Hamilton herself described the images as memorials: "there is something of the suffering and heroism of the war in my pictures," she commented in an interview ("In Her Own Words" 1). She used words such as commemoration, memory, spirit, sacrifice, and heroism to emphasize the lasting effect she hoped to create in the images. These words seem to overdetermine the meaning of her work as memory; however, the paintings are also rhetorical acts of persuasion.

Hospitals, troops, ruins, and mauled roads figured prominently in the work of wartime artists; in *The Sadness of the Somme*, Hamilton focuses on the last of these iconic images. Critic Paul Gough, in his exploration of the imagination of landscape in the Great War, points out that a key iconographical element of representation of war was "the tree-lined road" (78).

The Sadness of the Somme, ca. 1920 by Mary Riter Hamilton (1873-1954).
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In other words, an important way of representing the human story of wartime action was through scene. The road was an image for "forward propulsion" of the soldiers and the idea of battle (78), while also serving as a metaphor for "the total loss of energy and direction" in the administration of the troops (79):

> [T]he avenue was absorbed into the active war zone. Here it was pulverised by shellfire and gradually over time was reduced to a bare, treeless road. In this middle stage the avenue's part in a national perspectival system came to be torn apart, its singular direction was replaced by confused and ambiguous directions, and its previous role as part of a formalised geometric groundplan was often submerged in the debris of No Man's Land. (Gough 79)

This conception of the "ages" of the road is significant, because it implies that the scene encodes some type of temporal movement. Readers of the scene in *The Sadness of the Somme* understand that they are looking on a time identified regionally as the valley of the present, circa 1919; but they are also conscious that this present encodes the memory of the past, to what the Somme River Valley was during four years of armed conflict and previ-

ous decades of peace. The strongest element of *The Sadness of the Somme* is its perspective, since the diagonal line of the road cuts from the lower right foreground to the horizon line. Although Hamilton's painting offers a single vantage point, it has the advantage of encoding different times: the time of creation, time of memory (of the soldiers who used the road in the past), the viewer's time, looking down to the road and experiencing vicariously the loneliness and desolation of the space. Thus, as James Heffernan says, the image offers viewers a simultaneous awareness of past and future. The mind compares the past of the war to the present of the emptiness and wretched environment (Heffernan 98). Due to the absence of human figures, the viewer is able to be the protagonist, ordering his or her own story. Certainly, the image has a compositional symmetry to it that invokes a kind of peace in the viewer. The conscious decision to eliminate pedestrian or vehicle traffic from the road emphasizes the near-eternal spatiality of the painting. It is manipulative in the sense that it is painted in such a way that it invokes the history of perspective, representational art, and mood. The road implies movement forward, while the absence of figures and somber tone envelope the scene in stillness.

To Gough's retrospective description of the stages of the road during the Great War, Hamilton offers a new perspective of the scene. The road is reasserted holistically, direct with purpose, metaphorically attesting to Europe's ability to move away from the very "sadness of the Somme" that the painting evokes. Hamilton is a Romantic; she does not represent the direct experience of the war—but commemorates broader concepts of heroism, sacrifice, and remembrance. It is important to note that Hamilton created the images after the war when families, official memorial committees, and even curious tourists were able to make pilgrimage to the Western Front. In contrast to painters such as Nevinson, her landscape or scene is not the active scene of battle or even the impressionistic reflection of the aftermath of a recently ended barrage with bodies not yet buried, but the battlefield already in memory. Past bleeds into the present of her images, the past of the remembered war merging with the present of the visualized scene. Hamilton worked in plein air, visiting Vimy Ridge and the Somme. She housed with residual Canadian military and with workers rebuilding roads and clearing the battlefields of bodies and bombs. Thus her knowledge of action was gleaned through story and remembrance.

Unlike Nevinson, Hamilton names this place, thereby invoking specific public memories of particular strategic offenses between the period July and November 1916. Yet, what strikes the observer is the virtual absence of material objects in the scene; its "reaches of distance" (to echo Said's conception of imaginative geography) are "vacant" (Said 55). In contrast to Nevinson's almost documentary realism, Hamilton's painting is more impressionistic, evoking almost a dreamscape of ochres and browns.

Denotatively, the elements are simple and spare: trees, a road, and a road-side hovel. Hamilton's work follows the picturesque tradition of a balanced composition, even going so far as to include a ruined hutch or shed in the immediately foreground. Whereas certain Great War paintings deliberately break with tradition, showing its emptiness, Hamilton's landscapes still pay homage to the idealized creations of the picturesque painters such as Claude Lorraine. And while *The Sadness of the Somme* invokes the tradition of landscape painting, it is not the idealized Arcadian image that is framed, but its opposite, nature destroyed by technology. Rather than the blasted trees of the Italianate sublime, Hamilton's blasted trees have suffered from the mechanics of war. Aesthetically and politically, viewers of this image place the painting into these traditions and see the painting rhetorically, as a display of the waste and destruction of war.

Conclusion

Considerations of the Burkean scene do more than just account for the context surrounding the work of art's subject and creation. While context is important, it is static. If scene is used as a method of rhetorical analysis, it can be limited in its efficacy if it is treated solely as a synonym for context. An understanding of scene as context enables us to understand some of the conditions for action, as each actor is embedded in a complex social situation—the scene—of official and personal relations. But conceiving of scene as part of a dynamic set of forces in the pentad (among act, agent, agency, and purpose) and as dynamically created and represented across the three interpretive positions under which a painting's rhetorical scene can be analyzed, restores Burkean scene to a central position as a tool in rhetorical analysis.

Rhetorical considerations of time, space, and action allow us to envision new contexts for understanding and enable us to continually animate visual artifacts in new persuasive conditions. Rhetorical practice involves the creators of visual and verbal materials; they may draw attention to or offer strategies for rectifying injustice (as did Nevinson's *Paths of Glory*) or to assuage individual and collective grief (as did Hamilton's *The Sadness of the Somme*).

Hamilton and Nevinson's images each present specific histories, individual scenes with actors and acts, yet they continue to impress anti-war sentiments upon viewers today in part because of their generality and greater applicability. Nevinson's soldiers are the Everyman of battle; Hamilton's empty road, shrouded in fog, invites public and private memory of sacrifice. Hamilton's work implies a transition in time from a rustic and arcadian *then* (before the war) to a dystopian *now* (after the war). However, as Burke (and after him, Roland Barthes) point out, each selection of meaning closes off other avenues of potential connotation, yet these other possibilities for

meaning remain in play. This is truer for Hamilton's image than Nevinson's. (In Nevinson's image, the bold presentation of the dead soldiers seems to force the viewer to accept the matter of fact nature of their death). Hamilton's fairly traditional road image is polysemic. The road can lead to hope or to ruin, depending on the cultural, practical, and personal disposition of the viewer. In addition, we cannot rule out the role of time in shaping how we understand the image's relation to witnessing. The knowledge of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and subsequent global conflicts affects our reading of any image produced during the Great War, as we recognize that this was not the proffered "war to end all wars."

Nevinson's and Hamilton's paintings also invoke presence and absence within the scene. Hamilton's *The Sadness of the Somme* is notable for the absence of any human life (actors), although their presence is implied in the past tense; the soldiers were once *here*. The painting emphasizes the presence of the road, the reassertion of the act of movement. Nevinson's *Paths of Glory*, by contrast, draws attention to the presence of the soldiers, whose absence of life implies the past tense of their role as actors in the scene. The road, in Nevinson's case, is absent: the soldiers are cut off from any navigable passage. They are isolated, caught, trapped, and interrupted by the rolls of barbed wire fencing demarcating No Man's Land. The avenue, to return to Gough's commentary, is "replaced by a confused and ambiguous" direction (79).

The painters bear different relationships to witnessing. Hamilton traveled to Belgium and France after the war, had no direct experience with battle, and thus painted the aftermath. She relied on what the landscape—the scene itself—told her, as well as oral accounts from field workers and published official accounts in the press. Nevinson, on the other hand, saw active service as an ambulance driver and painted from direct experience. His was a physical and sensory experience of the landscape and battle, experienced through smell, touch, sound, taste, and sight. Whereas in Hamilton's work time is implied as the future of recurring memory, in Nevinson's, time is the endlessly recurring aftermath of battle and the cycle of death and destruction wrought by war.

Both *Paths of Glory* and *The Sadness of the Somme* are paintings about location or scene for they call to mind the terrible events that transpired at the sites they render. These representational works attempted to account for the loss of life during the war, commemorate the scene where life was sacrificed, and, in that accounting, refused to forget action or place. In each painting, viewers—the audience—are invited inside the frame of the picture; furthermore, it is the anticipation of an audience that creates the need for the image. In the future, the spaces and deeds represented within the frame will be remembered: the material fact of the painting signals that these events hold significance beyond the immediate time and space.

Notes

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