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Reading the repatriation events at Wootton Bassett:
national identity, ideology, absence and the uncanny

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Abstract

This thesis presents a 'reading' of the Wootton Bassett phenomenon: public mourning accompanying the repatriations of the bodies of members of the British armed forces between 2007–2011. Wootton Bassett, much discussed in the local and national press, was the focal point of conversations about the national mood, and national identity. The thesis explores national identity and the structure of the state, and the Wootton Bassett phenomenon in particular, in order that the two issues might illuminate each other.

This thesis is a work of creative nonfiction, which blends various approaches to the reading of historical and contemporary cultural narratives. My aim is to deliver a piece of analysis which is academically rigorous whilst reflecting my position as a creative writer within academia. Working from Althusser's theories of ideology, the methodology is a synthesis of Cultural Studies, close reading of media reports, and memoir. I begin with discussion of 'Ideology' per Althusser, and his proposition that Ideology is an ongoing event, and the state's accepted 'ideologies' are gathered centripetally around a fundamental absence of congruence and coherence. Utilising Althusser's descriptions of interpellation, ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and the repressive state apparatus (RSA), the thesis moves on to analyse British narratives of national identity: long-term narratives (the symbolic development of the mythical figures Gog and Magog), and then our current context, in particular the ideological redefinitions of the Second World War. Discussion of public mourning for Princess Diana offers an exemplar for discussions of Wootton Bassett in terms of tradition and ideologically-mediated concepts of appropriateness.

The concluding sections of the thesis are an Althusserian analysis of the discourse surrounding extremist group Islam4UK's proposed counter-march at Wootton

Bassett. The silence of the repatriation events' attendees is positioned as an uncanny indeterminacy, in which subjects refuse to enact interpellation. Finally, a memoir section describes my trip to the town for the 2014 armistice day memorial ceremony. Through these various approaches, the thesis explores the partial and mutable nature of ideology and national identity, and the scope within these structures for the subject to act with agency and dignity.

Reading the repatriation events at Wootton Bassett: national identity, ideology, absence and the uncanny.

This thesis is a creative nonfiction 'reading' of the repatriation events at Wootton Bassett in the wider context of twentieth and twenty-first century British national identity. My approach blends various forms of analytical and exploratory writing, including a terminal section which takes the form of a short memoir of my own trip to the town.

From 2007 to 2011, the bodies of members of the armed forces who died overseas were flown home. The Hercules aircraft which carried them landed at RAF Lyneham (RAF 2011). The RAF called this Operation Pabay (RAF Regiment Association 2012: 6). Hearses took the bodies from Lyneham to the Coroner's office in Oxford. The processional route cut through Wootton Bassett, a market town with a particularly wide high street. Some confluence of route, high street, the presence of a Royal British Legion wing in the town, and the local and national mood at the time, led to the unique public events which Jenkins et al name the 'Wootton Bassett phenomenon' (Jenkins et al 2012: 1).

In simple terms, members of the public began to line the high street as the hearses proceeded through the town. While members of the families of the deceased were present, the vast majority of those involved were not directly related to those who had died. The media picked up on the events and much was written about them in the local and national press: debate occurred as to the cultural value of these repatriation events. Political parties from either side of the left-right division passed comment on the repatriations but did not become directly involved. The police closed roads to facilitate the processions, but had only a limited involvement in the organisation of the events: in most regards the repatriation events were an organic, grass-roots development

facilitated by but not directed by the political structure of the state. It is worth noting that Operation Pabay always operated under a time limit; the RAF knew before the repatriations began that flights would eventually cease to land at Lyneham and would be transferred back to Brize Norton:

Repatriation ceremonies [...] were moved to RAF Lyneham in April 2007 to allow the Brize Norton aircraft servicing platform (the aircraft parking area) to be redeveloped [...] the Ministry of Defence announced in July 2003 that RAF Lyneham will be closing as part of Defence Estate rationalisation. (RAF 2011)

This may be one of the reasons why the ceremonies were allowed to occur naturally, as it were, instead of being directly co-opted and legitimised, or broken up and outlawed.

The Wootton Bassett phenomenon was significant in that it offered a performative, public display of complex aspects of British national identity at the turn of the twenty-first century. This thesis uses a variety of methods and techniques – Althusserian critique of ideology, cultural studies, close analysis of media reports, and memoir – to investigate both the phenomenon and the underlying aspects and issues of national identity it revealed. The cultural studies aspect of this thesis takes the form of analysis and description of both the long and short term narratives which inform contemporary British national identity and thus contextualise the Wootton Bassett phenomenon. The use of Althusser's theories of ideology in this thesis focusses upon the process of ideology; the ways in which it restates itself, and the fundamental ideological absences which necessitate and allow the operation of the state. This application of Althusserian theory attempts to apply the nuance of Althusser's argument as a tool for the critical reading of a cultural event in a way which avoids common pitfalls; the

Wootton Bassett phenomenon is presented here as a moment in the process of ideology as enacted by and upon subjects operating within the apparatus of the state. It does not simply present subjects of the state as automatons directed by monolithic power. Instead the focus is upon subjects as individuals operating within the system of the state and engaged in discourse with its constant ideological message or messages. In this regard I hope that this thesis presents an original approach to a significant issue, and a novel application of the theories of Althusser.

The thesis begins with a definition of Althusserian terms, and then moves into a specific discussion of national identity, and the historical narratives which have shaped the British national identity which led to the Wootton Bassett phenomenon. Thus the thesis is not an attempt to write a history of the Wootton Bassett events (indeed, the work touches on the problematic aspects of the historiographical process). As the thesis progresses, analysis shifts to the challenge made to the agreed meaning of the Wootton Bassett phenomenon enacted by the proposal of a counter-march by extremist group Islam4UK. The thesis also explores the space for struggle within the rhetorical and ideological action of the state. The thesis then deploys the concept of the uncanny as an analytical tool to explain the novel formal aspects of the repatriation events, positing that an uncanny performative mode is the product of subjects' lived experiences within the British state – which is to say, under the aegis of British national identity.

The final section of the thesis moves away from an analytical study of the Wootton Bassett phenomenon and presents a complimentary memoir detailing a visit to Royal Wootton Bassett after-the-fact. This section of memoir is an attempt to perform yet another kind of reading of the events and the place, one which focusses on the human experience of the town. This section of memoir does not provide conclusive statements about the town or the nature of the events which took place there; rather it is

presented as an attempt to engage with and perform the failure inherent in any attempt to encapsulate or theorise life through historical or ideological terms.

This concluding section of memoir might also be seen as a bridge between the critical and creative aspects of this doctoral submission. My creative work (*Manchester*, a novel) shares the overall concerns of this thesis – modernity, the impossibilities of communication, uncanniness as a lived experience and an unexplored facet of our agreed narratives. More overtly, a section of the novel takes place in Wootton Bassett, and the experience of visiting the town and writing the memoir section of this thesis informed and was reflected in the Wootton Bassett section of *Manchester*, in which two characters are taken on a ghost tour, discover the fictional or literary nature of the ghost stories they are being told, and then have a disruptive experience – an experience of rude alterity – with living human beings who inhabit the town. The memoir section of this thesis, then, is presented as both a confirmation of and challenge toward the critical work which has preceded it.

I.

Althusser's *On Ideology* (1970) offers a clear description of the state's mechanics of power and control. *On Ideology* also provides us with a deep field of concepts and terminology with which to discuss the workings of ideology. Althusser's image of the state, the nation, is one of constant reproduction. He suggests that we must think of it as a machine in motion, not only concerned with industrial production, but the constant reproduction of itself (not the construction of copies of the system, but – to deploy a useful pun – a kind of continuous *restatement*); only this hypothesis will allow us to understand 'the essential of the existence and nature' of such a system (Althusser 2008: 10).

It's not enough for a state to reach the point where it can produce automobiles; it must then re-produce the structure which allows or demands the production of automobiles. It is not enough for the state to repress its citizens through its monopoly on violence; it must inculcate in them the desire and ability to enact the reproduction of the power-relations which allow the state to exist; it does this through 'ideological State apparatuses (ISAs)' (16). For Althusser, the state works to create not a dumb proletariat, but a skilled and diverse nation of individuals, all of whom have been formed into useful subjects who might serve the interest of the state in any number of productive roles, whether working as a labourer or writing for a broadsheet newspaper. This occurs through the action of the ISAs which pre-exist an individual's birth. Althusser provides a non-exclusive list of ISAs: religious ('the system of different churches'), educational, family, legal, political ('including the different Parties'), trade-unions, the media – which he calls 'the communications ISA,' and finally the cultural, a rather loose category including 'Literature, the Arts, sports, etc,' (17).

While ISAs shape us, the real action of ideology occurs in moments of hailing, or 'interpellation' (48). There are two stages to this hailing. The first stage – we might think of this as simple interpellation – is the way in which the state constantly confirms the subject's identity. Our subjecthood exists even in our name; as we live our life through the ISAs with which we engage, we are forced to trade upon that name, that contingent sense of self inculcated within us by family and educational systems produced by the state in order to serve the state's re-productive requirements. In order to exist within the state without bringing down upon ourselves the firm hand of the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), we show identification and respond to moments of hailing from figures of authority. In the first instance and most obviously the RSA takes the form of the police and the army, but the definition extends to any arm or element of

the state which can act punitively and functions mainly through the forms of violence which are outlawed for subjects (17 - 19). Interpellation does not come solely from the state – it is not simply a matter of agents of the state interpellating subjects; there is what we might call 'complex interpellation', in which subjects interpellate each other *and themselves*. When Subject 1 hails or names Subject 2, they recognise subject 2 as belonging to the state, but also recognise themselves as belonging to the state; in turn subject 2 is forced to recognise themselves as belonging to the state, *and* the fact that subject 1 belongs to the state.

What does this tell us about the nature of ideology? For Althusser, ideology exists in constant interpellative events which are, in effect, the subject negotiating with the information provided by ISAs formed before our birth and during our lifetimes. We have been, in a sense, 'always-already' subjectified by the state, and are 'always-already' its subjects (50). Ideology is not a stable text to which we can refer as if we were separate from it: 'Ideology *has no outside*.' (49). The subject does not disagree or agree with ideology; rather ideology is the medium in which they live their external (that is to say, social) and internal lives. Althusser rejects the idea of 'ideology' as a singular concept: there are 'ideologies', that is to say, methods and modes of thought and culture which exist discretely within a state and 'which, whatever their form (religious, ethical, legal, political), always express *class positions*'; they are contingent on the subjective identities of subjects within the state, and if they are to be studied our theorisations should begin with 'the history of social formations, and thus of the modes of production combined in social formations, and of the class struggles which develop them,' (33). These 'ideologies' then, have histories which can be analysed. But 'Ideology' (capitalisation *sic*) itself – not a specific ideology, but Ideology in quintessence – '*has no history*' (35).

This does not mean that Ideology is an empirically false reading or representation of history; Althusser is keen to distance his formulation of Ideology from the traditional Marxist concept of false consciousness, in which the ruling class fools the workers with a 'pure dream ... merely the pale, empty and inverted reflection of real history.' (34) This may of course be the action of distinct 'ideologies,' which play all kinds of games with the grey area, the interstitial bleed, between fact and fiction. But Ideology is something different entirely; it has no history because, like the Freudian unconscious, 'it is eternal,' that is to say, it is always of-the-moment, 'omnipresent, trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history.' (p. 35)

Ideology, then, is the centre around which all the discrete ideologies of a state orbit. Those ideologies find embodiment through the ISAs of that state ('the unity of these different regional ideologies ... being assured by their subjection to the ruling ideology'; Ideology has a material existence rather than an 'ideal' one (40). We can say this because Ideology exists in, and has a material effect on the world through, the actions of subjects as they inhabit and live within the structures and strictures of ISAs. 'The individual [...] behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices' (41). Thus is ideology embodied in the world, and thus can it be labelled as material as opposed to ideal.

We see, then, what Althusser means when he describes Ideology as 'omnipresent.' It exists only in as much as it is acted upon, and it is acted upon constantly; it is a process, an event. We might think of Ideology as lightning striking; not an individual lightning strike but rather the process/event of lightning striking. It occurs, it has occurred, and when it occurs again it will be the same thing occurring, but who can or could write its history?

There is, then, no grand ideology to which the smaller ideologies of a state refer. Rather, there is the action of Ideology made material through a state's subjects: if we take a single individual subject, we see that 'his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatuses from which derive the ideas of that subject' (43). While our sense of freedom (itself formed and mediated by ISAs) might bridle at this, we must side-step that and instead look to what it tells us about the state. Where we might hope to see some central knot of ideas or heart of ideation, rather what we find is the state's need to reproduce methods of production, and the relationships of power between classes which support those methods of production. All our ideologies are predicated by that need. Thus, when the state appeals, however vague the terms, to a governing ideology which transcends our regional ISAs, our fragmentary individual lives within the nation, necessarily including a sense of a consistent national identity, it is an appeal in real terms to the structure of the state and its reproductive mechanism. It is an appeal to an absence; the idealistic space to which the state appeals is null, contains nothing.

The preceding section of this thesis has laid out the structure and reproductive mechanism of a typical nation (typical meaning, in this context: western, capitalist, industrial or 'post-industrial', liberal or 'neoliberal', etc). The next section will work to explore the ways in which a specific national identity develops. The focus is on British national identity in particular, in order to contextualise the Wootton Bassett phenomenon.

II.

In his essay *Create Dangerously*, originally delivered as a lecture at Uppsala in December 1957, Albert Camus posits that representative realism is impossible. We

could not, for example, make a truly 'realistic' film of a man's life:

The reality of a man's life is not limited to the spot in which he happens to be. It lies also in other lives that give shape to his – lives of people he loves [...] and also lives of unknown people, influential and insignificant, fellow citizens, policemen, professors, invisible comrades from the mines and foundries, diplomats and dictators, religious reformers, artists who create myths that are decisive for our conduct – humble representatives, in short, of the sovereign chance that dominates the most routine existences. Consequently, there is but one possible realistic film: the one that is constantly shown us by an invisible camera on the world's screen. (258 – 259)

Life is ordered by external pressures (our need for money; our reliance upon others to provide the education which allows us to fit into our culture) and internal pressures (the moral framework and sense of social place informed by that education; our shared acceptance of the validity of arbitrary currencies). These pressures are inculcated and enforced by the ISA / RSA structure – the work of Ideology commences both internally, in one's socially conditioned responses, and externally, in the hard limits placed upon personal agency by the state.

Camus presents us with a flat photograph; a man's life is contingent upon all others existing concurrently with him. But those connections – the realm of 'sovereign chance' – also extend back into the past; how else could Camus' religious reformers have a religion to reform? Occurrences years ago form the mechanics of the culture into which we are born, because historical precedent provides the language and the syntax of the rituals of ISAs. Religious ritualism is perhaps the most obvious example of this, in

which much of the dynamic energy of the institutions involved comes from their attempts to match historical precedent with contemporary event. The contingencies which shape us are articulations of the endless circulation of capital, and the industrial and political systems which it has amassed around itself.

Althusser's state system offers an answer to an issue which derails attempts at identifying an overall national identity: the paralysis of difference. How can we begin to talk about a nation when every time we look at it, it changes, and when we attempt to other ourselves and imaginatively examine it from a perspective not our own (how, I might wonder, does a recent refugee see this country?) we find that it changes and changes again, in novel and unsettling ways? As Chris Barker states, 'Governments, ethnic groups and classes may perceive their own national culture in divergent ways,' and that 'any ethnic or class group will be divided along the lines of age and gender' (Barker 2008: 252). Or, put more directly: 'Are there really such things as nations? Are we not forty-six million individuals, all different? And the diversity of it, the chaos!' So says George Orwell in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, his essay on Englishness and English society, its past, and possible revolutionary future (Orwell 1941, accessed 19 August 2014).

Orwell's investigation of that which is 'distinctive and recognizable in English civilization' shows us the multiplicities of identity and meaning – of ISAs – contained within a single state. 'Is not England notoriously two nations, the rich and poor?' he asks. And what of local difference? 'Looked at from the outside even the cockney and the Yorkshireman have a strong family resemblance' (Orwell 1941). As Robert Colls states, speaking of earlier centuries, when we begin to examine 'the difference between being British and being English or Scottish or Welsh at the same time,' we end up confronting 'Freud's narcissism of minor difference' (Colls 2011: 576). ISAs of regional

identity – sports clubs, hobbyist groups, faith communities, disparate tribes of weekend drinkers – allow us to individuate ourselves and commune with others with whom it might be expected or necessary that we trade, or co-operate with in productive terms. These ISAs also allow us to state our difference from and superiority to people in other regions or other subcultures, whose branches of the nation's over-arching ISAs follow different codicils, and whose experience of life is therefore – the logic of differentiation tells us – less genuine than ours. For Anthony Smith, a preoccupation with class blinds us to the fluid nature of identities within nations (Smith 1991). We are too mobile between classes and our class identities are at once too rigid and too shallow to offer a stable identity that can serve us day-to-day. 'Wider collective identities' challenge and disrupt narrow class identities 'through an appeal to quite different criteria of categorization'; religious and ethnic group identities, for example, will inherently contain people from different classes. Class identities emerge 'from the sphere of production and exchange', whereas religious identity as a social identity comes from the sphere of 'communication and socialization' (Smith 1991: 6). This sphere produces, it seems, hardier identities, because they are more open, and perhaps because they contain more of the products of, and stuff of, human creativity: 'They are based on alignments of culture and its elements [...] often codified in custom and ritual,' and so they invite and accept anyone who feels that 'they share certain symbolic codes, value systems and traditions of belief and ritual, including references to a supra-empirical reality, however impersonal, and imprints of specialized organisations, however tenuous' (Smith 1991: 6). So our ISAs may be, as it were, closer to and farther away from the industrial core of the nation. A labour union is an ISA and its connection to the productivity of the state is an obvious one; your religion is an ISA and its connection to the productivity of the state may be occluded. But Althusser demands that we acknowledge that the connection

is there: religion as social entity is an ISA and operates towards its own ends *and* the reproduction of the state and the state's industrial process.

These different ISAs tumble together. What links them is their subservience to the state, and the overarching narrative which has given them shape. Perhaps we need a simple definition here. That which we call national identity is 'imaginative identification with the symbols and discourses of the nation-state' (Barker 2008: 252); something which requires active input from a citizen of that state, who has an implicit knowledge of the right symbols, the correct discourse – what Orwell calls '*characteristic fragments*' (1941). Smith concurs:

Autonomy, identity, national genius, authenticity, unity and fraternity – [these things] form an interrelated language of discourse that has its expressive ceremonials and symbols. These symbols and ceremonies are so much part of the world we live in that we take them, for the most part, for granted. They include the obvious attributes of nations – flags, anthems, parades, coinage, capital cities, oaths, folk costumes, museums of folklore, war memorials, ceremonies of remembrance for the national dead, passports, frontiers – as well as more hidden aspects, such as national recreations, the countryside, popular heroes and heroines, fairy tales, forms of etiquette, styles of architecture, arts and crafts, modes of town planning, legal procedures, educational practices and military codes – all those distinctive customs, mores, styles and ways of acting and feeling that are shared by the members of a community of historical culture. (Smith 1991: 77)

These fragments are disparate, difficult to decode, and their meaning is contingent on

their context, their relationship with other fragments. 'National Characteristics,' Orwell tells us, 'are not easy to pin down, and when pinned down they often turn out to be trivialities or seem to have no connexion with one another' (1941). As citizens with a nation we exist in this whirl of images, half-remembered and continually re-discovered and re-defined, and we form our own identities in part from this mythic material. We end up as Tony Hancock does in *Hancock's Half Hour*, appealing to the stuff of National Identity in a factually vague but rhetorically charged manner; 'Magna Carta,' he implores – 'did she die in vain?' (broadcast 1959).

National identity is tied to the idea of national values – indicators of how a citizen might be expected to live their life between ISAs, under the gaze of the RSA. But Colls tells us that national identity is not merely an 'aggregate of all the values and all the attitudes which exist in a society at any one time' (2011: 575). National identity lies behind or before our national values – a society 'may equate diversity with tolerance and call it identity, but tolerance needs something 'there' in the first place to do the tolerating otherwise we are confusing tolerance with indifference' (575). Because values are changeable, if we look to them to articulate our National Identity we find that they attain a frustrating superposition; 'Either they are living, or they are dead, and if they are living you should not have to ask what they are' (575).

Parekh draws a useful comparison with the problems of defining one's own identity as an individual; 'we are constantly surprised by what we say and do [...] we can never fashion ourselves into entirely coherent and transparent wholes' (2000: 5). This might draw us back to thinking about Camus' impossible film – we need external interconnections in order to define ourselves, and even if we ignore them, they impinge on us, enforcing some structural consistency upon our personal identities; the fractured wholeness of the nation informs our fractured wholenesses as citizens. To a degree, both

objects, nation and citizen, share 'constraints imposed by [...] inherited constitution and necessarily inadequate self-knowledge' (5).

Coll's pre-existing 'something' which tolerates change, and Parekh's 'inherited constitution' lead us into thinking about the histories which shape the tendencies of ISAs and the structure of the RSA (even unto its arbitrary, iconic uniforms). This section has shown that national identity is the product of society rather than an inert backcloth against which society operates. It is inherently partial and resists definition; as with Ideology itself, it is something unfixable which exists in the moment of reference rather than in the ideal.

III.

Althusserian theorisations of the state demand that we interrogate any presentation of a unified, coherent ideology. But the subject can deny the culture which accrues around that falsely coherent narrative; ISAs are contingent upon the state, but that does not make the subject's lived experience ersatz. The narratives which inform our ideologies have a material existence through the ways in which they inform our actions. We enact the ritual aspects of ISAs; we make choices which affect the world and those choices are informed by a morality which we have inherited, or which we have negotiated for ourselves from source texts made available to us by our individual understanding of our inescapable histories. One of the arguments of this thesis is that in both long and short term, our histories (which may support or challenge the state; dominant histories, we might posit, being more likely to support the state's reproductive drive) develop from the material products of individual instances; events occur and stories are made from them; meaning is manipulated over time, by the communications or educational ISAs, for example. The following section of this thesis examines a grand narrative of national

descent – one of many possible narratives of this type – in order to highlight the ways in which the mythopoeic drive of the nation enforces sense upon events: lightning strikes.

In *Finding the People's War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II*, Geoff Eley provides us with a rich language for the analysis of national history – and notes that history itself is 'already an incorrigibly contested term' (2001: 819). 'Layers of recognition' are our interface with the 'grand narrative' of 'national pedagogy'; Eley cites Shakespeare as an example of a factor in that pedagogy (818). We cannot forget that history is 'a sign in the present [...] a container of meaning, a representational project, a field of disorderly interaction between a finished *then* and an active *now*' (818). We have not lived through the things our nation has lived through, but still feel their weight:

History enters popular circulation at the beginnings of the twenty-first century through [...] confusions of mass-mediated meanings. They construct the national past via a compulsive simultaneity of connotations, in a promiscuous *mélange* of imagery and citation, creating a dense palimpsest of referentiality. Symbolic capital accumulates thickly around national history's grand events in this manner, encumbering our access to their meanings. (819)

The problem is that the more we actively remember – creating texts of national memory in different forms – the more we occlude what we are remembering; 'memorializing [is] itself becoming remembered' (819). After numerous iterations of this process, we find 'history [...] erased in the very act of its recuperation' (819). Different ideologies with their different ISAs – perhaps facilitated by the bagginess of meaning that comes about from the continual restatement of popular histories – present 'competing mythologies of the recent past' (820). Different versions of history are deployed in the examination and

articulation of the always-anxious, always-fractured present, creating a 'discursive economy of national identification' (822).

The ideologies which grease the wheels of Ideology's self-restatement generate and are supported by national myths of descent. These 'shared historical memories' provide a foundational '*whence*' for our *here, now, and this*. 'Myths of political foundation, liberation, migration and election take some historical event as their starting-point for subsequent interpretation and elaboration' (Smith, 1991: 22). These myths are treated, in the symbolic economy of national discourse, as truths which require no supporting facts; we tap on the nation's flank and hear the hollow note of Althusserian Ideological absence.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th century *Histories of the Kings of Britain*, written at the behest of Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and based on a translation of earlier works, was the wellspring of a myth of 'British descent' until the 14th century – Monmouth's myths had 'wide social and political recognition' until a narrative of Anglo-Saxon Heritage over-took Monmouth's tales of ancient Britons (Smith 1991: 56). In his introduction, addressed to his patron, Monmouth claims that he is working from a master-text 'rehearsed from memory by word of mouth in the traditions of many peoples as though they had been written down' (1904: 4). We can see here the mechanism of National Identity – its position somewhere between oral and literary, its unfixability.

Monmouth gives us this myth of origin: Brute (also Brutus, Britto) killed his father, was exiled, and fell in with captured Trojans. They admired him - 'he was as wise as he was valiant among warriors, and whatsoever gold or silver or ornaments he won, he gave it all in largess to his comrades' (9). They followed him in rebellion against the Greeks. He won a bride, Ignoge, and took his people away. Divine Diana – that name will figure again in this study – told him this:

Brute,—past the realms of Gaul, beneath the sunset
Lieth an Island, girt about by ocean,
Guarded by ocean—erst the haunt of giants,
Desert of late, and meet for this thy people.
Seek it! For there is thine abode for ever.
There by thy sons again shall Troy be builded
There of thy blood shall Kings be born, hereafter
Sovran in every land the wide world over.

(24)

Via a long a circuitous route, with divers distractions, Brute and his Trojans picked up Corineus, who would be the forebear of the Cornish, and then land at Totnes. Albion became Briton, and because of this act of founding, their 'Trojan, or crooked Greek,' tongue became a language called British (34). They warred with the indigenous giants. Eventually Corineus wrestled the last one, Goemagot, and hurled him off a cliff to his death. Next Brute founded New Troy, which would become Lud, and so London. 'When the aforesaid Duke founded the said city, he granted it as of right unto the citizens that should dwell therein, and gave them a law under which they should be peacefully entreated' (36). On his death Brute was buried somewhere within London.

Here we can see a myth of descent which fulfils some of the key aspects of what we might call conditional western pre-nationhood. According to Smith, pre-requisites for nationhood include:

Some sense of political community, however tenuous [...] some common

institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community [...] a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong. (Smith 1991: 9)

In order for these conditions to be met, especially for all citizens to submit to being bound by an equitable system of law, a nation needs 'a measure of common culture and a civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland' (Smith 1991: 9–11). Monmouth's 'Britain, best of islands,' of 1136, and thus our current nation, which has evolved from that culture, is elect, both to inhabit an island homeland and to reign over others (1904: 6). Brute has bound us together under a shared law. We have a tongue with which we can share stories about giants, and the civic has begun to develop – we have London.

Giants have a knack for folkloric transference. They are idiotic figures, alien to the human – but our heroes, like King Arthur and Robin Hood, become giants in our retellings of their myths (Simpson and Roud 2003: 147—148). Giants shape our landscape – they throw stones, build causeways, their likenesses are cut into turf, and their sleeping or hiding bodies form and give name to features like the low chalk hills near Cambridge. Monmouth's writings seem obviously fantastical now, but are presented as history. 'Some with shattered walls in desolate places be now fallen into decay,' he says, describing the physical locations in his text but also giving us a handy figure for the impermanence of the factual, which lasts only a little while before it becomes histories (1904: 7). The constant renewal and evolution of the ISAs which we inhabit provide us with linkages to those histories – and even to counter-histories which put the lie to the dominant political narratives of the state. Of those cultural objects

which will survive beyond our lifetimes, we must ask what guarantee there is that anyone will recall their original meaning,

'The historical events and monuments of the homeland can be "naturalized", Smith tells us (1991: 65—66). 'Castles, temples, tells and dolmens are integrated into the landscape and treated as part of its special nature' (65—66). The things we do in our nation now – our industry, the wars we have; our ISAs, our RSA – produce material effects, that is to say buildings, that is to say, cities remodelled by bombs, and thus our landscape will in time be shaped by *ideologies* just as *ideologies* are shaped by landscape. It is not my argument that these forces which are so much larger than the individual and yet recognisably *of* the human have been sublimated into the folklorick figure of the giant. But I would suggest that the connection is worth following.

We find reference to giants as the builders of our pre-history in the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Ruin*, which narrates the rediscovery of a city once inhabited by the Romans – possibly Bath:

Wondrous is this masonry, shattered by the Fates.

The fortifications have given way, the buildings raised by giants are crumbling. The roofs have collapsed; the towers are in ruins. There is rime on the mortar. The walls are rent and broken away, and have fallen, undermined by age. The owners and builders are perished and gone, and have been held fast in the earth's embrace, the ruthless clutch of the grave, while a hundred generations of mankind have passed away. Red of hue and hoary with lichen this wall has outlasted kingdom after kingdom,

standing unmoved by storms. The lofty arch has fallen.

(Anon: 56—57)

And here there is a gap in the text, the manuscript having been partially burned at some point in its long history. The further our destructive progress takes us away from our predecessors, the more deformed our vision of them becomes. Romans are stretched into giants.

If we believe Monmouth, Goemagot met his death thousands of years ago. But the giants Gog and Magog are still with us; a handy parallel for the kind of national-mythic continuities I have been discussing thus far. By the fifteenth century the myth of Brute and Goemagot had altered – instead of wiping them out entirely, he led a pair of giants, Gog and Magog, in chains to New Troy, 'and chained them to the gate of his palace as porters' (Simpson and Roud 2003: 148). At some point the leap was made from myth and folklore to symbol:

Effigies of giants were used on royal occasions; a male and female pair greeted Henry V on London Bridge in 1415, while 'Gogmagog and Corineus' welcomed Mary Tudor and Philip of Spain in 1554, and Elizabeth in 1559. They regularly appeared in the Lord Mayor's pageants and Midsummer Shows, and were displayed in the Guildhall as defenders of the city. The names alternated between 'Gogmagog and Corineus' and 'Gog and Magog,' the latter gradually ousting the former. (Simpson and Roud 2003: 148)

They've had many bodies in the last 600 years. This short history is drawn from Simpson and Roud's *Dictionary of Folklore* and the official website of The Lord

Mayor's Show in which the effigies figure: 'In 1605 they were stalking on stilts; in 1672 they were fifteen feet tall' (Simpson and Roud 2003: 148). The 1672 incarnations, apparently, could speak and smoke. In Cromwell's interregnum the giants were deliberately destroyed, but with the reinstatement of the monarchy came their resurrection. Their wickerwork frames were no match for the Fire of London in 1666; since then Magog bears a phoenix on his shield. Rats ate the next iteration. In 1708 a solid wooden pair were made – they were too heavy for parade, and so in 1827 wicker doubles were created for that purpose. Since 2006 we have done the same thing; the Company of Basketmakers constructs the wicker effigies for the annual Lord Mayor's Procession (The Lord Mayor's Show 2014). The immobile wooden statues at City of London Guildhall – Gog and Magog alpha to the parade's wickerwork Gog and Magog beta – are facsimilies of the 1708 versions. They were carved in 1953. The 1708 editions perished, aged 232, in 1941, in the Blitz (Simpson and Roud 2003: 148).

A continuity can be plotted, then, through this pair of symbolic figures. Their shifting meanings take us from one of the founding myths of the nation – now neglected – and Orwell in 1941, at his desk during the Blitz. Long-suffering London is put to flame again, Gog and Magog burn, and we are at a start point (not *the* start point, because as ever, nothing in terms of nationality is certain) of a new myth. National myths of descent, then, cover great tranches of time, figuratively spanning them, and rendering them down into an understandable, singular narrative. Their effect is not only idealist, existing within the intellect of those individuals who learn the myth; it has a material existence. Those who know the myth act under its influence. Their actions may overtly develop and disseminate the myth, or may not. To a greater or lesser extent – depending upon how much effort we are willing to put in, and how willing we are to extend ourselves into the speculative and theoretical – we might trace every action back

to this point of mythic group identity, which demands of us that we re-tell it, however obliquely. Even ignoring or opposing it provides its proponents with a negative figure.

Orwell's first line tells us: 'As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me' (1941). The irony of 'civilized' points us towards the intractable strangeness of his subject, the annihilating power which civilization has over the individual. War is one of the great engines of nation-building, and so the history-building which gives us national identity. In the early 1930s, Einstein and Freud entered into a correspondence, part public, part private. Einstein wrote an open letter to Freud after the suggestion of the League of Nations' International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation that he might engage with another notable figure on 'any problem that [he] might select.' Attuned to his century, he chose to ask – in short – 'Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?' (1931—32: 2)

Freud's response highlights the intractable symbiosis between states and conflict. If we exist in a culturally plural world, he tells Einstein, war will always be with us, because peace is inimical to the project of nationhood: 'nationalistic ideas, paramount today in every country, operate in quite a contrary direction [...] so long as there are nations and empires, each prepared callously to exterminate its rival, all alike must be equipped for war' (1931—32: 11). The industrial system requires nationality, and nationality requires war. It will always be with us because it has always been with us:

The most casual glance at world history will show an unending series of conflicts between one community and another or a group of others, between large and smaller units, between cities, countries, races, tribes and kingdoms, almost all of which were settled by the ordeal of war [...] it is war that brings

vast empires into being, within whose frontiers all warfare is proscribed by a strong central power [...] as a rule the fruits of victory are but short lived, the new created unit falls asunder once again [...] conquests have only led to aggregations which, for all their magnitude, had limits, and disputes between these units could be resolved only by recourse to arms. For humanity at large the sole result of all these military enterprises was that, instead of frequent, not to say incessant, little wars, they had now to face great wars which, for all they came less often, were so much the more destructive. (1931—32: 7)

Much of the focus of this thesis thus far has been upon the ISAs within a nation. Now we see the RSA, which acts both within and without the boundaries of the nation. If SAs allow us to tell ourselves what we are as individuals, and what our relationship is to other people, the RSA enforces our understanding of the materialism of that culture, its reality, because the RSA exists to defend us from those who assault us, or assaults those who our state – whether for rhetorical political reasons, or productive existential reasons – deems to be a threat. Smith is in accord with Freud. 'There is no denying the central role of warfare,' he tells us, 'as a mobilizer of ethnic sentiments and national consciousness, a centralizing force in the life of the community and a provider of myths and memories for future generations' (1991: 27). In war, when there is a crossing over between the idea-space of national identity and the meat-space repercussions of bombings, whether carried out by suicide bombers or terribly advanced jets, we face the burden of our histories come to life, vivified. We are presented with few options. Orwell outlines one:

There can be moments when the whole nation suddenly swings together and

does the same thing, like a herd of cattle facing a wolf [...] does this mean that the instinct of the English will always tell them to do the right thing? Not at all, merely that it will tell them to do the same thing. (1941)

National Identity, after all, is what causes us to drop bombs on each other. 'Good or evil, it is yours, you belong to it [...] this side of the grave you will never get away from the marks that it has given you' (Orwell 1941). It is something which, as Orwell reminds us, writes upon us, an inescapable inscribing which brings to mind the punishment device in Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* (1919). We should note that the device in the Kafka's story enacts the execution of its victim by not only inscribing but re-inscribing its message, again and again, working back and forth in a manner which brings to mind the power looms of the industrial revolution. In the industrial state we are subject to not only one inscription, one interpellation, but many. There is not only one myth of descent, but as many as we can bear.

IV.

Regardless of our personal position on the internal political spectrum of the state, we cannot deny that the Second World War carries a huge weight of cultural meaning, not least because it links us to our martial deep past (National Identity might be best thought of as the product of both deep past and present past; learned history and remembered history). In this section, I will make use of Eley's work on the Second World War and historical memory in order to argue that historical narratives which inform our national identity are not only created with material from the mists of time. Subjects may have only a dim understanding of events and symbols in our pre-history, which allows those narratives to pass unchallenged. But national myths are also created from events which

have occurred within living memory. Ideology, then, is the reshaping, the enforcement of a coherent narrative logic upon, events even as we are living them.

In his essay on the important role film plays in examining and rehabilitating narratives of national history, Eley plots us a course of ideological development from the end of World War II. I will gloss this narrative – and refer also to a 'Long Read' piece written for the Guardian by Ian Jack (who we will meet again later, discussing the mourning for Princess Diana). We begin with some propositions from Eley: the Second World War has a 'foundational importance' for our 'popular memory,' but its meaning or meanings have changed profoundly over decades – it has been 'repositioned' (2001: 837). Eley gives us a brief list of the fields in which the Second World War has affected our popular culture, and so our popular memory: 'the formal languages of national politics and public institutions [...] the aesthetic productions of the arts and popular culture [...] the private realms of nostalgia and fantasy' (837). We see obvious parallels here with Althusser's list of ISAs. The longevity of a shibboleth like the Second World War is twofold; it lives in assumptions, those malleable 'truths', and in images – for the most part unexamined, generative nodes of new iterations of image, assumption, and interpellation.

The 'immediate postwar generation,' Eley tells us, were 'suffused in the effects of the war years,' but their 'memory' like ours, 'came entirely after the fact. [Until the mid '60s] official and popular cultures [...] were pervaded by the war's presence, via citations, evocations, stories, and commentaries, quite apart from the traces and indentations of everyday life and the private marks of families and personal histories' (818—819). That, then, is the personal impact of the war. But what about the more overtly political aspects of its legacy?

After 1945, patriotism – British national feeling [...] contained powerful inflections to the left. Pride in being British implied the egalitarianism of World War II, the achievement of the welfare state, and a complex of democratic traditions stressing decency, liberalism, and the importance of everyone pulling together, in a way that honoured the value and values of ordinary working people. (820—821)

But this 'democratic romance of 1945,' was a kind of socialism of stasis; it contained 'huge complacencies,' and was 'organized around insidiously embedded assumptions of Englishness ... moreover, the post-war consensus came not only positively from reconstruction but also from repressive disciplinary structures of the Cold War' (821).

Ian Jack's take on this is more personal, and puts a positive spin on that stasis:

Two world wars, the BBC, a reasonably popular monarchy, mining and manufacturing communities that shared trade unions and political aims; by the time I was born, in the closing months of the second world war, British identity had never been stronger or thicker, accreting layer by layer since 1707. Soon after, the National Health Service and the welfare state arrived: the cherry on the crumbling cake, the "fairer Britain" – the postwar settlement, now eroded, that many in Scotland believe independence can secure and preserve [he writes shortly before the 2014 independence referendum], while the rest of the UK privatises and outsources what's left. (2014)

Back to Eley's narrative. Cultural shifts in the 50s and 60s were unavoidable,

inculcated not only by external pressures – the Suez Canal crisis, for example, and other symptomatic episodes in the disintegration of empire – but by internal pressures as well: 'by the later 1950s, dissidence in the arts, new patterns of consumption, and stylistic rebellions of youth were already corroding the stable conformities that otherwise marked the time' (Eley 2001: 821). Ian Jack again: 'By the 1960s, the bombast of Britishness had drained away. It seemed loose and confused, and therefore spacious and accommodating. E. M. Forster, Joan Littlewood, Dickens, Orwell, CND, *Play for Today*, *Beyond the Fringe*, the Beatles: the list is random' (2014).

As the nation moved away from the Second World War, and competing histories flooded into the gap between *now* and *then*, the symbol-horde of the war was recast. Any 'new and different set of political claims [...] would require a new vision of contemporary British history, which repositioned World War II in popular history' (Eley 2001: 821). We can look to Churchill here; in the first iteration of postwar myth, 'great material security and rising living standards remained sutured to the political values of common sacrifice, egalitarianism, and democratic expectation accompanying the victory over fascism – so that subsequent evocations of the “Dunkirk spirit” were elided into what Churchill on V-E day had called simply “the victory of the cause of freedom in every land”’ (821). So; the Second World War was a triumph for democracy, and in that regard it was a moral victory – Churchill was the figure best suited to articulate and represent this argument. But by the time Thatcher was in power, she was 'evoking the other Churchill of late imperial militarism and racialized cultural superiority, exchanging ideals of social justice for a patriotism straight and pure' (822).

Ergo, we might imply, the Thatcher administration's most notable armed conflict: in a discussion of the role of Shakespeare in these ideological machinations Eley posits a 'Thatcherist reinscription of Churchillian “greatness” in the little-

Englander animus against “Europe,” licensed by the Falklands-Malvinas War' (820).

The treatment of this central figure in recent British history might remind us, perhaps, of those effigies of Gog and Magog, giants which smoke, and are brought out for parades. By the 80s the collective, consensus version of the 'national-popular mythology of World War II,' had floundered as an active ideological engine; 'leftist versions passed into crisis in the 1960s, before being aggressively dismantled by Thatcherism' (832).

Despite this recasting, this changing of meaning, World War II is still celebrated as a moral triumph; either national – as the moment in which we pulled together and displayed our stoic bravery – or international – as a moment in which we proved ourselves on the right side of history. That legacy continues to be an important point of reference when political figures discuss the morality of conflict. An illustrative example of this position can be seen in Tony Blair's address to the National Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo:

You must be true to the values which gave rise to the Republic of Kosovo. Those values were of course about freedom. But they were also about the values intrinsic to Europe itself. That after the horrors of World War Two, and the holocaust, never again would we see racism, with all its savagery, suppress a people, never again would we permit the innocent to be butchered without mercy, never again would we pass by whilst those we could help, suffered in agony without it. That injustice to one person was injustice to all. That is why we were right to liberate Kosovo and its people from tyranny. Those are the values we share. They are as relevant now as when we fought for them together here in Kosovo eleven years ago. (2010)

That, then, is the hard power of the legacy of the Second World War. But what of its soft power? Its ongoing position as a symbolic reference, a generator of idiom, a schematic system for people within our nation to process the private as well as the public and political? Ian Jack's *Guardian* piece slyly references 'Keep Calm and Carry On,' a poster-slogan (or slogan-poster) which has seemed ubiquitous in recent years – and has an afterlife as an internet meme, with websites which allow you to generate your own images following the 'Keep Calm and X' formula.

We can see here the way the narrative of the Second World War has been internalised, freighted with meaning. What is illuminating here is that the poster was little-seen, and less-liked, in its original context:

The individual responsible for sanctioning expenditure at the Treasury [...] expressed real fear that 'the population might well resent having this poster crammed down their throats at every turn' whilst Waterfield [A.P. Waterfield, a senior Ministry of Information civil servant] maintained that the slogan was 'too commonplace to be inspiring' and feared that 'it may even annoy people that we should seem to doubt the steadiness of their nerves' [...] Accused of failing to understand publicity during a hostile parliamentary debate, and attacked in the press for an inept 'Waste and Paste', the MOI scrapped the entire commercial campaign after just four weeks. Stocks of 'Keep Calm' were retained until April 1940 but began to be pulped after this point as part of a cross-government effort to overcome a serious paper shortage. (Irving 2014)

Since the end of the Second World War there has been political renegotiation of the meaning of that conflict and its meaning to us as a nation: this has been the genesis of

another myth of descent, a youthful, contemporary myth in historical terms, but still one which predates the lifetimes of many of the state's citizens. One simple précis would run thus: the immediate post-war period was one of national coherence and solidarity.

Living standards rose, we slowly rebuilt. A kind of social thaw set in, with the rise of satire and anti-authority sentiment which culminated in the sixties. Economic problems in the seventies put the lie to the Left's socialist project; the Thatcherite conservatism of the eighties atomised us. The nineties and the noughties were all spin and war. Labour and Conservatives have met in the middle ground, and neither are trusted. Our international standing has fallen and the moral superiority we gained from beating Hitler has evaporated; the sinking of the Belgrano could be seen as a foreshadowing in miniature of the nation's moral qualms regarding the conflicts in the Middle East, in which we are so intractably engaged. The shared assumption of our right as a nation to carry out compassionate, punitive humanitarian interventions into other, less important, less sophisticated states has evaporated. The myth of descent here might also be seen as a myth of decay, either a decay from a position of post-war unity into one of neoliberal, post-industrial paralysis, or a decay from greatness into irrelevance caused by immigration and the refusal of other countries to continue to understand and acknowledge our inherent superiority (these two examples are stereotypical but illustrative).

We can see, then, that the ISA system of the state of the present day refers back to both the distant and the recent past. This referencing can be more or less overt. The subject may be very aware of the cultural legacy of World War Two, particularly as its meaning is continually restated through the educational ISA, and its iconography continues to be a richly productive seam for the ISA of the entertainment industry. The subject may be less aware of continuities of the Gog and Magog type. But both elements

are part of, or are at least *potentially* part of, the coherency of British national identity. If Ideology is a lightning strike, then these aspects of rehearsed, re-shaped history are the materials with which the state constructs its lightning rods.

V.

Events within a state echo events which have preceded them. Similar events elicit similar reactions from the populace, and from the ISA structure which mediates meaning for us. The obvious precedent of the Wootton Bassett phenomenon is the public mourning which immediately followed the death of Princess Diana. It is important to note the differences between the events: the scale in terms of subjects directly involved in public mourning, the scale in terms of time (a week for Diana; years for Wootton Bassett), and the focus upon an individual in one case as opposed to the focus upon a number of individuals all of one symbolic type.

The brief but widely-reported mourning which resulted from Princess Diana's death provoked a public reaction and so an academic reaction which provides arguments and points of analysis which can profitably be applied to the Wootton Bassett phenomenon. While the preceding sections have examined historical narratives to tease out characteristics of national identity pertaining to the Althusserian model of the British state, this section examines the mourning which attended Diana's death in order to inform the following, conclusive sections of the thesis, which analyse the public discussions which accompanied the repatriations at Wootton Bassett.

The week following Princess Diana's death in 1997 is often held up as a tableau of a unified nation. However, academic and anecdotal evidence show that the mourning following Princess Diana's death and culminating at her funeral was actually a process

which generated division and dissent. As various ISAs operated to create meaning from the event, the lie was put to the idea of a monolithic nation; this division of meaning, this division of the interpellative labour of the state, supports Althusser's image of ISAs as discrete locations in which individuation takes place regardless of the individual's position (I am with the national consensus, or, I am against the national consensus). They are still interpellating themselves and each-other in a way which upholds their subjectivity.

Our key text of dissent here is Ian Jack's *Those Who Felt Differently*, an article and series of interviews published in the Winter 1997 issue of *Granta*. Jack overtly connects Diana's death with the continuity of nationhood and citizenship; 'The national memory was being awoken; the story that the nation tells about itself' (1997: 10). Initially this telling is specifically vocal/aural – it's a nuance in the BBC Radio 4 newsreader's script that sparks for Jack a connection in the fog of shared national memories:

The happenings that come into the category of supreme national moments have a grammar of their own, literally so. The BBC announcer usually said, 'You're listening to BBC Radio 4,' but that morning he said, 'This is the BBC,' and with that small reversion from modern, market-minded informality to old-fashioned authority so the death of the Princess of Wales became linked to Mr Chamberlain, air raids on the Ruhr (six of our aircraft are missing), the conquest of Everest, the Falklands War. (10)

But the nation's internal monologue lives not only the speech-patterns of newsreaders, but in our symbolic public spaces. Having heard the announcement of Diana's death in

the morning, Jack travels to the Mall, where people had already begun to gather to mark – or perform – their grief. Place communicates national history, and Jack is keen to point out that the traditions of this space (the Mall, Buckingham Palace, various pieces of statuary, all circa 1910—15) which may seem unquestionable and timeless, have been built relatively recently: 'There are people still alive,' he tells us, 'who can remember this imperial cityscape under construction' (11—12). As crowds mingle, flowers are placed, and TV crews and hotdog salesmen set up, we are reminded that 'This, then, is a twentieth-century stage, post-Victorian [...] as traditional and historic as the machine-gun or an early Mercedes' (12). The renewal of national identity is always ongoing, but the lightning-flash of Ideology blinds us to the action of that renewal, and instead tells us that what surrounds us – the Mall, the state – is constant and unquestionable.

Jack and his interviewees question the legitimacy of the grief of those who claimed to feel it, who wept for Diana as 'the readers of Dickens [wept] at the death of Little Nell, whom they too felt they knew' (16). Jack provides us with a précis of what we might call the 'rational despair' position. 'There was an oppression of grief. People had not only to grieve, they had to be seen to grieve, and in the most pictorial way, by hugging and kissing' (16). Jack and his interviewees are also discomfited by the seeming unanimity of opinion among citizens of the nation, as proposed by the media during the Diana event; the communications ISA, in Althusserian terms. Their dissent comes from the evidence of individual experience, which belied the notion that everyone felt the same way. But it is also seated in the friction between two kinds of grieving, one private and reciprocal, the other expressive and seemingly focussed on the rights of the individual.

In their 1998 article in *Folklore*, Biddle and Water tell us that while British

people are subjected to a number of conflicting social expectations when they are mourning or marking death, there are two major norms of behaviour in grief; private and expressive.

Private grief [...] is the dominant form. According to this norm, the bereaved grieve in private, behind closed doors, and hold themselves together when in public situations [...] but, when in public the mourner should give subtle hints that deep down s/he is grieving deeply (the In Memoriam notice does this perfectly). Others then feel grateful to the bereaved for holding themselves together when in company. This norm has the definite merit that it allows reciprocity: the bereaved are doing something for the sake of others, while those others show some consideration for the bereaved persons condition [...]

Expressive grief is a very different norm, emanating from the more expressive U.S.A [...] This norm takes for granted a certain view of the emotions, namely that if they are not let out they will fester within and all kinds of pathology will ensue [...] in some ways, the two norms may not be so far apart. (1998: 96)

It is important to note that we are, in this instance, extending the definition of the bereaved to include those who are mourning a person they have never met. Jack illuminates this split in grief with terms specific to the social and historical context of Diana's death:

'New Labour', a piece of highly-successful political rebranding invented by marketers, spoke for 'New Britain'. New Britain was the princess, the prime minister, flowers, compassion and the therapeutic benefits of touching and

crying [...] Old Britain was the Queen, her son and heir, pensioners with 'stiff upper lips', reticence and the neurosis brought about by repression [...] As a depiction of 60 million individuals, it was as accurate as Mrs Miniver had been in 1942 or Swinging London in 1966; but it became accepted wisdom that the nation had crossed some kind of emotional fault line. (1997: 16)

The position Jack describes here is one of concern; something decidedly unBritish has crept in, a spectre. The irony is that this unBritishness has found its articulation through an event which could only have occurred in Britain, due to the fact of our Monarchy, and our position as a culture which produces celebrities like Diana as cultural commodities which have worth overseas. We can trace this concern with or about alterity throughout Jack's article. He offers an anecdote of 'a little black girl in a bed of roses,' who he spots in the park after visiting the Mall (12). She is cutting flowers from the bushes.

I went across to her.

'You know you shouldn't be doing that, don't you?'

'Yes,' she said. 'I know.' Her scissors went on snipping.

A quandary of the civic-minded. She might have a father, or several tough brothers, out of sight behind a tree. I summoned some courage.

'Well, don't do it then.' (12)

He watches her move away, perhaps trying to sell the roses and perhaps not – 'She was too far away to hear.' He sees her again at the palace railings, with a woman, 'probably her mother, who looked like a Somali [...] The Somali woman stood reverently, I

thought' (12—13). The girl and the woman are swallowed into the crowd and the roses are swallowed into the growing pile of tributes. We cannot know whether or not the theft of the roses is justified. Jack, who we might see here as a figure for the white middle-class, product of a nexus of specific educational ISAs (University; the humanities) and cultural ISAs (Jack writes for *Granta* readers and is, presumably, a *Granta* reader himself). He is confronted by an expressive ritual he does not understand and which he finds morally suspect, and which is implicitly threatening; this threat plays out in the macrocosm of his interaction with the girl ('a father, or several tough brothers'). She is ultimately unknowable; we lose woman and girl into the multitude.

'People were arriving with bunches every couple of minutes. The people without flowers looked at these people with flowers. They were the spectacle; there was nothing much else to see' (13). Everything has become estranged – Jack is working the levers of satirical defamiliarization. Jack's interviewees reference Latin America as the nearest analogue for mood of the nation (or at least their perception of it) during Diana Week (1997: 24, 30). We can decode this comparison to mean i) ostentatiously Catholic, ii) politically unstable, verging on violent: certainly unBritish.

The divisions between ISAs, the fact that there is no central Ideology, no connection other than the one we impose from our positions as the living centres of absolutely overlappings of ISA's fields of influence, mean that the schism Jack and his interviewees have noted, this sense that someone else's genuine grief cannot possibly be genuine, is in an intractable one. Some chasms cannot be bridged. We might feel tremors in our territory, but the silent ideal palaces of national history are incapable of offering guidance because they're inert. The media suggests a unanimity which does not exist: when we turn to others for explanation we find only plurality.

The continuity between the mourning following Princess Diana's death and the

Wootton Bassett phenomenon has been pointed out by a number of commentators. The mourning for Diana can be seen as a formal predecessor of Wootton Bassett, which taught the nation various symbolic methods of displaying their grief. It is also a referent for those who put forward the argument, outlined above, that grief displayed publicly is unreal and unBritish. The following three quotations are examples of this linkage of events, in which individuals passing comment upon Wootton Bassett look back to the Diana event:

Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Fry, former head of British forces in Iraq, commented that some of the public support for Remembrance commemorations [at Wootton Bassett] is 'pretty mawkish'. Michael Clarke, Director of the Royal United Services Institute, agreed, and was quoted as saying that the Wootton Bassett phenomenon is 'not altogether helpful to the Forces' [...]. The *Daily Mirror* has labelled it 'A Diana-style tear-fest [...] that perhaps got out of hand and spiralled beyond what was intended or useful.' (Jenkins et al 2012: 6—7)

According to David Wilson, a professor of criminology at Birmingham City University, the 'distinct starting point' for these open expressions of grief was the death of Princess Diana. 'The only public show of emotion when Churchill died was that the [building] cranes were lowered,' he says. 'With Diana, you've got the public flocking, throwing flowers at the cortege [...] We've also got caught up in the cult of celebrity through things such as reality TV which gives out the message that you will be more successful the more you reveal about yourself. Emotion has become a commodity in our culture. Grief is part of that.' (Day 2010)

The families stepped forward and laid flowers on the hearse roofs. It started with Princess Diana, this bedecking of passing vehicles with flowers. In the years since then, the British have not learned to love handling flowers; they still come in cones of cellophane, and as the vehicles move on they take with them a powerful glint of artificiality. (O'Hagan 2009)

Andrew O'Hagan's Diary piece for the *London Review of Books* provides the model for the final section of this thesis, which moves into memoir to explore the experience of visiting the town as an observer and participant in a public ritual. Echoing Jack and his interviewees, O'Hagan seems to suggest that the presence of the mechanisms of the communications ISA – cameras, primarily – undercut the reality of grief. A comparison can be drawn here with the power of the interpellative gaze in Althusser's description of interaction between subjects. A subject sees another subject, recognises them for what they are (the property of the state), and so recognises themselves also. In public mourning, according to Jack and latterly O'Hagan, a camera sees a subject and thus that subject's meaning is fixed.

O'Hagan observes a procession of hearses, and tells us that, 'many of the young people were dressed in black ties and shoes from Topshop. Their hair was spiked down like the kids' hair on soap operas, and they had a very televisual way of becoming emotional' (2009) His piece concludes by recalling this type of portraiture:

I saw a young man with red eyes holding up an enlarged family photo of Sam Bassett [one of the soldiers repatriated that day]. The boy with the red eyes was being photographed; he posed against the old brickwork of the town, leaning

against a wall as if it offered something solid and traditional, something solid and symbolic, against which to offer a meaningful portrait of his feelings. In no time at all, he was surrounded by the magical apparatus of national television. (O'Hagan 2009)

Both Jack and O'Hagan's representations of people involved in the act of public mourning offer a critique which cuts two ways. There is an implicit criticism of these people who have crossed the line between private and expressive grief; Jack suggests that they've abandoned socially responsible reserve because it is 'enjoyable,' and promotes 'the griever from the audience to an on-stage part in the final act of the opera' (Jack 1997: 16). O'Hagan is less overt, and the opening of his diary piece, which focuses on reality television (specifically that broadcast by ITV2) which speaks to and about 'reckless teenagers,' suggest that he is aiming his criticisms at our voracious media. At the risk of simplification, Jack and O'Hagan's articles present arguments which imply that there is a cost to public mourning – that pre-existing social norms are being overtaken or usurped by modern mourning. Neither writer views this as a positive change; neither writer, however, is keen to make the argument that what has gone before is inherently better than what is occurring now or what might be forecast to occur. However, both seem to position the subjects they are observing as part of a problematic scenario which needs to be observed and commented upon; the subjects are othered, and become negative images (media-led, over-demonstrative; prey to false or incorrect emotions) against which the writer and reader can plot their own subjecthood: this is the work of interpellation.

We do well to remember that separate types of subject (in a specifically British context, members of different social classes) carry out different roles within the state,

have different ISAs and, we can assume, different interpellative matrixes which they apply to themselves and their peers. Althusser's explanation of the individual's relationship with ISAs might point us to consider the public who mourn in this fashion as subjects attempting to honour their emotional responses to events *despite* the media's intrusion, for example, rather than *in collusion* with the media.

As I stated in the introduction, one of the aims of this thesis in its entirety is to position the Wootton Bassett Phenomenon not as a dubious product of the state's operations, in which subjects were manipulated into acting out ISA rituals which uphold the state's dominant narrative, but rather as individuals with agency, living and reacting honestly to a particularly codified stimulus (the deaths of military personnel; the experience of being physically present at a specific space in order to mark those deaths). Having set out a critical approach, and provided a number of points of context, for example historical narratives long and short term, and the precedent of the mourning for Princess Diana with its concurrent discussions about appropriateness and its lesson of inherent alterity, this thesis will now move on to discuss Wootton Bassett, and in particular a specific challenge to the symbolic standing of the repatriations: a proposed march by the group Islam4UK.

VI.

Before moving into a discussion of the week during which the march was announced and then called off, this section will first set out some general points regarding existing critical readings of the Wootton Bassett phenomenon. Then, it will lay out a brief history of Islam4UK in order to contextualise the proposed march. Jenkins et al detail Wootton Bassett's place within the historical lineage of military procedures regarding the war dead, pointing out that this kind of memorial service, in which the body is present, is a

modern development, dating only since the 1991 Gulf War. Modern conflicts take place in a context in which the retrieval of bodies from the theatre of war and their repatriation is both feasible and necessary – 'the sites of conflict are foreign sovereign territories where there is uncertainty over the long-term care of British war graves' (2012: 2). They regard Wootton Bassett as a realisation of contemporary militarism, suggesting that the public, as 'non-state actors behaving in non-orchestrated ways,' enact our changing relationship with our military; in this era of 'low-casualty conflict' (in comparison to historical conflicts) the meaning of the soldier has changed; the public is now more than ever able to recognise a soldier's 'value as a human being' (2). There is evidence here of Althusser's descriptions of ISAs, which hardwire our opinions into us, but are themselves not static, and change the information they provide to us according to the necessities of the the state. While acknowledging the impossibility of ascribing a single meaning to the events, Jenkins et al conclude that the repatriation events were 'part of the trend of the rehabilitation of the military in the aftermath of the Iraq war, and the legitimisation of the Afghanistan war' (6).

Freden, in his article *The Politics of Ceremony: the Wootton Bassett Phenomenon*, offers a number of short theses on the events at the town as a 'case study – textual, visual and aural – of how the political displays itself intentionally and unintentionally, sincerely and self-deceptively' (2011: 2). Freden does not – cannot – reach a conclusion as firm as Jenkins et al's, because his work is not intended as a comprehensive overview of the events from a specific perspective, but is rather 'a salutary illustration of the complexity of rituals and of the many ideological and political languages of which they serve as conduits' (9).

Freden's readings range from the semantic/symbolic aspect of the events as performances, the debate over what we might call 'ownership' of the events, and

analysis of the phenomenon in terms of the current political context. Freeden's work highlights the richness of Wootton Bassett as a field for analysis and research. 'The Wootton Bassett ritual,' he tells us, 'is clearly replete with ideological messages' (7). He typifies the phenomenon as a 'vernacular exemplar' of political thinking, of a kind 'crucially important' in understanding the 'thought-practices of a society,' in this case England (8). Freeden raises many productive questions; his article might be seen as the rather more speculative, exploratory counterweight to Jenkins et al's grounded, authoritative analysis.

Both of these sources make particular note of the spatial element of the Wootton Bassett events, signalling that in their performative, physical element, they are differentiated from abstract, rhetorical manifestations of ideologies. They point us towards the materiality of the events, and the fact that the members of the public who were involved in the phenomenon were enacting or embodying something; the problem is the multiplicity of things which *might have been being enacted or embodied*.

Jenkins et al offer a useful introduction to Islam4UK:

In January 2010, Anjem Choudary sparked outrage by announcing that his radical group 'Islam4UK' would parade through Wootton Bassett with 'symbolic coffins' in memory of the Muslim civilians 'murdered by the merciless' coalition forces [...] The story was covered widely. Rather than using the controversy to demonise Islam, most papers depicted Choudary's group as a 'small bunch of extremists, bigots and opportunists' with little support amongst British Muslims [...] *The Times* reported that the local Wiltshire Islamic Centre described Choudary's previous group, the now banned al-Muhajiroun, as 'a deviant sect,' and stated that 'We unreservedly condemn this march and call on the organisers

to not go ahead with it' in the interests of Muslims and the people of Wootton Bassett [...] Choudary apparently claimed that his goal was to initiate 'an open and frank dialogue regarding the reality of this war' [...] The march never went ahead – it was doubtful if Choudary commanded enough supporters even to undertake it. (2012: 4)

This quotation provides the context for my work in this section. By the time Choudary proposed his march, Wootton Bassett had entered into the symbolic vocabulary of national discourse; the media had already ascribed various meanings to the town, and the town's name itself had become inextricably connected with the military repatriations and the national conversation regarding our military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan; in the discourse of our ISAs, 'Wootton Bassett' no longer simply referred to the town itself.

I am focussing upon Islam4UK's proposed march because it was a moment in which 'Wootton Bassett' was challenged on the grounds of its very nature; critical comment had previously been passed upon the repatriation events on other, less radical terms. These range, for example, from suggestions that the events had been hijacked by the media and therefore become ersatz, to the critique that there was something dangerously gung-ho about the tacit support for military action implied by memorialisation: '[M]edia coverage,' Jenkins et al tell us, 'transformed repatriation at Wootton Bassett to the point of growing unease,' as the spectre of 'grief tourism' was raised by both the media and towns-people (6).

Evolving from an earlier group, Al Muhajiroun, Islam4UK was led by 'Anjem Choudary and Abu Uzair, both acolytes of Omar Bakri.' (Pantucci 2010: 239) The group began to develop a public profile in 2009. In May of that year, 'a press statement

appeared on www.islam4uk.com announcing “Al Muhajiroun to be relaunched!” which as well as announcing the re-launching of the group provided a Tripoli telephone number for Sheikh Omar Bakri to contact for more information ... the timing likely reflects the clearing of the group from involvement in the 7 July 2005 bombings by the May 2009 ISC report' (Pantucci 2010: 240). Pantucci maps out the connections between Bakri Mohammed's group and a number of significant terror plots in Britain or involving Britons. Pupcenoks & McCabe put Islam4UK's membership at 300 in their pomp, but quote 'exiled, controversial leader Omar Bakri Muhammad' claiming 4,500 supporters (Pupcenoks and McCabe 2013: 176).

The group staged rallies against British troops, and called for the British Queen to convert to Islam and for the Buckingham Palace to be converted into a mosque. Islam4UK explicitly claimed that its aim is to overthrow the British government. (176)

These overt calls for revolution might strike us as absurd, even as we acknowledge that Choudary and his followers pose a threat to the order of the state. *Vice's* 2009 short documentary *Jihadi Milkshakes* focusses on this strange disparity, the air of the surreal, that Anjem Choudary and his followers generate. I do not present *Vice* as an academic source here; it is primarily a lifestyle publication; however, it has engaged with Anjem Choudary a number of times. While we might and should question the cultural assumptions under which *Vice* operates, we can find illuminating moments in their reportage. In *Jihadi Milkshakes*, dead-pan editing accentuates the willingness of Choudary's followers to say things which to secular ears sound ridiculous; they are very willing to administer lashings and cut off the hands of thieves. The documentary ends

with Choudary and his inner circle drinking milkshakes and discussing the duality of their identities; to non-Muslims, Choudary says – and for him the category of non-Muslim certainly, in this film at least, seems intermeshed with that of military aggressor – they must seem 'scary'; to those who are Muslims (according to Choudary's terms, meaning that they support the idea of a global Caliphate and hard-line Sharia law), they must seem *right*.

Here Choudary is enforcing a binary opposition upon categories of people, leaving no room for more complicated positions. Pupcenoks and McCabe remind us of the falsity of this categorical effort by Choudary: domestic British Islamic extremists can be seen themselves to be the product of the formation of a distinct kind of British anational identity within the nation's Muslim communities; one which negotiates differing cultural identities and arrives at a position of relatively harmonious synthesis. The mere fact of Islam4UK's existence puts the lie to the 'monolithic' view of the Muslim community espoused by Far-Right groups and the centrist political parties who are afraid of losing voters to them (Pupcenoks and McCabe 2013: 174).

The documentary illustrates another duality in its subjects' group identity; after all, the film seems to ask us, who can be threatening while drinking a milkshake? The cognitive dissonance created by this scene is illustrative of the press reaction to Anjem Choudary in particular. In February 2013 – after Islam4UK had become a banned group – *Vice* published an online article titled, 'We Asked the Lunatic Fringe of UK Politics About Their Ideal Britain'. Anjem Choudary is interviewed, and *Vice* describes him thus:

Islamist cleric and former leader of the now defunct Islam4UK who wants to introduce Sharia law to Britain. We've hung out with Anjem a couple of times

and he always seems like a pretty nice guy, then you remember – if he had his way – women would be treated like slaves and being stoned to death would be a thing again, both of which obviously aren't ideal. (Childs and Francey 2013)

The overall media narrative regarding Choudary, whose public profile has long since eclipsed any groups of which he is part, generally acts out – in a much less self-aware manner – the threatening figure/ figure-of-ridicule dichotomy evidenced by Vice.

Having laid out important background information regarding Islam4UK's position within the cultural context of Wootton Bassett (as a fringe group, attracting both derision and fear, with aims closely related to the conflict(s) oversea which were leading to the military casualties and thus the repatriations), the next section will now move on to look at reactions to their specific threat or promise to march at Wootton Bassett. I have outlined Althusserian theory and terminology, along with and the relationship of national identity to the state, and having provided contextual information moving from the general (British myths of descent) to the specific (public mourning after Diana's death), this section of the thesis will now perform an Althusserian reading of the reaction to Islam4UK's proposed march.

VII.

A briefing available on the Wiltshire Council website provides a good overview of the collaboration between police and local council – RSA and ISA – during the period in which the march was announced. This document was supplied as part of the agenda of a Tidworth Area Board meeting on 15 March 2010. The Tidworth Area Board chair states on the Board Agenda page that the proposed reaction to the march, encompassing and detailed within the .pdf, is 'a very good example of Wiltshire Police and Wiltshire

Council working in partnership' (2010). Here we can see the collaborative functions of ISAs and the RSA. We can assume that the .pdf is the product of the 'Gold' group mentioned in same document. From the very beginning, there was doubt as to whether the group could or would go through with the march. Press interest in the proposal led to 'significant Community Impact,' along with statements from the English Defence League, among other groups, promising to counter-march (2010).

'Community Impact' is a neat rhetorical categorisation which compartmentalises offence and revulsion, typifies it as the product of 'press interest' rather than some innate moral or emotional response, and treats it as simply an additional stressor in the situation as opposed to an overriding concern. The briefing shows that it was commonly understood that the march would disrupt a repatriation ceremony; the .pdf states that a rumour began to circulate that Islam4UK would attend the town for the repatriation on 10 January. They didn't, although there was a 'significant show of strength' from people opposed to the group's proposed march; the 'general nature of the crowd was calm and there were no significant incidents' (2010). Much work was done to prepare for the march if it happened:

A Gold Group was established. The membership of the group consisted of a wide range of internal key managers from Wiltshire Police and various senior members of other agencies including the Fire Service, Ambulance Service, Health Authority and the Local Authority. Swindon Borough Council and local communities were included in the operational plans to ensure a pan Wiltshire approach was adopted. Regular meetings were held and a great deal of work was carried out on how to contain a protest and counter any potential fall out from it. (2010)

Much of the immediate evidence in this section of the thesis comes from the BBC's reportage of the week during which the march was proposed and called off. While these sources have their own biases, the BBC's daily bulletin stories offer a concise record of public statements made by figures involved in this event. The articles are straightforward pieces of reportage which track the chronology of statement and counter-statement from the figures involved. I have avoided including editorial opinion from these sources in my quotations, using them rather as a silo of statements from third parties. Reference is also made to Jenkins et al as a historical source, as their work is authoritative. It is based in part on analysis of newspapers published during the period and related to Wootton Bassett, and so offers not only a record of the events, but an even-handed representation of the debates taking place regarding the processions. I cite their study and use of media reportage regarding the event as a precedent for my own use of the BBC's articles.

On 4 January 2010 Wiltshire Police released a statement. Islam4UK had made no effort to contact them before declaring that they were planning the event, in order to have the march sanctioned. Here the focus was entirely on the legality of the march. The police statement is skilfully worded – a careful performance of lack-of-bias:

Under the Public Order Act the organiser must inform the police of the date, time and route of the proposed procession, and the name and address of the organiser. If the march or procession is believed to be likely to result in serious disorder, disruption or damage, then the police can impose conditions upon the organiser. In exceptional circumstances, police may apply to the local authority for an order prohibiting such a march. (BBC News 2010a)

The police statement puts Islam4UK's provocative plan into a position of equality with other, more prosaic political actions, thereby robbing it of radical glamour, and neatly encompassing the group within the aegis of civil policing – at once a repressive and protective act – and demoting their rhetoric to issues of civil order.

Here we can see a key difference in the nature of ISAs and the RSA (the police). While we cannot forget that the two types of State Apparatus overlap, with the RSA acting ideologically and ISAs acting repressively, Althusser points us to a useful division in their functioning. The RSA, he states, 'belongs entirely to the *public* domain' (2008: 18) Therefore it is no surprise that the police statement quoted above uses a particular register which we might term 'authoritarian neutral.' It deals with the issue at hand strictly on, and with, its own terms, exerting repressive power through the redefinition of the march into an issue of *public* order as opposed to private moral hygiene.

The RSA's focus upon the public sphere can also be seen in comments reported by Jenkins et al, offered in support of that paper's conclusion that although Wootton Bassett was broadly a facet of conservative, positive militarism, it could not – due to the essentially ambiguous nature of the events and their focus upon the death of servicemen – avoid also acting as a critique of militarism. Issues of control are raised by this dichotomous position. To return to a statement quoted above, in a section related to the mourning for Princess Diana, Jenkins et al report Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Fry describing the commemoration as 'pretty mawkish' (2012: 6).

While this is a step away from 'authoritarian neutral' in register, it is worth noting that the appeal here is to a concept – mawkishness – which is predicated upon social interaction and public context. One's degree of mawkishness is defined by the

unmawkishness of those around you. What is more, the idea that to be mawkish is a negative attribute relies upon a concern for wider culture. Mawkishness is an issue of public good; false sentimentality clouds the waters of discourse and symbolic interactions, devaluing real sentimentality and artificially elevating unworthy events into positions of undue cultural prominence. I labour this point here in order to offer an important contrast to the ideological loading of the statements of politicians, below. While RSAs operate in and belong to the public sphere, ISAs, on the other hand, operate in 'the *private* domain' (2008: 18).

Having set out information regarding the state's practical reaction to the march (the RSAs calm, authoritative response), I will now examine the state's rhetorical reaction, which takes the form of statements made by politicians; that is to say, subjects working within – and for – the political ISA.

On 2 January Wootton councillor Jenny Stratton said: 'Everyone has the right to protest, but it's not a very tactful place to do it' (BBC News 2010a). Tact, the ability to deal with others without causing undue upset and while acknowledging social codes, seems a strange quality against which to judge a radical group. We might see this as an attempt to nullify Islam4UK's proposal by treating it on a level other than that which it was intended to be treated, working in a similar fashion to the Police's treatment of the march as a purely practical concern. Tact is related to offense and appropriateness but is, unlike those concepts, one in which it is possible to see gradations – you can be more or less tactful in a freer and less universal way than one can be more or less appropriate – an act which is *almost* inappropriate is still appropriate, and has in fact extended the boundaries of what can be conceived of as appropriate; one could be tactfully inappropriate or tactlessly appropriate depending upon the situation.

If we follow the logic espoused by government and press, the inhabitants of

Wootton Bassett 'own' offence in this context because i) they are part of the British people, who must all feel offence at this proposed march, and ii) the town's entire meaning pre-repatriations has been subsumed into the place's new symbolic role. Despite this doubling of Stratton's duty to feel offended, she is in fact stepping down in register, speaking in a way which still engages with her discomfort at the march, but also engages with Islam4UK as a group of individuals who share her reality as opposed to a threatening other. Stratton recasts the group as people for whom tact is a possibility, although they have failed to conform to it this time. She has (re)interpellated the group as subjects of the state, albeit 'bad subjects,' rather than as individuals whose beliefs allow them to exist as a kind of splinter-of-another-state living as dissidents within a nation, and a national identity, which they reject.

On 4 January 2010, Prime Minister Gordon Brown commented on the proposed march in a morning press briefing. His first appeal is to the concept of appropriateness. 'The Prime Minister felt that anything that was considered offensive to families of troops in Afghanistan would be completely inappropriate [...] Anything that would cause offence to our troops in Afghanistan and their families would be completely inappropriate' (The Prime Minister's Office 2010). The headline for the concurrent BBC story is 'Brown warns against "offensive" Wootton Bassett parade.' David Cameron, leader of the opposition, states that the march would be 'completely unacceptable,' and appeals to legal recourse: '[Choudary] strays, I think, extremely close to the line of encouraging hatred, extremism and violence' (BBC News 2010c).

On 4 January, Home Secretary Alan Johnson is quoted stating that the march 'fills me with revulsion [...] I find it particularly offensive' (BBC News 2010b).

Members of the political ISA make statements in what we might think of as private language; the language of emotion, of emotional/physical reaction. The politicians'

focus here is on really a vivified, active kind of national identity – identity is required, after all, in order for offence to exist. By issuing personal reactions ('it fills me with revulsion') politicians are working to show the electorate that they are embodiments of the same shared consciousness, nodes of the same organic, natural, commonsensical system, and healthily – *rightly* – unable to stop themselves from serving first and foremost the subjective, the reactive, thus temporarily relegating the objective and the nuanced.

That strict and limiting definition of the town can be seen in Gordon Brown's comments on the 5th of January:

[Wootton Bassett has] become a symbol for the whole country's commemoration of fallen soldiers ... I think the whole country is proud of the people of Wootton Bassett and the dignified way that they have commemorated the service of the soldiers in Afghanistan. It has become a symbol for the whole nation's commemoration and remembrance of the people who've served our country. I don't think there is anybody I know in this country who wishes to turn Wootton Bassett and what happens there into an undignified political event led by one or two people who've got malicious reasons for doing so. I think we should be very clear that it's not acceptable and it would be disgusting and offensive and I don't think there is any public support for any means by which Wootton Bassett should be abused in this way. (BBC News 2010d)

Brown here is appealing to 'wholeness', a unity, and then speaking for that unified state which his own grammar has provided for him. If we refer to Jenkins et al we can see this as an example of Brown working to shore-up the necessary militarism of the state,

the 'intentional, sustained and deliberate practise on the part of the state military institutions [the RSA] and wider actors [ISAs] supportive of state objectives' (2012: 2). Jenkins et al are keen to remind us that the events at Wootton Bassett 'occurred at a time when the government and the military were deliberately attempting to “reconnect” the military to the public in the wake of the unpopular Iraq war' (6).

In his work to fulfil this aim, Brown performs an act of interpellation; subjects are spoken to and spoken for, and that speaking tells them who they are and how they feel. Brown is channelling the lightning-strike of Ideology, conjuring a cohesive 'whole' identity out of a set of ISA-mediated assumptions; that we are proud of the same things; that we have the same understanding of dignity (a term laden with liberal-humanist baggage); that we are all engaged in 'commemoration and remembrance'; that we share an understanding of what actions would constitute an abuse of a symbolic space.

Brown adds that the people of Wootton Bassett were 'loyal, dedicated and patriotic [...] I do not want their good will abused by people coming in to disrupt what is an activity which is welcome throughout the country' (BBC News 2010d). It is also worth noting that here again we can see an elision between the march and a repatriation ceremony; as far as Gordon Brown is concerned, Islam4UK would be disrupting a repatriation, despite the group claiming otherwise. Brown's focus is not only on the town, but outwards – this again is interpellative action – he is demanding that we regard ourselves as a nation, as a whole, at the same time that we regard Wootton Bassett; he is working to enforce complimentary meanings on both territories.

We should also note that the division between public/RSA and private/ISA is apparent here in the semantics of these political statements. Brown and Johnson speak of 'disgust,' and being 'filled with revulsion'. These are visceral reactions taken from the field of physical – that is to say, private – response. While Sir Robert Fry's statement

focuses upon the cultural impact of the target of his critique (in his case the Wootton Bassett phenomenon itself), Brown and Johnson return to the body in a way which upholds the concept of the subject-as-embodiment of the state; they are positing a porous membrane between the public and the private, in which that which the state finds unacceptable elicits a reaction in the subject which mimics that of the human body when it encounters something it cannot accept; disgust, revulsion. Freeden points out that Brown's statements about the proposed march marked his 'personal intervention for the first time,' in the Wootton Bassett phenomenon (2011: 7). As previously noted, we must acknowledge that the fact that the RSA was not brought in to halt the repatriation events implies a tacit consent and thus involvement on Brown's part.

For Freeden, Brown's statements that this proposed march 'penetrated the psychological defences of the nation,' forming as it did 'an attempt to colonize "sacred" national space by an "alien culture" and an extra-British allegiance that undermined the core of an unspoken and assured national identity' (7). Freeden highlights the Althusserian problem in Brown's argument; the idea of an 'unspoken and assured national identity' (7). This is the null space of Ideology, the impossible point of synthesis which unites our constellation of regional ISAs and by doing so finally legitimises the state-system which has created them. It is interesting to note that Freeden, as Brown and Johnson trade on ideas of revulsion and disgust, proposes the image of penetration, colonisation, and the idea that a nation or a nation's identity might have a core; this enforces a structural analogy similar to the idea of body-as-state.

It would be a mistake to present that state (according to Althusser's theories) as inert, not only because the reproductive effort of the state is always occurring, but because the class struggle is also ongoing. While the ISA/RSA structure works towards the state's aims, it also provides the subject with a material, social space – a 'site' – in

which to work against the dominant ideologies at play (Althusser 1990: 21, see also 59). ISAs are the space in which meaningful narratives are communicated to us, inculcating that interpellative, Ideological bolt, and thus they are simultaneously the space in which we can challenge or subvert those narratives and their agreed-upon meanings. Satire, for example, operates within the communications ISA; Marxism is taught within the educational ISA.

The Wootton Bassett phenomenon, with its specialised rituals and its close interleaving with accepted symbols of patriotism and militarism, falls within Althusser's definitions of the operation of ISAs. That is not to suggest that the phenomenon was in and of itself an ISA, but rather that it is recognisably part of the continuum of ISAs (in this case the ISAs closely linked to the RSA) as they develop according to the events which affect the populace of the state. It is important to remember that Althusser positions the ISA as not only part of the mechanism of the state, but also as the space in which the subject can take part in class struggle – is forced, in fact, to take part in class struggle, as the ISA is a mechanism by which class war is waged against the workers by the ruling classes.

An example of the potential of the ISA as a space for struggle is visible in the comments made on 4 January 2010 by Chris Wannell, a town councillor. Wannell told the BBC that the townsfolk did not honour the soldiers 'for any political reason at all' other than to show respect for 'those who have given their lives for our freedom' (BBC News 2010a). In the same report, Wiltshire's Tory MP James Gray told BBC News that 'The point about the repatriation ceremonies in Wootton Bassett High Street is that they are totally non-political ... People aren't saying we are for the war or we're against the war. It is just about paying respect to those who have laid down their lives in the line of duty.' He is reported as telling BBC Radio 5 live: 'Fine Mr Choudary, say what you

want, I detest what you say, but please, please don't come to Wootton Bassett' (BBC News 2010a).

What Wannell and Gray propose is a challenge not only to Islam4UK but to the government's use of Wootton Bassett as ideological capital. They are the exemplar of a position Jenkins et al identify: 'apolitical' positions that sought to deny explicit recognition that the repatriations could be understood in those terms.' (Jenkins et al 2012: 6) They are upholding a simplistic narrative of the events glossed usefully by Jenkins et al, as solely 'spontaneous civic markings of respect for dead military personnel and solidarity with the bereaved' (2).

Wannell and Gray – both of whom are directly involved in political ISA – can be seen as making a case for the triumph of the individual over their context. They are presenting a unilateral challenge to other readings of Wootton Bassett by simply and terminally denying them. This might be seen, according to Freedon, as an attempt fundamentally to uphold the authenticity of the towns-people's experience in the face of a communications ISA which intrinsically denatures the authenticity of that which it reports:

The suggestion of free agency and exemption from organisation and control lends weight to the popularist aspect through emphasizing the unprompted origins of the mourning practice – for genuine emotion is unplanned and such artless expression of grief lends the event additional authenticity, irrespective of the question of the spontaneity of the ritual. (Freedon 2011: 3)

According to Wannell and Gray, Wootton Bassett was not a way of celebrating the conflict which had caused the deaths of those it marked it was only, their argument

would suggest, marking the final honour afforded to a soldier by the citizens of the soldier's nation *despite* the exact nature, cause or justification of their death.

In all cultures, the war dead occupy a particular place. They occupy it because of the difficulty in rationalizing sacrifice and because the bereaved need a rationale that explains the deaths of their relatives, transforming them into heroes; because of the ostensibly altruistic nature of such death; and because a nation betrays the duty to protect all its members by sending some of them to their deaths, on what is sometimes merely the pretext that those who die are protecting the rest.

(Freedman 2011: 2)

If these military casualties were described as heroes, it wasn't particularly for things they'd actually done – heroism (in the patriotic mode) was conferred in the moment of their death as an extension of the logic of the contract they entered into when they joined the military.

Of course it is untrue to say that the repatriations are 'non-political.' They are an extrusion of the political; a politically-shaped understanding of the history of the nation and the actions of its military has combined with a political event – conflict in Afghanistan – and people have reacted in a way which must, therefore, be read as political. What is more, 'when transmitted to 'the nation' through television and newspaper coverage, the Wootton Bassett phenomenon was produced as a political event' (Jenkins et al 2012: 5). As Althusser would remind us, it is impossible to be outside Ideology or ideologies, impossible to be outside of the machinery of the state, as that is the context which has formed us as individuals, and thus it is impossible to be outside of politics once one is actively bringing about material change in either the

public or private sphere – both of those spheres being contingent upon the state.

Freeden tells us that 'Wootton Bassett has removed the 'repatriation' practice from the public domain by substituting itself, as a territorial and social miniature, for that domain' (2011: 4). We can see in this description all the functions of an ISA; a discrete, regional, 'that is to say, a limited 'social miniature,' of norms and ritual, which serve to uphold the interest of the state.'

The value of this ISA to the state is obvious, re-entrenching as it does ideas of unity, of shared military heritage and so a shared national identity, and of the myths of heroism and self-sacrifice which uphold the actions of the RSA. Even the political appeals to keep Wootton Bassett as a sacred space – of which the proposed invasion by Islam4UK provokes disgust – performs an ideological function, as it enforces the false difference between public and private, implying in a way which is useful to the state that something should and can be left unexamined, provided of course that its meaning has been successfully defined by the state.

Wannell and Gray refute the symbolic potential of Wootton Bassett as an arena for ideological combat by trying to recast it as an apolitical space in which the repatriation ceremonies are private, not political events. Freeden usefully typifies this attempt to retrieve the town from the public sphere and return it to the private: 'The town has adopted the private persona of an individual or, more accurately, of a close-knit family of citizens or denizens, removed from the national public sphere' (2011: 4).

Islam4UK's ideological action required the Wootton Bassett phenomenon to have a fixed political meaning. If the town would not conform to Islam4UK's idea of what is correct – to stop the repatriations as a mark of respect to the civilian casualties overseas – then the group required it at least to accept itself as a valid battleground for ideological contest. The defence of Wootton Bassett is two-fold; one, that ideological

battle shouldn't be met there because it's inappropriate – we might call this the argument *from within* ideology. The second – this is Wannell and Gray's argument – is that Wootton Bassett should be allowed to exempt itself from 'political reason[s],' the argument *from outside* ideology (despite this being an impossibility).

Wannell and Gray's protest – and any other attempts, including the one I make in this thesis, to complexify, sophisticate and problematise the state's narrative of the events – can be read as an example of an ISA functioning to provide an outlet for subjects to challenge the state. In this regard they conform to one of Althusser's more hopeful statements in *On Ideology*: 'Ideological State Apparatuses may be not only the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle [...] the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there [...] by the utilization of their contradictions' (2008: 21). The Wannell and Gray position is a form of struggle against the state's interpellative action, all be it one which is very much engaged with the sentimental cultural payload of the events. This is not clear cut class action – there are no calls for revolution here – rather it is a more-or-less unconscious rejection of the state's reproductive need and the consistent Ideological event – the lightning strikes – which enable it.

VIII.

This short section attempts to introduce a complimentary critical approach to the Althusserian reading performed up to this point. This new critical field – the uncanny – provides a useful position from which to illustrate the ways in which Wootton Bassett is an example of the ISA-as-space-for-struggle. This section will begin with some brief statements on the uncanny as a critical approach. Studies in the uncanny in recent years have moved this concept out of literary studies and into the world, deploying at as

a destabilising tool with which to interrogate material narratives, which lack the manageable, formal order of literary texts (Masschelein 2011). The critical approach in this section springs from Nicholas Royle's book *The Uncanny* (a work in which Royle refers, as earlier in this thesis, to Kafka as – this is my gloss – an engine of the uncanny). The justification of this use of the uncanny as analytical tool can be found in Royle's proposal of 'the importance of notions of the uncanny as a way of beginning to think about culture, philosophy, religion, literature, science, politics *in the present*' (2003: 22).

Royle's work resists simple derivations, and part of the thrust of his book is that the uncanny resists definition. It is to do, he states, 'with liminality,' a natural aspect of our interaction with the material (2003: 2). The uncanny as a concept, even as a word (uncanny meets its heteronym head on; too much canniness becomes uncanny) is about fixed positions running in to each other, opposites embodying each other – Royle's liminality. Absence and presence replace each other in destabilising ambiguity and – a more direct challenge to our fragile ontology – parity. These uncertainties of position and of meaning play out in subtler and subtler articulations as we read our surroundings and our lives. The uncanny is a central experience of life (and let us not forget Althusser entirely: life means *life within the state*). To experience the uncanny is similar to experiencing interpellation: it is the experience of 'a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself *as* a foreign body, the very estrangement of inner silence and solitude' (Royle 2003: 2).

Silence is at the core of this section. The Wootton Bassett phenomenon is typified by silence. 'Dignified silence', was a defining quality of the repatriation events, and one much mentioned in the newspaper reportage of the events. To work from first principles: silence is the absence of utterance. Silence in a social situation is the result of

a choice made by each subject present at the event. That choice is to make no statement, in a situation (a gathering of people; an event with obvious political meaning) in which statement might naturally be expected. In the case of Wootton Bassett, the argument might be made that silence was enforced by cultural norms of the type outlined earlier in this thesis – that while mourning is becoming perhaps more demonstrative, it is overall still much to do with self-control in support of public hygiene. That type of silence would be predicated by the modes of behaviour taught to us by ISAs, products of a Christian, Protestant history (remember Jack's interviewees, quick to distinguish between Catholic mourning and our mourning). We should also consider the type of mourning – the type of grief – which is being enacted. There is a difference between directly traumatic mourning – or mourning which comes from direct trauma – and the kind of mourning enacted or experienced by the majority of people who attended the Wootton Bassett phenomenon. This difference was at the heart of Jack and O'Hagan's suspicions about the mourning for Diana and the Wootton Bassett repatriations respectively. We might expect or allow, socially speaking, demonstrative, verbal grief from the directly bereaved. When mourning moves on a step, to the general populace, our culturally-mediated sense of what is correct begins to make itself known.

These considerations make the case for a conservative kind of silence, one which conforms to the social rules we have been taught through our ISAs. However, the overt political aspects of the repatriations demand comment. To attend the repatriation processions was to face the products (the mechanical/industrial pun here is intended) of the state which has subjectified us, and within the security of which we operate in our subjecthood. Shouldn't the subject then feel compelled to make some kind of utterance, to state their position? But silence reigns, enforced by the culturally conditioned aspects of mourning – that is to say, the socially mediated aspects. Thus is Ideology made

material. The state's lesson is that it would be inappropriate to use someone's death – the moment in which we are focussing all our attention simply in being aware of their death – to make a statement about *yourself*; this rule applies at any ritual marking a death, and especially at one marking the death of a subject involved in the RSA, exactly where the compunction to make a statement might be most deeply felt. This formulation of the silence of public mourning points us again to the lightning-strike of Ideology; the choice (which is perhaps no choice) to be silent is again evidence of the material way in which a state reproduces its conditions through its subjects.

However, there is an alternative case: silence may not be a sign of acquiescence to social pressures, but rather an articulation of Althusser's description of the ISA as site for struggle. Althusser's theory in this regard allows us to redefine that silence, and to examine it as not simply a socially codified situational response, but instead an act of struggle against the interpellative mechanism of the state. The moment of silence at these events can be read as the performance of the impossible apolitical position proposed by Wannell and Gray – an uncanny moment in which the absence of political utterance ('I think *this* about *this*') is present when a political utterance would be most appropriate: at the bleeding edge of political action. The silence of the subjects who took part in the repatriation ceremonies, then, may be positioned as a moment of uncanny indeterminacy in which the silent subject, containing a multitude of feelings and opinions, and possibly inhabiting quite contradictory positions due to the various ISAs from which their contingent self has sprung, chooses not to say anything, because there is too much to say. A subject performing this silence is not supporting the state; they are removing themselves from the interpellative cycle by refusing to confirm their beliefs and so their identity. That the mute attendance of subjects provides enough evidence for the state to *claim* support is a separate issue.

The model described here is of the silent subject as an active participant in ritual aspect of the repatriations – one who has at least the potential for dignified struggle against the state. Silence in this context is a kind of stacking of absences: the absence of utterance when confronted with the absence of life in the bodies repatriated, the absence of sense in the face of the randomness and finality of death, and the central absence of a firm, definitive Ideology underpinning the nation – and, by extension, the reality of our lives.

The terminal section of this thesis details my own visit to Wootton Bassett, in November 2014, in order to take part in the armistice day ceremony there. This piece of memoir operates as a discrete investigation of the issues and ideas discussed in the body of the thesis. In some respects it shows the limitations of such study when applied to the real world, the subject finding it impossible to work through the detritus of meaning thrown up by the reproductive operation of the state like a dust cloud. My visit to the town was an attempt to enact a less critical, more associative kind of reading (and writing), an experiential reading in which the idea of absence and silence – uncanny and Ideological – guided my process.

IX.

When I was off the M6 and onto the M5 I stopped at a service station for coffee, and spent a little time arguing with myself about whether or not I had been there before; it seemed to be a service station I stopped at once on a trip down to London to play a gig and met, by coincidence, a very good friend from Manchester, a beautiful and hip man called Matthew. He was also on the road, with a band he was half-managing called Ghost Outfit. But it wasn't that service station; that, I remembered when I was back on the motorway, had been Watford Gap. The feeling of coincidence was still hanging

around me when Radio 4's afternoon play started: *The Death of a Soldier*, a kind of docu-drama about the military career and fatal wounding in Afghanistan of a young officer of the Welsh Guards.

As I listened I realised that I half-knew the story already; it had been told in a series of television programmes broadcast on BBC3 based on head-cam footage of soldiers in Afghanistan; I had heard some of the lines the actors were speaking coming from the source itself – the sources themselves, terrifyingly young soldiers who had killed people, and seen their friends wounded and killed for this country.

Vaughan Savage played himself in facsimile news broadcasts. It was a bit dizzying. The subject of the play didn't end up on the road through Wootton Bassett to Oxford's coroners; he was flown to Birmingham, and it wasn't until he was there that the decision was made to switch off his life-support. At the point of death the radio signal started to dip in and out and as the dialogue became hushed and the soundtrack delicate, static blotted it out. Even before that the broadcast had been interrupted by occasional blurts from other stations, lightning-fast fractions of songs or syllables cut free from the words to which they rightly belonged. I got Radio 4 back after a few minutes, in time to hear the fallen Sandhurst graduate's mother say that evidence had come to light that her son was exposed to sniper-fire because he was moving around, trying to get radio reception.

Off the motorway and into Cotswold countryside. It reminded me of the greenbelt around my home town, but the fields were larger, or if they weren't larger then there were more of them; it felt like land I knew around Leyland had been allowed to exhale, to spread. As the roads narrowed I passed a truck with an unusual assembly of headlights, some above the cab, more than seemed necessary, and I noted it; that, I thought, is unique. Then I saw the same kind of truck two or three more times. They

were servicing the unseen industrial estates hidden in the countryside.

At the hotel the staff were teenagers and when asked I couldn't remember the registration number of my car.

It's new, I said, although it was months old.

The bed was a vital inch too short. I scanned the TV guide for violent films and wrestling.

That evening I went out into the drizzle for my first trip into the town. When I jogged across the main road the rain on my glasses made oncoming headlights blur so I thought they were closer than they were. I was timing my walk for the next morning. For the first ten minutes it was all petrol stations, residential cul-de-sacs, and office buildings (including, a signpost said, the Red Cross). Then the police station; then the pubs and shops began. I noticed a funeral directors. I passed by an old gent in a wheelchair, with one leg and a poppy on his lapel.

My first procession-related thought: what would it look like without all these cars? Royal Wootton Bassett High Street is wide, originally having accommodated 'vibrant markets' (Clarke 2013: 14), which now means there's a lot of parking spaces. When I wandered in it was gone five and people were parking outside off-licences and takeaways – there's a healthy crop of those – or leaving their places of work. There were union jacks in the windows of some of the shops, if you looked for them. In a jeweller's window, a display of RAF-themed necklaces and tie-pins; unlike the displays which could be assumed to relate to time of year, that jewellery, I thought, must be there long term.

I found the war memorial statue. There were already wreaths around it from the previous Sunday. It consists of a globe held up by many hands; Atlas's role democratised. There was a flag – a white cross on red background with lions rampant.

Next to it, the town museum on its pillars, ridiculous.

Arguably the most recognisable building in Royal Wootton Bassett, the Town Hall dominates the High Street. Gifted to the town by Laurence Hyde, Lord of the Manor, in 1690, the hall as the location for much of the Borough's business. The building hosted the corporation meeting, elections (both local and Parliamentary), court, charities and a school from time to time. The local lock-up or 'blind house', primarily for drunks, was once located at the stairs end of the building [...] When in 1886 the Borough was abolished the future looked bleak for the – by then – neglected structure [...] and thoughts turned to demolition. Luckily, public opposition encouraged Sir Henry Meux to fund restoration work, so long as the building passed to him on completion. In 1889 a number of pillars were replaced and the exterior given its current mock-Tudor style; the interior was also radically altered with one complete floor being removed. In 1966 the Town Hall became the location for the town's museum. (Clarke 2013: 6—7)

The mock-tudoring of this building highlights a problem I found in my attempt to acclimatise myself to the town; to an untrained eye like mine, it was difficult to tell what was old and what had been made to look old. The town hall squatted, at once smaller and larger than I had imagined, and charming. I was expecting to see the Cross Keys pub – the unofficial social heart of the repatriation events, according to O'Hagan – until I realised I was standing next to it while I waited to cross the road – it was completely masked by scaffolding, making it look like a siege tower, with an egress for pedestrians to pass underneath the workmen, who were drilling and rattling up on their frame. When I crossed the road to the town-hall side I could make out the pub's name

through the mesh and the pipes.

I carried on down, not wanting to dwell too long at the prime target of my trip. Lots of charity shops; I'm drawn to charity shops. Then the High Street started to dip downhill and there was the infants school. Initially I mistook its playground equipment for some southern breed of pub smoking-area furniture. I went on down the hill until it seemed obvious that observers would not have travelled so far down – maybe they did – but it no longer felt like natural procession territory for me; it had become too residential, lacking the obvious shared and public usage of the broad pavement outside the shop-frontages of the High Street.

I turned around and said aloud, 'So, I am a hearse.' I walked slowly up the hill, thinking, this slope into the town was never really mentioned in the newspaper articles; Wootton Bassett had always seemed flat to me. How slowly to walk – how slowly could they have driven? What gear does a hearse have to be in to climb a hill at a dignified speed? As I walked a car pulled up at the curb next to me and for a moment, as it rolled to a stop, its speed matched mine. I wondered if they were going to wind the window down and uselessly ask me for directions.

The Town Hall on its pillars came into view earlier than I thought it would have, floating in the night like a bungalow, a bit mad, Baba Yaga's house on its chicken legs. That's what they would've seen, I thought, and then wondered who my *they* was – some composite driver/corpse, or a version of myself as driver. By the time I'd reached the off-licence I couldn't imagine anymore and was just looking in through the windows of pubs, of which the town has many. Middle-aged white men, mostly, with bellies, drinking pints and chatting, as it is across the country.

From midnight to one in the morning I watch *TNA British Bootcamp on Challenge*; it featured UK-based wrestlers who I'd seen in the flesh, back home, at

Preston City Wrestling events. The programme was a layering of fictions – the choreographed narrative of the wrestling match, with a clunkily bolted-on reality TV element; American wrestlers from Total Non-stop Action Wrestling were scouting British talent. The Bastard Dave Mastiff from the Black Country; Rampage Brown from Sheffield; Noam Dar from Scotland; Preston's own Kris Travis.

Travis 'goes through' to America. Then there's a quick cut, an overdubbed voice – Kris Travis was unable to travel to America; Noam Dar has taken his place. I happened to know that this is because Travis had stomach cancer. I watched his match, thinking (having spent some of the evening reading Jenny Diski's latest, cancer-related article in the *LRB*), he's got cancer.

Walking into town again the next morning the journey had already become automatic. Drizzly, grey – weather I like and feel at home in, because it reminds me of my youth in Leyland and Preston and my early adult years in Manchester. I tried to mark the arrival of the town proper at the beginning of High Street, or see if it marked itself, and the first thing I truly noticed was Dream Doors, a kitchen fitters. Yes, I thought, I hope so – I need a door into dreams. I wandered down. I crossed the road and at the mid-point I nodded at and was halloed by the town crier, in his burgundy costume with matching tricorn hat and broly, his bell tucked under his arm like a lapdog.

I tucked myself into the doorway of a little covered arcade, mooched into it, rolled a cigarette and listened to old women talk to each other. They were weighing up the sky, working up if it was about to tip down. There'd been some kind of falling out; 'The words,' said one, defending herself, 'weren't going into my ear.'

Fag in mouth, I continued. As I approached the war memorial, the elevated town hall, I was arrested by a little blue hatchback waiting to turn right into one of many parking spaces. There were balloons coming out of the windows: not escaping out of the

windows, but tethered to the car, a bunch of three or four red and blue balloons on driver and passenger sides. I thought, Birthday party. But then I read the print on the balloons, and saw as the car made it into the parking bay the banner across its front, trapped there because its edges had been trapped under the bonnet: Help for Heroes. That makes sense, I thought, and then, The balloons still don't quite make sense. There was a small crowd at the memorial. Those involved in the production of the ceremony were milling around, a few people were watching them mill. Pedestrians cut through on their way between shops or on who-knows what other errands. I leaned against a wall and tried to take up little space.

There was a biker, his very clean motorcycle parked up like street-furniture. He had a grey handlebar moustache, a leather vest with a 'lest we forget' patch on its back, an officious air. I'll be honest; my first thought was, Here's someone with a powerful need to belong to things, to be attached to the world – the kind of neighbour who involves themselves in your life under the guise of doing you favours.

There were three policemen who had followed me up the road. There were veterans in suits, with their varying caps and berets, their poppies and medals, their undeniable age. There was a woman in a strikingly witchy, Masonic-looking robe, hood up – a few minutes later I spotted her dog-collar and understood who she was. There was a cameraman, his camera in its waterproof jacket on a high tripod. There was a military man with the banner and the high-wristed white gloves to go with it, a grey suit, white teeth; he approached the police officers and said, 'Right, my lads, I've got a job for you,' and gave them the merciless smile of pulled rank. In turn the policemen looked sullen, schoolboyish. The crowd grew – middle-aged and older, mostly, with a few young women and fewer young men. There was the odd pram and one or two toddlers and young children. Maybe a hundred people in all, counting those who stood

across the road.

I get nervous in crowds; it's something which has bothered me more and more in recent years. Soon, and annoyingly, the deft logic of anxiety began to unpack itself; I must stand with my legs slightly bent or it will cut off the blood supply to my brain. I must control my breathing; I must not think about my breathing or it will make it worse. I can't leave, because I've travelled so far – this heightened the stakes, which made the anxiety worse. I might, if I had begun to think that I was going to faint, have ducked into the pet-shop against whose window I was leaning. Then I'd be trapped in a petshop, having to sit down, having to explain. At a reading a few weeks before I had almost fainted, but had managed to sink to the floor relatively unobtrusively, and had read along from the book which was being read from by the reader. As my vision slowly righted itself, a spider crawled up my leg, and I was so out of it that my arachnophobia was quashed; I watched the little beast for a few seconds, pondering, before calmly brushing it away. Sinking to the floor was not an option here – I was surrounded by the kind of people who would be concerned, and who would want to help me.

Thankfully, it all began. The standard-bearer, who minutes ago had concealed himself down an alleyway, emerged with two veterans following him. They marched maybe fifteen feet to the memorial, halted – there was some 'eyes left' and etc. I think I have this in order: one of the police officers wandered back into the road as the cornet player began to play. The policeman signalled to a Royal Mail truck coming from the left and a lorry coming from the right that they must stop – he did this by drawing a finger across his neck.

The Royal Mail van shut its engine off. It had stopped outside the Cross Keys, where the refurbishment work had ceased for the moment. The lorry stopped but didn't turn off its engine and the sound of powerful idling continued throughout what

followed. The cornet music was beautiful, poignant, and I was moved by the bravery of it, the little gorgeous sad sound beginning the work of, or hinting at the work of, the articulation of the meaning of our presence on the High Street. When the music stopped, the silence had already begun.

The recognition of the silence seemed to settle on us, something to be borne, a burden we had invited. The silence was: bird song, idling engine, wind and the flag flapping and creaking in it, the small noises of children behaving themselves, distant unnameable noises of conurbation. I didn't know where to look, wanting to both observe and experience. I looked at faces, at the black back of the overcoat of the man in front of me, at the people across the street, distant but involved, at the low cloudy sky. The town had stopped.

If I allowed myself a callous or knowing thought it was this: the town is inherently good at this kind of thing. I shut my eyes and opened them again. There were, thankfully, patches in which I thought nothing because I was just a person among other people, feeling a sadness, knowing that I was doing enough. Afterwards I thought, what thoughts did I stop myself from thinking. I did not allow myself to think romantic thoughts about sacrifice, and, despite some briefly flaring spite about the waste of life we were marking, my thoughts were not overtly political (although that absence is, of course, overtly political; this kind of circularity is what I was trying to make myself avoid).

It ended. The vicar spoke. I paraphrase: *It is a most poignant time, as our troops return from Afghanistan, as we become involved again in the Middle East, as we mark the 100th Anniversary (I thought again about those balloons) of the beginning of the First World War. This town has been so much involved in history.* It seems hubristic; surely the point is that this town is a normal place, a coincidental nave around which a

small wheel of one nation's history has briefly turned. Still, this event is in part about perspective, and we must in that effort overshoot.

A list of those from the town who died in first months of WWI is read. There is a shared prayer, the liturgical line-end repetitions of which I do not join in with – that would not be, I think, respectful, because it would be a lie. It's a startlingly Christian ceremony, for the most part, for someone like me, who is well insulated from the functional religious/state ceremonials of the nation. But God means something other than God, I think, as the crowd, following the vicar, ask Him to guide our leaders, to comfort civilians who have found themselves recast as collateral – God in this context is History, maybe, or just ameliorating, levelling, fatal time. There is a moment when the focus – the position of speaker – shifts from the vicar to one of the veterans; it feels for the first time small and theatrical, a kind of staging I recognise, one utterance finished and another begun from another position, without pre-emptive announcement, presenting this following speech as counterpoint, counterargument, conclusion to what has gone before. The momentary sense of falsity is erased by the way the veteran recites his brief lines: *We will remember them, who gave their today for our tomorrow*. It is itself a paraphrase of that poem, which has become common currency. His voice breaks or almost breaks as he speaks, and once he has spoken he looks at the ground.

Very soon it is over. The biker gives the thumbs-up to the van; the traffic begins again. There's a what-now in the air, lots of smiles and sudden chatting, perhaps a relief which makes no criticism of what has preceded it. I linger, smoke, read wreaths from the local charities, from the cadets, from military associations, from individual families. There are small wooden crosses and among them one wooden crescent moon. The crowd disperses very quickly. A woman pulls her 4x4 into a parking space next to the biker's ride. There's a tree planted at the head of the parking space. One of the veterans

takes it on himself to guide her in, beckoning her forward, then halting her with a raised hand. Just as she puts the handbrake on another veteran gets involved, starts waving her on again. The first veteran gives him a look. It's funny – I haven't explained it well – it's farcical, physical, comic. And this is something I have noted throughout the ceremony – the good humour and slight impiety of the veterans, their joking with each other – one was chatting to the front row while the vicar talked through her microphone; I caught sight of another two whispering to each other during a quiet moment in the ceremony.

When the cameraman left I followed him to his car. He had been filming for Points West, the BBC Wiltshire news show. The footage was going to be broadcast at 1:30 in the afternoon, and 6 that evening. Chances of getting hold of the raw footage were nil; the BBC won't even give contributors access to it. 'It keeps them from getting their fingers burned,' he says. I said, 'Yeah, that makes sense.' Because vaguely it did, I suppose. 'So,' he said, once I had belatedly explained why I was questioning him, 'have you discovered anything astounding yet?' I wonder in what tone he meant it to come across. I said, 'No.'

Back in the hotel room I watched the first broadcast of Points West. I see Royal Wootton Bassett briefly, not looking as I remember it, people's faces in close-up who I had only seen in profile and so on. It was a reminder of how cameras change everything, re-narrativise and de-collectivise events. I read the *Ode of Remembrance* and then *For The Fallen*, the longer poem from which it is taken. There's much to argue with in the text – a romanticisation of nationalism and of the dumb act of dying which I cannot stomach – I trimmed it down to that which I felt I could accept:

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time
(Binyon 1914)

'The labour of the day-time,' that seemed true, truest – it's our labour that connects us to the rest of humanity; it is a labour to connect to the rest of humanity. And soldiery is labour, and the deaths of soldiers cannot be separated from the economic structures of which labour (first for sustenance, then for/in surplus) is the wellspring.

I thought: While I'm here I must think, what's my motive? Is my motive to articulate a way in which I, as someone with no connection to the military dead, might also own this motive power within my nation? A corollary of that thought is this: as someone who defines themselves more or less in opposition to socially and culturally conservative forces, isn't it in my interest to work to articulate and hypothetically inhabit those forces as best I can, in order to better know who I am? What is a good tradition and what is a bad tradition? What is my nation if I know it is not the nation of the banal evils of Cameron-cum-Farage politics, and the evil keep calm and carry on banality of Top Gear and X-Factor?

In the late afternoon I went to survey the town's charity shops. It was a smart idea, I thought – I thought I might catch our reflection in the things we give away. But soon I realised it was wrong-headed. The detritus of charity is the same everywhere. I went into Marie Curie, the Prospect Hospice Shop. The Red Cross was closed but the Blue Cross was open. Commercial fiction, DVDs from five years ago, bright plastic toys, fleeces, elements of three-piece suits, womenswear from M&S, slogan t-shirts which teenage boys had outgrown (including one piece of wrestler's merchandise – a

promo shirt for WWE's Goldust, son of Dusty Rhodes, which read SHATTERED DREAMS).

In Oxfam I bought a ghost story called *Dark Matter*. In Sue Ryder I bought an anthology of Irish poetry and the pleasant grey-haired woman behind the till was very pleased. 'You put these things out on the shelves,' she said, 'and think, who in Wootton Bassett is going to buy that?' I felt guilty for taking the chance away from someone. I don't intend any of this as a critique of Wootton Bassett – rather it was a much needed-reminder that there is an equivalence between small towns, and the link I could feel between Wootton Bassett and my own home town was valid; you could swap the charity shops and no-one would notice. A little later I considered the Aces High tattoo parlour – I wanted a little skull on my arm – but decided against it, not in the mood for talking to tattoo artists, who always have the satisfied, supercilious air of people who have been initiated into a secret society.

In Bassett Books I bought a collection of Conrad's short stories. Again, this could have been any small bookshop: local history, children's books, a shelf of Terry Pratchett, Sophie Kinsella, Ken Follett, a couple of anthologies of modern horror with nothing I wanted in them.

I did almost a full course of counselling through the university in the summer of 2013, coming up to my wedding. Not my first – the third course I've been through. I was low, obviously, not at crisis point but just low and frustrated by it. Visiting the counsellor felt like maintenance, especially as by 2013 I had accrued a decent bunch of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or CBT-esque strategies for getting by. *What*, asked the counsellor, *would it look like?* We were talking about anger or sadness. He wanted me to visualise it. And quite quickly I was sure that it was a Big Black Monolith, like cold onyx. *What happens if you touch it?* It feels like it's full of energy.

And we agreed that it could be a source of energy that I might tap into. I wondered how this might correspond with the idea of a war memorial: a monolithic, impermeable structure which is invested with social meaning and social energy.

The next morning I drove into the town from my hotel to visit the Town Hall museum on its legs on the High Street. The town crier was at the bottom of the stairs, talking to someone. The modern, reduced market was being set up. I ascended into the Museum. As I should've expected, its focus was upon the town's military tradition. There was a Lee Henry in a case. I start to chat to the volunteers, and listen in on the conversations they were having with other visitors who climbed up to join us.

There was a gun from the Crimean war in the town until the Second World War, when it was taken away for the metal. One of the museum volunteers explained that there had been a German gun as well, but the townsfolk didn't want it, so they removed it from the High Street and threw it in a ditch. Moments after this anecdote has been told, a German couple come in; one of the volunteers repeats it to them, as if he knows they will understand. The volunteers were fantastically helpful and eager – I gave them my email address and they agreed to send me a timeline of the town. A volunteer showed me old sepia photos on his laptop. He said, 'This is what fascinates me – look at all these people.' He pointed out a blurry woman with his fingernail. 'They must have stood still for the photograph to be taken. And this is a hundred years old or more. They're all dead now.' A few minutes later we're looking at another photograph and he says, 'They're all dead. It fascinates me.' I buy the local history book they're flogging (the source for many of the references in this piece).

The site manager from the Cross Keys pub comes in. The post-fire work is ongoing, they're repairing the roof and the water-damage in the lower floors. It's a big job, he says; they're about to start re-timbering, putting beams and rafters back in, and

do any of the local historians want to come and take photographs? It's two buildings, really, he says, at the back it's medieval, wattle and daub. And it's been moved forward at some point. There are structures inside, he says, you can tell. All the scaffolding is there to stop it from falling forward into the street.

When he had gone I asked, Was the Cross Keys popular before the repatriations? Certainly it was during, a volunteer says, because they gave out free tea and coffee to the relatives. We had segued into discussing the repatriations, unprompted, although the volunteers knew my purpose in the town. I didn't ask them anything specific or personal.

The police got very good at organising it, the volunteer says. They shut the road off coming into the town from Lyneham, so traffic had to take a big loop down New Road and circumvent the town. The volunteer's partner worked as a teaching assistant at the primary school on the hill. Playtime was at 11am, which was also the time the repatriation planes would fly over if they were bodies coming back, so the volunteer's partner would know.

Relatives had as much time as they needed in a chapel at Lyneham, so the repatriation corteges could happen at 1, 2, 3 or even 4 pm. The most they ever had was eight bodies repatriated, making for nine hearses – one spare. As I had guessed, the crowds started at about the brow of the hill and petered out towards the end of the built-up section of High Street.

One of the bikers – perhaps, I wondered, the same one who had been present at the armistice day event – acted as liaison between the town and the relatives. The relatives were brought into Wootton Bassett via minivan, and the open patch of paving next to the museum was reserved for them to stand.

The press were a problem; there were cameras from the major channels, and

freelance photographers who – I had not considered this – brought stepladders with them; at one repatriation there was a television camera on a crane. These things were disagreeable, undignified.

I drove to Lyneham, to the entrance of the Hercules Site, where they were building a training college on what had once been RAF Lyneham. Operation Pabay was over. I turned around in the entrance way, not allowing myself to become interested in the once-military territory further than the cracked-looking concrete pillbox I could see from the car. I drove back towards Wootton Bassett, listening to a hardcore band called Ed Gein and trying to watch the landscape as much as possible. The road meandered – copses of trees, rolling fields. How quickly did they drive, I wondered again. Professional drivers are professional drivers – they must've done the speed limit. The brief climb into Wootton Bassett still surprised me. The High Street was so broad. Driving into it from a new direction seemed to accentuate it.

Luck, I thought, that was all – that it was the first town after Lyneham, that it required no detour from a major road, that it had such a broad High Street. It was a natural aptitude or talent, if a town can have a talent (Britain's Got Talent, after all), that the slope of the hill allowed the High Street to have a clear beginning point or vanishing point, enforcing a truncated and narrative visuality upon incoming traffic.

I went into the town again in the afternoon, to take photographs. By now I felt almost fully there, walking in a place I knew. I went into the graveyard of St Bartholomew & All Saints church to make a phonecall. I spoke to my wife from among the headstones, tried not to laugh too loudly when she made jokes. We laugh a lot.

A church is first mentioned in the town in 1200, however, masonry recently discovered suggest and earlier foundation is likely [...] The current building

comprises a mixture of fourteenth-, fifteenth- and nineteenth-century styles mixed with facsimilies of earlier thirteenth-century tracery inserted during restoration undertaken in 1870/71. The work [...] substantially extended the building the building, including the addition of a further storey to the tower. (Clarke 2013: 43)

In the open gateway to the churchyard stood two secondary school students, a boy and a girl, probably twelve or thirteen, the girl taller than the boy. As I walked out of the graveyard, phonecall completed, and they moved to allow me through, the girl said, 'She says she's got the power of the tit. I was like, what, with your fucking A-cup?'

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