Anthem for Marginalised Narratives: The Relationship Between Cultural Memory and Homosexual Narratives in Historical War Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between cultural memory and historical war fiction. In order to do so, it focuses in particular on works of historical fiction regarding the First and Second World War that highlight homosexual narratives. Alice Winn's *In Memoriam* and Louis de Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* are novels that function as examples of such historical fiction. The thesis explores how these selected novels engage with premediations and multi-perspectivity in order to reflect on the established framework of cultural memory regarding warfare, gender, and homosexuality. It aims to demonstrate that *In Memoriam* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* practice performativity through their reinterpretation of the canon of cultural memory and traditional forms of cultural memory formation to emphasise their homosexual narratives. Furthermore, this study will show that the novels provide critical reflections upon the exclusionary processes of constructing cultural memory.

Keywords: cultural memory, homosexual narratives, historical war fiction, performativity, remembering, gender

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Introduction

In Arlesey, a small town in England, a single statue serves as a war memorial for the First and Second World War. [1] The statue portrays a soldier standing to attention, resting his hands on top of his rifle which is pointing down. His head is bowed down ever so slightly as a commemorative gesture. The observer is forced to look up at the statue as it is placed on a column that lists the names of those who fell in the various battles of the wars. Therefore, it conveys that the observer is supposed to respect this soldier. Furthermore, the soldier is portrayed in a masculine manner. This is not only communicated through his strong stance, but also through the phallic shape of the rifle that is positioned in front of him.

This masculine, commemorating soldier has become a key icon in British society's cultural memory of war. It therefore reflects British national identity, for Timothy Ashplant argues that "one of the central tasks of the nation-state in war commemoration is to maintain or secure the unity of the 'imagined (national) community'," [2] indicating the importance of the cultural memory of war for national identity formation. Aleida Assmann defines cultural memory as a man-made "temporal framework that transcends the individual life span relating past, present, and future." [3] Such a framework becomes increasingly important once a society loses direct access to the lived memory of war, as is the case for the First and Second World War, for instance. As those who lived through these wars are sadly passing away, we lose our access to direct memory and increasingly have to rely on the constructed framework, which

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[1] "Arlesey – WW1 and WW2," Imperial War Museums: War Memorials Register, accessed June 13, 2025, https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/1924.
[2] Timothy G. Ashplant, "War Commemoration in Western Europe: Changing Meanings, Divisive Loyalties, Unheard Voices," in *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory*, eds. Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 263.
[3] Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 97. https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9783110207262.2.97.

consists of "a number of cultural messages that are addressed to posterity and intended for continuous repetition and re-use."[4] It therefore functions along the lines of "prosthetic memory," which Alison Landsberg states provides "an intimate relationship to memories of events through which one did not live."[5] This form of memory is constructed, derived from media interpretations, adaptable, and useful in "generating empathy and articulating an ethical relation to the other."[6]

The constructed nature of cultural memory has frequently caused its contents to be contested. The memory of war has often been used for political purposes, much like prosthetic memory,[7] as it may be framed to present a certain group in society "as a legitimate element within the nation-state."[8] This has often happened alongside the suppression of alternative representations and memories of war that challenge dominant societal perceptions.[9] Homosexuality, for example, does not frequently occur in the memory of war as a result of the larger "interest in portraying the Army and Navy as highly masculine and heterosexual institutions."[10] In an attempt to gain recognition for such underrepresented and marginalised stories, the dominant narrative that is perpetuated within official commemorations has been questioned in various artistic forms.[11]

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[4] Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 99.
[5] Alison Landsberg, "Prosthetic Memory: The Ethics and Politics of Memory in an Age of Mass Culture," in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 148. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jfm0.12.
[6] Landsberg, 149.
[7] Landsberg, 150.
[8] Ashplant, "War Commemoration in Western Europe," 267.
[9] Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," in *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory*, eds. Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 13.
[10] Natalie Marena Nobitz, ""We Have to Do the Things They Tell Us" – Nation, Masculinity and War," in *History's Queer Stories: Retrieving and Navigating Homosexuality in British Fiction about the Second World War* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2018), 143. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839445433-005.
[11] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 32.

This thesis will investigate the relationship between the neglected representation of homosexual narratives/memories in the cultural memory of the two world wars, and their representation in works of historical fiction of war. Contemporary historical fiction, in particular, has often been used to reflect upon the established framework of cultural memory, as it can "at once immerse us in historical particularity and the quotidian realities of former eras but also question unified and normative views of the past."[12] It therefore has a unique position in its ability to both remember the past and question its dominant cultural memory. Two works that make full use of this unique position are Alice Winn's *In Memoriam* (2023)[13] and Louis de Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (1994).[14] This thesis will investigate the relationship between cultural memory, historical fiction, and these novels' representations of homosexuality in order to answer the following question: How do Alice Winn's *In Memoriam* and Louis de Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* reflect upon the selectivity of cultural memory and processes of memory construction in relation to the representation of homosexuals in the memory of the First and Second World War? In doing so, the following sub-questions will be taken into consideration: To what extent do the novels incorporate or subvert the established memory framework of the two world wars in order to highlight homosexual narratives? and how do the novels engage with processes of cultural memory formation in order to present it for critical review? To highlight the importance of these questions it is relevant to investigate the relationship between memory and historical fiction in more detail.

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[12] Anne Fogarty, "Memory and Counter-Memory in Contemporary Irish Historical Fictions: Lia Mills' *Fallen* (2015), Mary Morrissy's *The Rising of Bella Casey* (2016) and Emma Donoghue's *The Pull of the Stars* (2020)," *Irish Studies Review* 30, no. 4 (2022): 425. https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2022.2129348.
[13] Alice Winn, *In Memoriam* (London: Penguin Books, 2024).
[14] Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (London: Vintage, 2018).

The political nature of the cultural memory of war has caused it to become fractured. There is the "official memory" of the war, which includes the "dominant or hegemonic narratives which underpin and help to organize the remembrance and commemoration of war at the level of the nation-state."[15] Such memory is thus often presented at larger, national commemorations, such as Remembrance Day in the United Kingdom. It often describes the masculinity that belongs to the ideal soldier.[16] In general, the active soldier is often portrayed in a "tough and heroic" manner,[17] whereas those who refuse to fight are often described as "weak and effeminate."[18] This is reflected in Siegfried Sassoon's "Repression of War Experience" (1918),[19] for instance, in which the individual who refuses to enlist is presented as a stay-at-home coward.[20] This emphasises the brave, masculine portrayal of the active soldier while those who did not fight were considered to be spineless.

This is a result of the nation's political needs to be perceived as a strong and virile nation, as returns in many war-time propaganda imagery. An example of this is the World War One propaganda poster tells British men to "step into your place,"[21] depicting a large line of men from various backgrounds slowly turning into soldiers as they march forward.[22] The various jobs that are depicted in the men's outfits highlight the idea of a complex masculine army that can tackle any challenge. The presentation of the nation as a self-sufficient, strong country became even more prevalent in the aftermath of the Second World War in which the memory of the war was used to "mask the decline of the Empire and the economic and

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[15] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 22.
[16] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 21.
[17] Nobitz, "We Have to Do the Things They Tell Us," 136.
[18] Nobitz, 136.
[19] Siegfried Sassoon, "Repression of War Experience," in *Counter-Attack and Other Poems* (London: William Heinemann, 1918), 51-53.
[20] Sassoon, 51-53.
[21] "First World War Recruitment Posters," Imperial War Museums: Learning Resources, accessed June 13, 2025, https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources/first-world-war-recruitment-posters.
[22] "First World War Recruitment Posters." Imperial War Museums: Learning Resources.

political decline of Britain as a world power."[23] As a result, official memory becomes a means for a nation-state to represent itself as a strong power through portrayals of idealised masculinity, demonstrating the gender politics that lie at the core of the memory of war.

However, this is not the only kind of memory of war. It is merely more accessible. Jefferson Singer and Martin Conway explain that if memory "is available it does not follow that it is at any given time accessible."[24] Official memory is made accessible as it is frequently represented in various commemorations by the nation-state or other institutions, but there may be different memory narratives available. The underlying politics of this accessibility causes a contestation of official memory as non-dominant groups in society hope to have their narratives recognised.[25] These groups' memories are considered part of the "sectional memory" of a given war, indicating that they "have achieved the level of open public articulation,"[26] but "have not yet secured recognition within the existing framework of official memory."[27] This is particularly true for homosexual narratives within the memory of war. The homosexual soldier clashes with the highly masculine, heterosexual ideal of the soldier that sits at the core of the nation's representation of the soldier in war commemorations.

Therefore, homosexual narratives are often found in the sectional memory of war, receiving little to no attention in the larger framework of war memory. In the postmodern era, however, marginalised perspectives have received more and more attention,[28] hinting at a

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[23] Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, "Introduction: 'Keep Calm and Carry On': The Cultural Memory of the Second World War in Britain," in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, eds. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 12. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350214583.ch-001.
[24] Jefferson A. Singer and Martin A. Conway, "Should we forget forgetting?" *Memory Studies* 1, no. 3 (2008): 280. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698008093793.
[25] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 16.
[26] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 20.
[27] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 20.
[28] Gavriel Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask "What If?": Reflections on the Function of Alternate History," *History & Theory* 41, no. 4 (2002): 92. https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/1468-2303.00222.

growing shift in the balance between official and sectional memory. It is possible that previously suppressed narratives, such as those of homosexual soldiers, will gain more recognition over the course of time. Thus, while there is a hierarchical difference between official and sectional memory, it does not mean that this difference cannot be overcome.

This change is exemplified by the representations of narratives of the sectional memory of war in post-war artistic productions. One of the most common forms of media in which this occurs is that of the historical fiction novel. For instance, the *Regeneration* trilogy by Dame Pat Barker (1991-1995) includes several homosexual characters who struggle with their identity and the pointlessness of the First World War.[29] Another example is Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1951), where the main character is a homosexual army officer who struggles with his inability to adhere to the traditional image of the masculine soldier.[30] These novels, just like other historical fiction novels, enable their readers to experience the past while also presenting a different view on it.[31] Such works contribute to the perpetuation of the cultural memory of war, considering that recurrent representations of war, such as those in popular culture, can ensure "that even those who were born in its aftermath have particular 'memories' of it."[32] As Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney explain, works of historical fiction can therefore "provide an important bridge between generations."[33] These works thus contribute to the perpetuation of the cultural memory of wars, but they also provide new perspectives that help to highlight the sectional memory of wars.

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[29] Christopher Bond, "Gnosis and the Sexual Transgressive in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* Trilogy," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 57, no. 1 (2016): 1. https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2015.1019400.
[30] Nobitz, "We Have to Do the Things They Tell Us," 135-136.
[31] Fogarty, "Memory and Counter-Memory in Contemporary Irish Historical Fictions," 424.
[32] Noakes and Pattinson, "Introduction: 'Keep Calm and Carry On'," 1.
[33] Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction," *European Journal of English Studies* 10, no. 2 (2006): 112. https://doi.org/10.1080/13825570600753394.

Previous research has explored the relationship between the marginalised narrative of the homosexual soldier and topics of masculinity. For instance, Nobitz has analysed the struggle of the homosexual to fit in with "the military as a masculine institution representing the ideals of the nation" in Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy*.[34] While such research questions the image of the ideal masculine soldier, it does not frequently reflect upon the fact that works of historical fiction can also function as the means to reflect upon the creation and perpetuation of cultural memory.[35] Novels such as Barker's and Baxter's reflect upon and contest the established memory by using homosexual characters to deviate from the norm and "enable a re-negotiation of gender and sexuality,"[36] but historical fiction can also delve further into the neglected representation of marginalised narratives by investigating the creation of cultural memory itself. Works of historical fiction demonstrate the fickle nature of memory and its construction, by showcasing to the reader "how history when fictionally re-imagined unsettles our preconceptions,"[37] and "thwarts our sense of command over the past."[38] Historical fiction thus perpetuates cultural memory while at the same time being critical of it.

This form of criticism is best explained through Judith Butler's ideas on performativity. In describing identity expression, Butler states that "performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power."[39] This is a concept that can be applied to historical fiction about war as well, for it often incorporates elements of the official memory of war, but at the same time uses these to be critical of this memory, being "a medium that

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[34] Nobitz, "We Have to Do the Things They Tell Us," 135-136.
[35] Erll and Rigney, "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction," 113.
[36] Nobitz, "We Have to Do the Things They Tell Us," 145.
[37] Fogarty, "Memory and Counter-Memory in Contemporary Irish Historical Fictions," 426.
[38] Fogarty, 426.
[39] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 2011), 184. https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/chapters/mono/10.4324/9780203828274-12/critically-queer-judith-butler?context=ubx&refId=93e767f4-a25a-4998-9ea6-c9294777c2b4.

simultaneously builds and observes memory."[40] Butler points out such an adherence to the restrictive system is not voluntary,[41] nor does it mean that this new representation of the memory of war is "reducible to those dominant forms."[42] This highlights that while historical fiction may include elements of the established cultural memory, it is not unable to critique this memory. Therefore, historical fictions can reflect upon the selectivity of the largely established memory by highlighting new perspectives and reflecting upon the creation of cultural memory itself.

This thesis will investigate the relationship between cultural memory and historical fiction when it comes to the representation of homosexual identities. In doing so, it will keep in mind Butler's theory of performativity, considering that established forms of cultural memory are thus strongly tied to historical fiction both in terms of its preservation and its reinterpretation. Winn's *In Memoriam* and Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* centre around the First and Second World War respectively. These time periods were chosen as the remembrance of these wars consists of an increasing reliance on the cultural memory of these two wars as a consequence of the death of the generation who directly experienced them.

In order to provide an answer to the previously-outlined research questions, this thesis will explore the relationship between cultural memory, historical fiction, and homosexual narratives over the course of three chapters. It will provide a close reading of both Alice Winn's *In Memoriam* and Louis de Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, focusing in particular on their reflections upon cultural memory. The thesis will aim to demonstrate how premediations and multiperspectivity contribute to the novels' performativity, enabling them

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[40] Astrid Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 391. https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9783110207262.6.389.
[41] Butler, "Critically Queer," 184.
[42] Butler, 184.

to critique the formation and selectivity of cultural memory from within its restrictive system. In order to do so, the first chapter will present the theoretical framework surrounding cultural memory, its construction, and its perpetuation. In chapter two, this thesis will delve into the premediations of the First and Second World War. It will also focus on the two novels' engagement with the established memory frameworks of these wars and its subsequent critiques on them regarding the position of homosexuals within existing memory regimes/narratives. Finally, chapter three will investigate various processes of cultural memory construction that the novels engage with, focusing on how the discussion of these processes reflects upon the representation of homosexual narratives by, for instance, engaging with multi-perspectivity.

Chapter One – Theoretical Framework

1.1 The processes of cultural memory construction

The growing importance of the cultural memory of war begs for a deeper investigation into its construction. First and foremost, cultural memory formation is a social practice in which "society as a whole remembers, and makes sense of things."[43] It can reflect the past and contemplate the future,[44] while at the same time reinterpreting the past according to "present knowledge and needs."[45] Thus, as society establishes cultural memory, it becomes a reflection of that society's agendas and values. This is emphasised by the bidirectional nature of cultural memory in which it is dependent on individual memory. An individual's memory is reinforced by the recurrent representation of certain images within cultural memory, whereas cultural memory depends on the individual memories of the general public for "recognition and validation."[46] Cultural memory is thus both constructed and affected by a specific society at a specific point in time. This is relevant when it comes to the cultural memory of war, especially that of the First and Second World War, for the cultural memory of these wars is increasingly artificial as it is both made and affected by a society without any personal experience of these events. It is therefore important to investigate the interplay between society's ability to influence and be influenced by cultural memory.

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[43] Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan, "Collective Memory: Theory and Politics," *Social Semiotics* 22, no. 2 (2012): 145. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2012.664969.
[44] Patrick O'Donovan, "Common Culture and Creativity: Forgetting and Remembering in the Cultural Theory of Michel de Certeau," in *Cultural Memory: Essays on European Literature and History*, eds. Edric Caldicott and Anne Fuchs (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 317.
[45] Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 5. https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9783110207262.0.1.
[46] Noakes and Pattinson, "Introduction: 'Keep Calm and Carry On'," 4.

Much like the memory of an individual, cultural memory is not limitless. It has to find a balance between forgetting and remembering,[47] which is a highly selective process due to cultural memory's "notorious shortage of space."[48] In the public sphere, this causes a constant contest as to which aspects of history are included in cultural memory. Aleida Assmann elaborates on this tension by dividing cultural memory into a "canon"[49] and an "archive."[50] The canon of cultural memory is that aspect of it which is repeatedly made accessible to the next generation.[51] Its active representation ensures the preservation of "the past as present,"[52] indicating that the canon consists of those aspects of memory that align with the ideologies of present-day society.

The archive of cultural memory is less accessible yet still available, as it is "a space that is located on the border between forgetting and remembering."[53] Assmann describes the archive as a storage room for information that represents "the past as past."[54] In this instance, the repeated narratives in the canon of cultural memory are thus more accessible than the narratives one can find in its archive, as physical archives usually are controlled by "institutions of power,"[55] and thus not readily accessible. Singer and Conway explain that they believe information related to the memory of a particular event is never completely gone, but that it may come at various levels of accessibility, where some narratives are more accessible than others.[56] The information in the archive is therefore never fully forgotten, but it is also not easily remembered. It is available, but not easily accessed. This distinction

[47] Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 97.
[48] Assmann, 100.
[49] Assmann, 98.
[50] Assmann, 98.
[51] Assmann, 100.
[52] Assmann, 98.
[53] Assmann, 103.
[54] Assmann, 98.
[55] Assmann, 102.
[56] Singer and Conway, "Should we forget forgetting?" 280.

between the different aspects of cultural memory highlights the tensions within society regarding its selection of materials. There is a lot more information available than can be actively circulated, and the selection of narratives that are incorporated in the canon tends to be largely based on a society's motives and ideologies,[57] which indicates the political function that cultural memory can serve.

Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan state that "the constitution of memory is above all a terrain of cultural politics,"[58] which is why they argue for a distinction between history and collective memory.[59] They believe that this distinction will allow us to compare historical fact and collective memory in a way that demonstrates how collective memory is affected by the power structures within a particular society,[60] demonstrating its possible functionality as a means to contradict the established canon that is perpetuated in national commemorations. Astrid Erll, however, argues that such a distinction does not benefit the analysis of representations of the past in culture.[61] Instead, she suggests that it is more important to focus on a means of representation that "proceeds from the basic insight that the past is not given, but must instead continually be re-constructed and re-presented."[62] It is therefore not the differences between historical fact and cultural memory that demonstrate political influences, but rather the representation of historical fact within cultural memory that does. This is why Erll believes that "cultural memory hinges on the notion of the medial,"[63] for this is the way in which many representations of the past are shared.[64] It is therefore important to investigate the representation of history in media in order to explain the construction of cultural memory.

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[57] Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," 5.
[58] Weedon and Jordan, "Collective Memory: Theory and Politics," 144.
[59] Weedon and Jordan, 146.
[60] Weedon and Jordan, 146-147.
[61] Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," 7.
[62] Erll, 7.
[63] Erll, 12.
[64] Erll, 12-13.

Historical events have frequently been portrayed in (popular) media. As a result of this, many people have become familiar with certain representations of the past that are constantly perpetuated. Erll refers to these repeated representations as "remediation,"[65] explaining that particular representations of historical events are repeated across a variety of media,[66] leading to a "canon of existent medial constructions,"[67] which often do not reflect history accurately.[68] The familiarity of the reader/viewer with these constructions is their "premediation,"[69] which consists of all that they have seen presented to them about a certain event or similar events before.[70] This means that certain ideas about a particular event in the past are constantly perpetuated, a practice that is not dissimilar to the construction of the canon of cultural memory. As certain perspectives on historical events are consistently represented, the premediation of the readers/viewers will affect the remediation and vice versa,[71] creating an infinite loop in which society and memory continually affect each other, even in medial representations of events as opposed to official commemorations. The larger dominant framework of the memory of war thus also depends on its "capacity to connect with and articulate particular popular conceptions, whilst actively silencing or marginalising others."[72] These representations are therefore just as important to cultural memory as any representation of the past within official memory.

[65] Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 392.
[66] Erll, 392.
[67] Erll, 392.
[68] Erll, 392.
[69] Erll, 392.
[70] Erll, 392.
[71] Erll, 395.
[72] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 13.

1.2 Historical fiction and its relation to processes of cultural memory formation

Cultural memory is impacted by various kinds of medial representations. Literature has an important effect on both individual and collective memory.[73] As previously explained, historical fiction, in particular, is relevant when it comes to cultural memory, both regarding the perpetuation and reinterpretation of cultural memory. This is highlighted by the fact that many works of historical fiction make use of "a multi-perspectival narration or focalization,"[74] which can "provide insight into the memories of several narrative instances or figures and in this way they can reveal the functioning and problems of collective memory-creation."[75] It is therefore relevant to investigate the integration of cultural memory within historical fiction, as well as historical fiction's possibilities for (critical) commentary on cultural memory.

Similar to many medial representations of historical events, historical fiction does not always strictly adhere to historical fact. Though this historical infidelity has been criticised by many historians,[76] it is an important tool in the perpetuation of cultural memory, for it has a "potential to generate and mold images of the past which will be retained by whole generations."[77] However, works of art such as historical fiction may also present narratives that go against the generally established canon.[78] Novels can do this in a very effective manner by allowing their readers to empathise with narratives of the past that also question the established memory of a particular event.[79] Thus, while historical fiction draws on the

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[73] Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 396.
[74] Birgit Neumann, "The Literary Representation of Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 338. https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9783110207262.5.333.
[75] Neumann, 338.
[76] Fogarty, "Memory and Counter-Memory in Contemporary Irish Historical Fiction," 437.
[77] Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 389.
[78] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 32.
[79] Fogarty, "Memory and Counter-Memory in Contemporary Irish Historical Fiction," 425.

canon of cultural memory to establish its story, it can also use this canon to provide a reflection on the selectivity of cultural memory.

On the one hand, this can refer to an investigation of the tensions between canon and archive, official and sectional memory. Historical fiction can present new perspectives that "can offer socially excluded groups a sense of ownership, which can empower through positive identification."[80] This is relevant for the memory of war as well, for there are many marginalised individuals who have tried to achieve a sense of belonging by connecting their stories to those in the official memory of war.[81] Historical fiction can thus represent the past from a marginalised perspective in order to connect marginalised communities to the memory of a particular event in order to help them develop their sense of self. On the other hand, historical fiction can also expose the imbalanced power relations that lie at the core of the distinction between canon and archive, as it can reflect the artificial nature of cultural memory in an unsettling manner.[82] It is therefore clear that historical fiction does not only maintain cultural memory, but that it can also reinterpret or investigate cultural memory, particularly regarding its inclusion or exclusion of marginalised groups and identities.

Historical fiction's continuing engagement with hegemonic aspects of cultural memory is necessary for its ability to influence its hierarchical organisation. The success of such an effort is dependent on the familiarity of reader to the setting, where a higher sense of familiarity leads to an easier acceptance of new elements.[83] It is therefore important that works of historical fiction appeal to the readers' premediation of the events they discuss. This will then allow these works to incorporate the narratives of marginalised groups and identities, while at the same time keeping the reader close to the story due to their familiarity

[80] Weedon and Jordan, "Collective Memory: Theory and Politics," 150.
[81] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 12.
[82] Fogarty, "Memory and Counter-Memory in Irish Historical Fictions," 426.
[83] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 20-21.

with the material. This is then a form of Judith Butler's performativity, where the narratives of historical fiction novels are embedded in this larger, more restrictive framework of the canon of cultural memory out of necessity, while at the same time opening the way for marginalised narratives.

Cultural memory is thus strongly tied to historical fiction both in terms of its preservation and its reformation. It is particularly interesting to analyse this alongside the memory of the First and Second World War, as war commemoration is of particular importance to society. The memories of these two wars have been frequently remediated, leaving the audience with a certain premediation that reflects the general setting and any ideas regarding gender and sexuality. It is therefore interesting to see how historical fiction can incorporate the narratives of marginalised identities within such a well-established canon. An analysis of historical fictions' engagement with their audiences' premediation will provide further insights into the relationship between cultural memory and historical fiction while at the same time providing insights into how the relationship between these two can serve to highlight marginalised narratives, such as is the case in *In Memoriam* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. The next chapter will examine the audience's premediation of the First and Second World War, and how this relates to the novels' representation of homosexual narratives within this time period.

Chapter Two – The Memory of War and the Representation of Homosexual Narratives in Historical Fiction

All works of historical fiction are affected by their audiences' premediation of the historical events they discuss. The constant remediation of certain historical events has created a framework that consists of recurring "narratives and images circulating in a media culture,"[84] that "create images of the past which resonate with cultural memory."[85] It can therefore be argued that these remediations have become an important aspect in the perpetuation of cultural memory's canon alongside national commemorations, with Erll referring to the process of remediation as creating "a canon of existent medial constructions."[86] This canon is the framework to which many refer in their premediation when engaging with new representations of certain events,[87] and thus subsequently a canon in which these new representations have to position themselves. This is partially a consequence of the idea that "familiarity sells."[88] Ann-Marie Einhaus explains that works have to generally match the audience's expectations regarding certain historical events, but that they can also incorporate some elements that do not align with the audience's expectations.[89]

However, it is not just commercial success that drives a novel's engagement with premediations. It is important for novels that intend to highlight underrepresented narratives that their stories align with the audience's expectations, for it is believed that representations of narratives derived from sectional memory should " be distinct from, but not necessarily

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[84] Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 392.
[85] Erll, 389.
[86] Erll, 392.
[87] Erll, 392.
[88] Ann-Marie Einhaus, "Cultural Memory, Teaching and Contemporary Writing about the First World War," *Literature & History* 25, no. 2 (2016): 197. https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0306197316668055.
[89] Einhaus, 197.

inimical to" the larger established framework.[90] Adherence to this framework and to common premediations ensures that these narratives may be more easily accepted within these established forms of memory,[91] but the familiarity that the readers experience as a consequence also enables them to connect with the story more easily. Both Winn's *In Memoriam* and Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* incorporate aspects of their readers' premediation in order to put focus on the narrative of homosexuality during the time of the First and Second World War respectively.

Natalie Nobitz explains that "homosexual war narratives can significantly broaden the canon of war literature by challenging dominant perceptions of military masculinity as tough and heroic,"[92] but Ann-Marie Einhaus states that they may also make use of the dominant framework of memory to invoke pity, leading to representations with "small, incremental changes to the war's cultural memory."[93] Thus, Bernières' and Winn's novels can at the same time adhere to and question the established canon of their historical settings, reflecting the principles of performativity. This chapter will investigate premediations of the First and Second World War, and will then analyse how these are incorporated or contested to highlight the homosexual narratives within *In Memoriam* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.

2.1 Well-established premediations

The First World War has been remediated many times across various types of media and therefore has a well-established canon. Upon analysing media that represent the First World War, Ross J. Wilson notices how the imagery used is not strictly derived "from the battlefields

[90] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 20.
[91] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 20-21.
[92] Nobitz, "We Have to Do the Things They Tell Us," 136.
[93] Einhaus, "Cultural Memory, Teaching, and Contemporary Writing about the First World War," 198.

themselves but through the representations of the conflict after 1918."[94] He notes three major returning elements in the representation of the First World War, the first of which is the "suffering of soldiers,"[95] referring to the experiences of frontline soldiers who suffered through the disillusionment with the war and their distance from home.[96] Wilson furthermore notes the "desolated battlefields,"[97] which highlight the destructive properties of war both on the landscape and those fighting in it.[98] In representations of the First World War, this is often depicted in the form of scenes of trench warfare, for instance. Together, these two elements strongly contribute to the general focus within contemporary works of historical war fiction to structure their narratives around the "core ideas of suffering and futility,"[99] which at the same time "reveals an ingrained reliance on an already established master narrative about the war."[100] Lastly, Wilson mentions the "witness perspective" that many representations provide,[101] forcing the reader/viewer to "carry the burden of memory" as they get a first-hand account of the war through the chosen focaliser.[102]

Besides Wilson's returning elements, contemporary war commemoration is often affected by the myth of the war, which places emphasis on "the values of heroism, patriotism, camaraderie, [and] sacrifice."[103] It is a combination of these values and the recurring core

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[94] Ross J. Wilson, "It Still Goes On: Trauma and the Memory of the First World War," in *The Great War in Post-Memory Literature and Film*, eds. Martin Löschnigg and Marzena Sokolowska-Paryz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 44. https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9783110363029.427.
[95] Wilson, 47.
[96] Wilson, 47.
[97] Wilson, 47.
[98] Wilson, 47.
[99] Einhaus, "Cultural Memory, Teaching, and Contemporary Writing about the First World War," 196.
[100] Einhaus, 196.
[101] Wilson, "It Still Goes On: Trauma and the Memory of the First World War," 47.
[102] Wilson, 47.
[103] Tom Quinn, "Rewriting Memory: The Great War in Céline's *Voyage au Bout de la Nuit*," in *Cultural Memory: Essays on European Literature and History*, eds. Edric Caldicott and Anne Fuchs (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 351.

aspects as outlined by Wilson that make up the well-established, mediated canon of the First World War.

Much like the First World War, the Second World War has also frequently been remediated. Over the course of the years, the Holocaust has become the biggest element of the memory of the Second World War.[104] It has featured as a prominent aspect of many representations of the war across various media, but it is not the sole element that defines World War Two. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson explain that the common imagery of this war is derived from "both *personal* memories and narratives of war as well as *publicly* produced war memories."[105] This is particularly fitting for the Second World War, which has also often been referred to as "the People's War," a term that directs attention to "certain national characteristics as well as civil duty and community spirit."[106] It reflects the representations that show that "the whole population 'pulled together' to 'do their bit' in order to secure victory, obeying official instructions to 'stand firm' and 'carry on'."[107] This is reflected in many propaganda posters of the Second World War that, for instance, ask people to donate their clothes or ensure they stay safe during air raids.[108] Thus, a combination of the horrors of the Holocaust and the enhancement of community and collaboration as a result of the war feature prominently in the memory of the Second World War.

However, there are common trends that occur in both memories and thus premediations. For instance, the memory of war generally depends on the "idealized figure of

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[104] Noakes and Pattinson, "Introduction," 2.
[105] Noakes and Pattinson, 3.
[106] Jessica Hammett, "The People's War," in *Creating the People's War: Civil Defence Communities in Second World War Britain* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2022), 99. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2tp73p7.7.
[107] Hammett, 73.
[108] "Second World War Posters," Imperial War Museums: Learning Resources, accessed June 14, 2025, https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources/second-world-war-posters.

the masculine soldier."[109] Furthermore, it frequently centres itself around certain narratives. Brian Puaca and Shizue Osa point out that these narratives of the Second World War are often affected by "the universal allure of victimhood and the unifying effects of a memory concentrating on shared suffering."[110] Einhaus notes that this is common in representations of the First World War too as "pity and a desire to honour the dead offer an easy emotional point of access regardless of direct personal or family links to the war."[111] The general memory regarding both wars therefore builds strongly on a feeling of pity for those who lived through them. In Winn's *In Memoriam* and Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, this feeling of pity becomes connected to the homosexual narratives in their stories as these texts navigate the illegality or disapproval of homosexuality in their respective time periods. They furthermore use and subvert the audience's premediation to highlight the narrative of homosexuality within the cultural memory of war.

2.2 Engaging with premediations of war

Winn's *In Memoriam*, largely set in the period of the First World War, frequently engages with the common elements that return in the representation of this war as outlined by Wilson.[112] Henry Gaunt ironically writes in his letter to his friend and future lover Sidney Ellwood that "We had reached a point in history where we believed it was possible to make war humane."[113] The quote indicates Gaunt's great disillusionment with the war after his first

[109] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, "The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration," 21.
[110] Brian M. Puaca and Shizue Osa, "The Memory and Commemoration of War," in *The Oxford Handbook of World War II*, eds. G. Kurt Piehler and Jonathan A. Grant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 612. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199341795.013.26.
[111] Einhaus, "Cultural Memory, Teaching, and Contemporary Writing about the First World War," 190.
[112] Wilson, "It Still Goes On: Trauma and the Memory of the First World War," 47.
[113] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 75.

interaction with the use of gas. His disillusionment is emphasised by the graphic descriptions of the trenches that return throughout the novel, such as the description of the sand bags that had become "a sickening mixture of sand and gut-smeared earth,"[114] that covered "passers-by with gore and maggots."[115]

It is when Ellwood joins the war that the disillusionment becomes even clearer. Ellwood has always been more in favour of the war than Gaunt was, believing much more strongly in the myth of war. He writes to Gaunt at one point stating, "I can't tell you how glad I am to be alive and young when we are. A war is what we needed."[116] In another letter he states that he wishes he could join Gaunt at the front.[117] In one of his letters, Ellwood quotes William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers!",[118] highlighting Ellwood's belief in an romantic war that is surrounded by the value of camaraderie. However, Ellwood, too, eventually becomes disillusioned with the war. His earlier love for poetry fades as the war progresses, until such a point where Ellwood's poems about the war feature in newspapers, yet "He didn't care about the poems, one way or another. He merely cut away the blackened, gangrenous bits of his soul and sold them."[119] The use of the terms "blackened" and "gangrenous" highlight how Ellwood's perspective on war has slowly been poisoned by his actual experience of it. *In Memoriam* thus makes its homosexual characters suffer through the disillusionment with the war.

In doing so, the novel thus incorporates elements of the established memory of the war, such as the hardship of the trenches and frontline poetry, combining them with the first-hand perspectives of its focalisers Ellwood and Gaunt. The subsequent feelings of pity that

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[114] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 92.
[115] Winn, 92.
[116] Winn, 32.
[117] Winn, 39.
[118] Winn, 39.
[119] Winn, 316.

may arise in such occasions according to Einhaus can then serve to enable "attempts to shed light on perceived neglected aspects of war within the established framework of the disillusionment narrative."[120]

This is further emphasised by the scene in which Gaunt and Ellwood meet again after a gruelling battle. In a moment of passion and relief they kiss one another and forget their surroundings.[121] The characters' relief is palpable, but so is their dread when they are caught by Burgoyne, an old schoolmate who has served as a minor antagonist throughout the novel. The most striking example of this is when the reader learns that Burgoyne threw Ellwood's poems in a fire.[122] Ellwood describes his poems as "the thoughts and hopes of years, the records of my growing soul, the truest version of me!"[123] Burgoyne's choice to then throw these poems in the fire does not only reflect a petty schoolboys' feud, but it also reflects an erasure of or disagreement with Ellwood's identity and Ellwood knows "Burgoyne has his opinions" regarding his behaviour.[124] Burgoyne is therefore implicitly representing a homophobic reaction to Ellwood and Gaunt's homosexual narratives, which is only emphasised further as Burgoyne makes the call to send Gaunt and Ellwood on an impossible mission to cross the trenches and take a German soldier hostage.[125] Gaunt describes this assignment as "murder,"[126] telling fellow soldier David Hayes, who believes they might make it back, "I rather think the point is that we won't."[127] The audience's premediation of the war enables them to realise that Gaunt might be right. This, in combination with the realisation

[120] Einhaus, "Cultural Memory, Teaching, and Contemporary Writing about the First World War," 198.
[121] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 138-139.
[122] Winn, 49.
[123] Winn, 43.
[124] Winn, 43.
[125] Winn, 141.
[126] Winn, 142.
[127] Winn, 143.

that Ellwood and Gaunt are essentially being punished for their love, can generate a sense of empathy for the homosexual narratives presented in the novel.

This is returns in Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. Though many representations of World War Two feature the Holocaust and a resilient community which contributes to the war effort, this is not the case for Carlo Guercio's narrative. Upon his first letter, the reader learns that Carlo is homosexual as he writes about his inability to fall in love with a woman, stating "How can I decide to desire women, any more than I can suddenly decide to enjoy eating anchovies, which I have always detested?"[128] His letters guide the reader through his narrative, in which he suffers through various horrible circumstances, including a winter in horrid conditions as he has to keep himself warm "by cutting out the brains of dying mules and putting them in our helmets."[129] The reader is also told about the death of the man Carlo was in love with, Francesco, who "took two hours to die."[130] These events are described in graphic detail, and within Carlo's writing, his disillusionment with the war frequently returns. For instance, he writes, "War is a wonderful thing. In movies and in books,"[131] indicating that experiencing actual warfare has made him think of it differently. He directly addresses this when he writes, "I had gone into the war a romantic, and had come out of it desolate, dismal and forlorn."[132] Much like Gaunt and Ellwood's narrative, Carlo's narrative lends itself well for the generation of pity, particularly as the reader gets a first-person perspective on his life, and Carlo is one of few characters whose story is told in this perspective.[133]

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[128] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 27.
[129] Bernières, 136.
[130] Bernières, 150.
[131] Bernières, 124.
[132] Bernières, 190.
[133] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.

The empathy for Carlo only increases as he decides to give his life in order to save Antonio Corelli's.[134] It is a choice he has made consciously, for he writes, "I now thank God that I shall die before you, so that I shall not have to bear the grief."[135] This stems from his love for Antonio, which he explicitly expresses in his final letter by writing, "I have loved you with all my shameful heart."[136] This sacrifice then does not only emphasise Carlo's suffering for the cause of war, but it also shows his homosexuality, connecting the two elements in order to generate pity. Thus, Bernières deviates from the well-established canon of the memory of the Second World War in Carlo's story in order to establish empathy for Carlo more easily.

2.3 Unsettling (expected) perspectives and relationships

The novels furthermore engage with established premediations by presenting the homosexual narratives from an already unexpected perspective. Winn's *In Memoriam* frequently points out Gaunt's German descent,[137] aligning him with a force that is usually represented as the enemy in remediations. The rising tensions in Britain cause Gaunt's mother to ask him to go and fight at the front, stating "If we have a son in the army, no one will dare say we are not patriotic."[138] His German descent is unsettling to many, for instance to Hayes, who "stared at him as if he had gone completely mad" after Gaunt speaks German fluently in front of him.[139] This outlier perspective is reminiscent of the tensions that surrounded homosexuality at the time. This is exemplified when it is said about Gaunt that "He could not help that he was German, and he could not seem to help whatever he felt when Ellwood pressed himself close. But he could

[134] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 399.
[135] Bernières, 384.
[136] Bernières, 384.
[137] Winn, *In Memoriam*.
[138] Winn, 18.
[139] Winn, 142.

jolly well kill people."[140] The novel thus shows Gaunt to be an outlier in two different ways, yet it also states that this does not take away from his ability to be a soldier.

Carlo's perspective in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* can also be considered unexpected to the reader due to the fact that he is on the side of the oppressor, as Italy is generally considered to be one of the enemy forces during World War Two in the western world. The novel therefore forces the reader to accept a different perspective, but it also makes Carlo's perspective likeable by making it clear he works against the oppressive Italian regime by, as Pelagia finds out,[141] working together with doctor Iannis and Kokolios to spread pamphlets across the island of Cephallonia that state things about the Duce such as "Who from unpromising beginnings has led us to perdition,"[142] and "who has destroyed the economy and has made us ashamed forever."[143] The novels thus create an already unexpected perspective for their homosexual characters that at the same time enables the reader to empathise with them.

Besides these troubled perspectives, the novels also question these characters' position to certain heterosexual relationships. Winn's *In Memoriam* depicts the tensions between Gaunt and the relationship between Ellwood and Gaunt's twin sister, Maud. Gaunt believes that Ellwood will eventually marry his sister, for he asks Ellwood, "You're just passing the time until you can marry Maud, aren't you?"[144] At the same time, the relationship is revealing, for Ellwood's aim to marry Gaunt's twin sister reflects a hidden desire for Gaunt as it is assumed that she is very similar to Gaunt, but for the fact that she is a woman. The novel therefore provides a reflection on the boundaries of homosexual relationships, pointing out

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[140] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 24.
[141] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 287.
[142] Bernières, 269.
[143] Bernières, 278.
[144] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 14.

that the only thing that holds back the love between Gaunt and Ellwood is the illegal status of homosexuality.

A similar point is made in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. The blossoming relationship between Antonio and Pelagia is considered taboo due to the fact that he is an Italian invader and she is a Greek, but also so because she is engaged to Mandras. Her father addresses this by asking her if she can imagine "the torment that would be inflicted upon you by others when they judge that you have renounced the love of a patriotic Greek, in favour of an invader, an oppressor?"[145] He does not, however, forbid their relationship.[146] Furthermore, it later turns out that the whole town knew about their relationship all along for, as doctor Iannis says, "There's no old woman who gossips like a goatherd."[147] This goes to show that their relationship was generally accepted, even though it was taboo. Furthermore, Antonio and Pelagia have always been able to act upon their love, albeit they thought they did so in secret.[148]

This clashes with the possible relationship between Antonio and Carlo. This relationship is only entertained by Carlo in his letters, writing about Antonio that he hopes "you are not disgusted, and I hope that, because you have a big and generous heart, you will be able to forgive me and remember me without contempt."[149] Carlo's writing reflects the impossibility of a relationship between him and Antonio. Furthermore, due to the fact that it is only ever written about and not acted upon, Carlo's narrative quite literally becomes archivable material, highlighting the fact that homosexual narratives tend to fall in the archive rather than the canon of cultural memory. The novels therefore use heterosexual relationships

[145] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 344.
[146] Bernières, 347.
[147] Bernières, 419.
[148] Bernières, 419.
[149] Bernières, 383.

to reflect upon and emphasise the illegality of homosexual relationships at the time. This demonstrates the hypocritical boundaries of memory to neglect homosexual narratives but not other taboo love stories.

2.4 Representations of the masculine soldier

The novels also highlight the struggles that the characters themselves experience as a consequence of not fitting in with the image of the stereotypical masculine soldier. Ellwood's mother, for instance, tells him directly that he is different, stating, "You're not a soldier, Sidney,"[150] citing her belief to be based upon the fact that Ellwood is not like other boys of his age, but is instead "sensitive."[151] The hidden implication is not lost on Ellwood,[152] and this makes it all the clearer to the audience that his mother is indirectly referring to Ellwood's homosexuality. The tension between the masculinity of the soldier and homosexuality returns in Gaunt's conversation with John Maitland, who is frequently implied to have been Ellwood's lover while they were at school together. Maitland warns Gaunt that any indications of homosexuality in his letters may well cause him to have to choose between "court-martial and disgrace, or a Military Cross for his grieving family,"[153] considering homosexuality was illegal at the time. Despite the fact that the image of the homosexual soldier clashes with that of the ideal masculine soldier, Ellwood and Gaunt are among the few that make it out of the war alive, though each with their own scars.[154] The novel therefore subverts the image of the masculine soldier as the ideal soldier by having Ellwood and Gaunt be successful soldiers who do not adhere to that image.

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[150] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 79.
[151] Winn, 79.
[152] Winn, 80.
[153] Winn, 66.
[154] Winn, 327.

In Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* no one is aware Carlo explicitly states that he disagrees with the established image of the heterosexual masculine soldier. His argument, at which he arrives through a reading of Phaedrus, states that the homosexual soldier may even be a better soldier than the heterosexual one, for they can truly love their fellow soldier and "who would desert his beloved or fail him in the hour of danger?"[155] Furthermore, the descriptions of Carlo that are provided make him the perfect soldier outwardly. He reflects upon this in his letter as well, stating people might think "I am an effeminate even though I am as strong as an ox and fully capable of lifting my own weight above my head."[156] Carlo is therefore the ideal soldier in terms of his physique, causing the novel to put into question the masculine ideals that befall the soldier.

2.5 Conclusion

Both *In Memoriam* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* navigate the narrative of the homosexual soldier and its position within the larger framework of cultural memory. They incorporate suffering and horrible living conditions in order to generate a sustainable pity for these characters, but they also reflect on the illegality of homosexuality by comparing homosexual and heterosexual relationships and in representing the homosexual narrative from an already unusual perspective. They refute the common ideal of the masculine soldier by representing the homosexual soldiers as capable soldiers who are not inferior to the masculine soldier. Thus, the novels both incorporate elements of their audiences' premediation as well as subvert other elements in order to highlight the homosexual narratives. In doing so, they engage in performativity by situating themselves within the generally restrictive established cultural memory in order to then highlight neglected narratives within this memory. They do not allow

[155] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 29.
[156] Bernières, 26.

themselves to be restricted by it, but are obliged to function within it as a result of the audience's premediation which is an essential part to enabling the possibility for them to feel empathy. Consequentially, the novels incorporate elements of the established framework of the memory of their respective wars, but they also pay more attention to the underrepresented narrative of homosexuality.

Chapter Three – Reflection on Traditional Modes of Cultural Memory Formation

As the second chapter has shown, historical fiction provides a reflection on the selectivity of the canon memory of war. However, this is not the only way in which novels can provide commentary on cultural memory. As Erll and Rigney explain, every representation of history "involves both a re-visioning of the original event and a comment on the tradition of remembrance itself."[157] Works of historical fiction can thus also provide a reflection upon the ways in which certain events are remembered. This chapter will investigate how historical fiction can provide commentary on the processes of cultural memory creation in a way that reflects upon the neglected representation of homosexual narratives.

Works of historical fiction can be particularly effective in providing commentary on the creation of cultural memory through "multi-perspectival narration or focalization."[158] Birgit Neumann explains that this enables novels to present a variety of memories of the past that may or may not clash with one another.[159] A novel that is thus told from multiple perspectives may provide commentary on the creation of cultural memory by creating differences in the various characters' experience of war. However, these various perspectives are not only explained through the characters, but they may also be derived from "intertextual and intermedial references,"[160] which highlights the fact that memory is above all a social creation as well as the fact that media are important to the construction of a larger framework of the memory for a certain event.[161]

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[157] Erll and Rigney, "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction," 114.
[158] Neumann, "The Literary Representation of Memory," 338.
[159] Neumann, 339.
[160] Neumann, 340.
[161] Neumann, 340.

Multi-perspectivity returns in Winn's *In Memoriam* and Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. The two novels both engage with literary works from their respective time periods, while at the same time allowing multiple characters to present the story through their eyes. In combination with these strategies, the novels furthermore let their characters engage in various processes of cultural memory construction while at the same providing a critical view on these processes, highlighting the novels' capacity for performativity. The novels engage in a process common to historical fiction where they "combine personally engaged memories with critically reflective perspectives on the functioning of memory, thus rendering the question of how we remember the central content of remembering."[162] They combine the various perspectives of the characters with critical reflections on established means for the formation of cultural memory in order to question the established framework of the cultural memory of the wars and the place of homosexual narratives within.

3.1 Intertextuality

Extracts from various poems feature frequently in Winn's *In Memoriam*.[163] It indicates the novel's awareness of memory construction processes, for poems like Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854), which occurs at multiple moments in the novel,[164] would have been part of the people's premediation of what fighting in battle was like at the time. Gaunt expresses that everyone was well-acquainted with the poem for "Like every English schoolboy, he knew Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" off by heart."[165] The poem is therefore presented to a large generation of young men, providing them with a certain image of what battle is supposed to be like, contributing to their expectation and/or

[162] Neumann, "The Literary Representation of Memory," 337.
[163] Winn, *In Memoriam*.
[164] Winn, *In Memoriam*.
[165] Winn, 19.

premediation of what might be waiting for them at the front in Belgium or France. This is emphasised by the points at which it occurs. It is partially quoted early in the novel as tensions rise regarding Gaunt enlisting in the army as his mother wishes.[166] The partial quote reflects Gaunt's unwillingness to go to the front while at the same time hinting at the fact that his struggles against his mother's request will be in vain, as the some of the lines included are "Theirs not to make reply, / Theirs not to reason why, / Theirs but to do and die."[167] It therefore highlights both Gaunt's inevitable future and his perspective on what the war is like. The poem is quoted in full right after the announcement of Gaunt's presumed death at the front after falling into a German trench and being shot.[168] As it surrounds the beginning and end of Gaunt's efforts in the war, the novel thus not only uses the poem to connect itself to its historical setting, but it also uses it as a means of commemoration.

The repeated use of Tennyson's poem furthermore adds an additional layer to the text upon the realisation that the war was not as romantic as the people's premediation may have made it seem, reflecting both the soldiers' and the civilians' disillusionment of the war. The novel subverts this idyllist image by having Gaunt mock Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier," which he describes as rounding off with "some claptrap about laughing under an English heaven."[169] The use of such intertextuality shows the novel's ability to critically engage with established forms of cultural memory formation, such as poetry, and using them to showcase that premediations or certain perspectives on war do not always reflect reality. This demonstrates that certain cultural texts align more with the myth-making commemorations of the nation-state that neglect some of the realities of war, while indicating that there may be

[166] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 19.
[167] Winn, 19.
[168] Winn, 161-162.
[169] Winn, 40.

more to know than that which people have been told about war before, such as the homosexual narratives that the novels represent.

This returns *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* in Carlo's love for ancient Greek myths and poetry. As previously discussed, Carlo reads works by Phaedrus that describe the homosexual soldier as the ideal soldier who is ready to die for his fellow men more than any other soldier, for "Love will make men dare to die for their beloved – Love alone."[170] These works are of great importance to Carlo, for he had been searching for a long time to find men like himself mentioned, writing that "I am mentioned almost nowhere, but where I find myself, I find myself condemned."[171] The text therefore means a lot to Carlo as it is the first time he finds a mention of homosexual men in a positive light, yet he also reveals that the writings eventually "brought me incalculable grief."[172] The novel thus uses the Greek text to demonstrate how positive homosexual narratives have been neglected in the long line of history, but it also indicates that they created a romantic ideal of battle, in which Carlo would become "an inspired hero."[173] This furthermore highlights that premediations consisting of previous battles do not always reflect reality accurately. In the end, however, Carlo becomes part of the history that he searched through to find representations of himself as he is buried "in the soil of Odysseus' time, as though he had belonged there from the first,"[174] indicating that there should be a space for Carlo's homosexual narrative in cultural memory.

[170] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 29.
[171] Bernières, 28.
[172] Bernières, 29.
[173] Bernières, 29.
[174] Bernières, 414.

3.2 Other traditional forms of commemoration

Though intertextuality is not prominently used in Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, the novel does engage with other traditional forms of memory. This is particularly clear in doctor Iannis' attempts to write a history book. During this process, he frequently reflects upon the creation of memory. He struggles to write the book objectively, for "it seemed to be impossible to write it without the intrusion of his own feelings and prejudices."[175] The novel therefore reflects upon these processes of cultural memory creation in stating that the selectivity of cultural memory is highly subjective but also political, for as Carlo writes, "history is the propaganda of the victors."[176] *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* thus takes a critical stance towards official means of commemoration, highlighting their underlying subjectivity and political background. The novel subverts such official commemoration by paying more attention to a larger variety of narratives of the Second World War, as will be detailed in the next section.

3.3 Multi-perspectival narratives

Captain Corelli's Mandolin allows a large range of characters to tell their story at various points in the novel, thus showing the conflict from different perspectives. For instance, the story is told from the perspective of various inhabitants of Cephallonia, but also through the eyes of those in the occupying Italian army. As the perspectives shift, the reader sees the impact the war has on each of the characters, highlighting the fact that "there is no single, shared memory of World War II."[177] The novel reflects on multi-perspectivity through one of Carlo's letters in which he writes "that the ultimate truth is that history ought to consist only

[175] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 4.
[176] Bernières, 39.
[177] Puaca and Osa, "The Memory and Commemoration of War," 601.

of the anecdotes of the little people who are caught up in it."[178] This is exactly what the novel does by providing snippets of various people's stories, including both the perspectives of big leaders such as the Duce,[179] but also the more marginalised narratives such as Carlo's. However, it pays more attention to Carlo's perspective, which is described more frequently,[180] subverting the idea that political leaders control the narrative. In allowing this multi-perspectivity, the novel thus refers to the selectivity of cultural memory and goes against it by providing as many different perspectives as possible in order to demonstrate that this selectivity will always ensure that some narratives in the memory of war become lost.

Multi-perspectival storytelling in *In Memoriam* returns in the form of the letters between Ellwood and Gaunt. Initially, Gaunt is alone at the front, contacting Ellwood only through the letters they write one another. In these letters the different perspectives on war are painfully clear. Gaunt writes about the reality of warfare, describing his struggles with being under constant attack and the gruesome conditions of the trenches.[181] Ellwood, on the other hand, views war and fighting as something romantic and playful, joyfully referencing the "trench-digging competitions" that are being held at school,[182] as well as being enamoured by a schoolmate's "In Memoriam," writing "Can you imagine anything so glorious?"[183] The novel therefore highlights the differences in the perspectives of the active soldiers and those at home. In describing such different experiences, the novel's multi-perspectivity demonstrates the large variety of narratives that are part of the memory of war, highlighting once more "that

[178] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 40.
[179] Bernières, 10-18.
[180] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.
[181] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 35.
[182] Winn, 32.
[183] Winn, 32.

the ultimate truth of the war is not knowable."[184] In doing so, the novel also brings to attention that depictions of warfare are restrictive and may therefore neglect certain narratives.

3.4 Active marginalisation

Captain Corelli's Mandolin offers direct criticism on the erasure of certain aspects of memory in the scene where doctor Iannis confronts Corelli with the fact that his troops destroyed a monument. The doctor is furious as he asks the captain several questions including, "Do you think you can so easily erase our history?"[185] and "What kind of heroism is this?"[186] The doctor's outrage at the erasure of certain aspects of memory of occupied Cephallonia can be interpreted as a comment on the erasure or neglect of certain oppressed memories within the larger framework of cultural memory, with the doctor questioning both the use and the morality of such a process. *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* therefore critiques the disregard for marginalised narratives as a consequence of a suppressive force.

This critique returns in *In Memoriam* due to its focus on censorship. During Ellwood and Gaunt's time in the trenches, one of the activities that is frequently referenced is the censoring of the letters that the soldiers both send out and receive.[187] Gaunt writes to Ellwood that they "have to censor the mud and the rats."[188] At the same time, they have to censor themselves in their letters to one another, lest anyone find out about their feelings for each other. John Maitland tells Gaunt off for letting Ellwood write to him in a careless manner.[189]

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[184] Virgine Renard, "Reaching Out to the Past: Memory in Contemporary British First World War Narratives," in *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, ed. Jessica Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 303.
[185] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 203
[186] Bernières, 203.
[187] Winn, *In Memoriam*.
[188] Winn, 47.
[189] Winn, 66.

As a result, Gaunt writes to Ellwood that he may only write if he "can do so appropriately."[190] Therefore, the novel reflects upon the restrictive nature of one of the major sources for the memory of war, letters. Ellwood questions the effects of the censorship as he thinks about "how the widows of Britain would interpret the great smudges of the censorship pens."[191] However, the novel refuses to adhere to any form of censorship regarding the physical relationship between Ellwood and Gaunt as it freely describes their more intimate moments, with Gaunt thinking about their "hazy, sunny weeks of kisses and poetry and sex."[192] In doing so, the novel actively places the homosexual narratives outside of censorship and thus highlights them, contradicting the illegal status of homosexuality at the time. The novel therefore expresses its concerns regarding censorship and the effects that removing certain elements from memory may have on the representation of certain historical events.

3.5 Remembrance

The novels also provide a reflection on concerns regarding remembrance. In *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, Carlo asks the reader to "Remember me" in his final letter.[193] Despite this request, Carlo's papers get lost for a long time, and Pelagia reads them for the first time only multiple years after Carlo's death.[194] Later, the papers became buried under her old house after an earthquake,[195] literally never coming to light until much later.[196] This is reminiscent of the long-lasting suppression of the marginalised narratives of the war, such as Carlo's homosexual narrative. Despite his plea to be remembered, his story had been forgotten until much later.

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[190] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 67.
[191] Winn, 274.
[192] Winn, 126.
[193] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 385.
[194] Bernières, 457.
[195] Bernières, 470.
[196] Bernières, 507.

Furthermore, when Corelli reads Carlo's papers, his first reaction is that he wishes he had not read them, stating "I've just realised that I'm more old-fashioned than I thought,"[197] imitating the general reluctance to accept such narratives into the established framework of memory and describing it as an out-dated practice.

The concern with remembrance returns in *In Memoriam*, though Ellwood and Gaunt are much more concerned as to *how* they will be remembered. Ellwood writes to Gaunt about the "In Memoriams" that appear in the school newspaper, stating that "we all simply dread having a dud one."[198] The remembrance of individuals is a recurring topic of discussion, also in relation to the letters that Gaunt, Ellwood and Hayes have to write to family members of fallen soldiers, with Gaunt writing to Ellwood that he is running out of ways to say "Your son died painlessly and was a credit to the Empire."[199] This is a reflection on the fact that many of the letters about the fallen soldiers are not entirely truthful but have to fit the larger narrative that is being spread about the war. The wish that both boys then thus have is to fit in with this larger narrative and to be remembered, mirroring the wishes of marginalised groups.

3.6 Conclusion

The novels' multi-perspectivity allows for a critical reflection on the selectivity of cultural memory by showing the large variety of narratives of war as well as characters' struggles with processes of cultural memory formation. It furthermore demonstrates the different ways in which war can be remembered. The novels' reflections upon commemoration emphasise the important role that memory plays within our society. Together, all these elements demonstrate historical fiction's awareness of processes of cultural memory formation. As the novels use

[197] Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 523.
[198] Winn, *In Memoriam*, 32.
[199] Winn, 47.

long-standing modes of remembrance to reflect upon the way in which these modes are exclusionary, it leans into the practice of performativity by using a restrictive system against itself. They use the various processes outlined above in order to highlight the homosexual narratives in their stories, or to critique the various ways in which these narratives have been left out of the established framework of memory. Historical fiction thus uses performativity as a means to reflect upon the selectivity of cultural memory, its political nature, and its marginalisation of homosexual narratives.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that historical fiction plays an important role in cultural memory formation. Not only does it perpetuate the recurring representations that are present within the existing framework of cultural memory, but it also allows the reader to explore commonly underrepresented narratives. This thesis has explored this with a focus on homosexual narratives within the historical war fiction of Alice Winn's *In Memoriam* and Louis de Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.

A close analysis of these novels has shown various strategies employed by both novels to either highlight the homosexual narrative of war, or to critique the neglected status of homosexual war narratives within the established framework of the memory of war. The novels each incorporate elements of the audience's premediation of war in order to generate a feeling of pity, while at the same time subverting expectations in order to place emphasis on the homosexual narrative. In doing so, the homosexual narratives were often represented from an already unusual perspective, enabling the reader to connect with the characters' storyline regardless of their homosexuality. Furthermore, the possibility of the homosexual relationships was often compared to heterosexual ones in order to highlight the marginalised status of homosexual narratives in the memory of war. The novels furthermore interact with various forms of commemoration and cultural memory formation in order to stress the constructiveness of cultural memory. Returning tropes include the obsession with being remembered and/or being remembered in a certain way, but also reflections through intertextuality. Combined with the novels' multi-perspectivity, this provided insights into the novels' means to demonstrate the highly selective nature of cultural memory and the political concerns that lie at the heart of this selectivity.

It is important to note, however, that this thesis has solely focused on the representation of homosexual narratives within historical fiction written about the First and Second World War. Research into other settings may provide additional interesting insights as such other settings cannot rely on the empathy that is generated through the incorporation of the established memory of war. Future research may therefore explore historical fiction with homosexual narratives set in different time periods in order to see how the setting of a novel may effect its engagement with established forms of cultural memory and how this in turn may affect the representation of these homosexual narratives. This research, alongside this thesis, would contribute to the growing body of literature that investigates the representation of marginalised narratives within historical fiction as a means to reflect upon cultural memory.

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