

The Olfactory Shift in the Literature of the First World War:

The Reawakening of Smell

Volume Two, Exegesis

Eleanor Christine Ahern

The second of two volumes of a thesis submitted
in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, Creative Writing

Discipline of English and Creative Writing

School of Humanities

University of Adelaide

27 April 2016

Contents

Contents	2
Declaration.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	5
Abstract.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Part One	14
Introduction.....	14
The Shifting Sensorium	17
Representing Death.....	20
Remembering War.....	22
Upside-Down Sensations	25
Discussion.....	28
Part Two.....	31
Introduction.....	31
<i>The Middle Parts of Fortune</i>	32
<i>Testament of Youth</i>	35
<i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> and <i>Flush</i>	40
Discussion.....	44
Part Three.....	47
Inspiration for “One Sunday in Picardy”	47
Research Design	48
Literary Techniques	54

Self-Reflexivity.....	59
Discussion.....	64
Conclusion	66
Works Cited	70
Works Consulted.....	78

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provision of the Copyright Act 1968.

I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library catalogue, the Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADTP) and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

The University has placed an embargo on my electronic and printed thesis for a period of twenty-four months, with effect from the date of submission.

Eleanor Ahern

27 April 2016

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my main supervisor, Professor Brian Castro, Chair of Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide, and my co-supervisor, Dr Philip Butters.

For sharing the family history, I am grateful to: my grandparents Jack and Andrée, and my father Roland Beard; my brothers John and Robert, and Helen Beard; my mother Chris Jolly; Agnès, Jacqueline, Christian and Patrick Raquet; and Catherine and Bénédicte Valencourt.

During my research I received assistance from many others at the University of Adelaide, especially Dr Heather Kerr, Jennifer Liston, Dr Madeleine Seys and Dr Christine Velde, English and Creative Writing; Jennifer Osborn, Barr Smith Library; Dr Cally Guerin; and Andrew Cook, Archives. I also appreciate the input of Dr Anne Sved-Williams AM, Dr Prema Thavaneswaren, Dr Josie Peters and Professor Drew Dawson.

I acknowledge the work of Dr Kerrie Le Lievre, casual tutor, Discipline of English and Creative Writing, University of Adelaide, who proofread this exegesis in accordance with the University's policy on the editing of theses.

I thank my partner Michael, and children Katie and Ben, for their loving support.

Abstract

“One Sunday in Picardy”, the creative work presented in Volume One of this thesis, is set during the First World War and inspired by a family story. An Australian doctor returns to see his young French fiancée. Unable to remember his role in one fierce battle for which he was decorated, the doctor’s thoughts are plagued by traumatic images and sensations as the likelihood grows of an enemy attack.

The exegesis presented in Volume Two of this thesis positions my writing within the context of the literature of the First World War and suggests that modernist war writers gave special attention to olfactory representations due to an increased focus in the trenches on smells such as the stink of corpses. The sense of smell has been a neglected subject in literary criticism, yet it is proposed that in early-twentieth-century literature a dramatic shift in olfactory representation may have taken place. While Danuta Fjellestad advances the idea of an “olfactory turn” in the context of postmodernist works such as Patrick Süskind’s *Perfume* (Fjellestad 642), I situate it earlier, in First World War writing, where the representation of smell was a factor of both originality, as writers searched for new methods of depiction, and repression of traumatic memory. An analysis of four war texts was conducted with reference to Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of language, Jacques Derrida’s ideas on deferred meaning and immediacy, and Sigmund Freud’s theory of repetition-compulsion. A shift in olfactory representation was demonstrated both within and between the war texts; such features also emerged in my own work, written through a process of immersion in the war literature and historic settings. This combination of auto/biographical writing and historical and theoretical research may provide insights into why olfactory representations in literature changed in the aftermath of the First World War.