

Abigail Cerys Phillips

**The Mail Body: Picture Postcards and the Iconography of the
Wounded Soldier during the First World War in Vienna.**

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Supervisor(s): Karl Hall

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Abigail Cerys Phillips

Abstract

This thesis investigates how the wounded soldier's body was rendered visually coherent in Viennese postcards during the First World War, arguing that these images did not aim to depict injury as it was lived, but to make it culturally legible. Throughout the work, the injured man emerges as the paradoxically 'unwounded wounded' figure, an ideologically flexible allegorical symbol who served as a palatable icon of national strength and masculine continuity.

Chapter 1, '(In)Visibility, or The Image as Salve,' explores how trauma was stylised and concealed through conventional visual codes, including sanitised depictions of wounding, Christian iconography, and the elision of permanent bodily loss. Chapter 2, "Who Cares? Social Treatments of the Body," examines the relational construction of woundedness through proximity to others, highlighting how gendered care sustained masculine resilience and patriotic virtue. Across both chapters, a consistent symbolic logic emerges, wherein injury is granted visibility only when narratively contained, and pain is transfigured into sacrifice and service.

The work deliberately resists the impulse to treat postcards as retrospective memorials, viewing them instead as artefacts of real-time mediation. This study thus repositions wartime Vienna as a cultural arena of visual coherence, where the disruptive forces of mechanised war was metabolised through familiar symbolic forms. By foregrounding visual culture, this study uncovers a moment of intense symbolic labour, demonstrating how the wounded soldier became a site through which a fractured body politic was rendered intact.

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Introduction



Figure 1: 'Krüppel-Entente' (1914).¹

As the First World War began in the summer of 1914, a seemingly innocuous postcard emerged from the Viennese printers Anton Böhm & Co. Titled *Krüppel-Entente* ('Cripple-Entente'), a sardonic portmanteau fusing 'cripple' and 'Entente' to mock the military alliance between Britain, France, and Russia, the card depicts three visibly wounded national caricatures sat together sporting bandages and torn clothes, their missing and wounded limbs supported by rudimentary wooded peg legs.

Images like this rarely seem out of place in discussions of the First World War's visual cultures of woundedness. A mocking portrayal of the Triple Entente, emasculated through deformity, this image seems little more than simplistic propaganda, reflecting an iconographic disregard for wounded bodies. Yet whilst this surface reading may well hold some truth, it can

¹ Anton Böhm & Co., *Krüppel-Entente* (Original Title), 1914, Postcard, 9.6cm × 14.6cm, 1914, 41098/5, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/110322-krueppel-entente/>.

lead to incorrect conclusions. If we are too quick to compartmentalise postcards like this as simple state-directed mockery, we risk replicating the assumptions of many early historians who, upon the medium's rediscovery during the 1980s, treated such images as straightforward instruments of propaganda.² In doing so, we not only obscure the rich cultural value these postcards offer as artefacts embedded in the messy terrain of consumable wartime sentiment, but we also reinforce a model of top-down visual culture in which meaning is something inevitably imposed from above, glossing over the veritable force shaping it from below.

Still, the question remains. If, as Joachim Bürgschwentner has argued, postcards displaying 'aggressive war caricatures [...] were banned by the censors as offensive within the first few weeks of the conflict,'³ then why exactly do images like *Krüppel-Entente*, and its treatment of physical injury feel so natural? Why are we so attuned to seeing such cards only as tools of ideological assault, and not the more complex cultural logics they may encode?

Part of the reason such misreadings persist lies in how memory has come to frame our understanding of the First World War, a field where retrospective thinking and disruptive terms find a long history. George Kennan called it 'the great seminal catastrophe of this century';⁴ William Barrett described it as 'the axial date in modern Western history.'⁵ In Austria and Germany, the term *Urkatastrophe* circulated even in the immediate postwar years, a recognition of the war's shattering of the social and epistemic order.⁶ Perhaps nowhere does the war settle

² Joachim Bürgschwentner, 'War Relief, Patriotism and Art: The State-Run Production of Picture Postcards in Austria 1914–1918', *Austrian Studies* 21 (2013): 102, <https://doi.org/10.5699/austrianstudies.21.2013.0099>, citing Walter Lukan and Max Demeter Peyfuss, 'Jeder Schuß ein Russ', jeder Stoß ein Franzos. Kriegspropaganda auf Postkarten 1914–1918', in *Jeder Schuss ein Russ – Jeder Stoss ein Franzos. Literarische und graphische Kriegspropaganda in Deutschland und Österreich 1914–1918*, ed. Hans Weigel, Walter Lukan and Max Demeter Peyfuss (Vienna, 1983)

³ Bürgschwentner, 102.

⁴ George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691218274>.

⁵ William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1962), 32.

⁶ Oliver Jahraus and Christian Kirchmeier, 'Der Erste Weltkrieg als „Katastrophe“ - Herkunft, Bedeutungen und Funktionen einer problematischen Metapher : literaturkritik.de', *literaturkritik*, accessed 26 May 2025, <https://literaturkritik.de/id/18875>.

more heavily as a crucible of modernity than in the contested histories of the former Habsburg lands, including Austria, where postwar instability and monarchical collapse have made the war's meaning persistently retrospective.

However, whilst this retrospective approach has yielded rich analyses of Austria's tumultuous twentieth century, it has also contributed to an overwhelming tendency to subordinate the Austrian wartime experience underneath post-1918 concerns. Frequently, scholars seek the war's cultural output in the seeds of imperial collapse, rather than engaging with how the war was interpreted and mediated as it unfolded.⁷ In visual terms, this often means treating representations of woundedness as little more than symptoms of a broader historical unravelling. The temptation to situate these bodies within *longue durée* narratives, perhaps by tracing how they were later appropriated in Austrofascist iconography or postwar monuments, thereby casts many images in the shadow of what came next at the expense of examining their role as dynamic, wartime-specific artefacts of cultural expression.

This thesis intervenes by asking a deceptively simple question: how was the wounded soldier visually constructed in Viennese wartime postcards, and what emotional and ideological work did these representations perform as the war unfolded? It argues that these images were neither passive illustrations of wartime suffering, nor straightforward instruments of propaganda, but complex symbolic artefacts forged at the intersection of ideology, commerce, and emotion. I contend that the wounded soldier, as he was depicted, did not aim to depict injury as it was lived, but rather to reassemble the broken body into a symbol of coherence, continuity, and collective endurance. Though ostensibly an effigy of the wounded, he is better understood as a palatable fiction removed from pain, intended to soothe the anxieties of the uninjured. Sanitised, sentimental, and spiritually recuperated, he became a paradoxical icon of resilience,

⁷ John Deak, 'Habsburg Studies within Central European History: The State of the Field', *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): 53–55.

with his cultural utility laying precisely in his distance from embodied reality. *Krüppel-Entente*, for all its savage humour, is not so distant from the sanitised wounded soldier who we will come to see populating more sentimental cards. Both traffic in palatable fictions whereby injury is rendered meaningful, even useful. One does so by mocking the enemy's deformity, the other by cloaking pain in virtue. In either case, the wound is made to speak to the values and fantasies a culture projected onto the injured body.

This is not to suggest that, in approaching the wounded body through its real-time visualisation, this study rejects the insights of memory studies. On the contrary, by dedicating attention to how wartime imagery was mediated, politicised, and performed in the moment of its production, this project arguably aligns closely with the field's foundational thinkers who have worked to unmoor the past from strict chronology and to reveal memory as a socially and symbolically constructed act. From Ebbinghaus's attempt to quantify forgetting,⁸ to Freud's recursive and traumatic returns,⁹ and Halbwachs's concept of socially framed recollection,¹⁰ modern theories of memory have increasingly moved away from models of fixed recall and toward an understanding of memory as both dynamic and culturally mediated. In this spirit, the present study follows such thinkers in recognising that meaning is never stable, instead seeking to trace how that instability was lived and visualised in the wartime present. To borrow a line from Aristotle, it holds that 'there is no such thing as memory of the present while present, for the present is object only of perception [...] but the object of memory is the past.'¹¹ As artefacts of the present moment, shaped by and for a society in the midst of war, the picture postcard provides a particularly revealing site for this methodological push away from recollection

⁸ Hermann Ebbinghaus, *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*, trans. Henry A. Ruger and Clara Bussenius (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1913).

⁹ Patrick H. Hutton, 'Sigmund Freud and Maurice Halbwachs: The Problem of Memory in Historical Psychology', *The History Teacher* 27, no. 2 (1994): 147–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/494716>.

¹⁰ Hutton, 149.

¹¹ W. D. Ross and J. A. Smith, eds., *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. J. I. Beare, vol. I to XII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 1297.

towards perception, allowing us to interrogate exactly how injury was visually narrated before the outcomes of war were known.

Of course, if the wounded soldier in this visual corpus is to be understood as a cipher for the emotional and ideological tensions of his time, one must ask: what symbolic roles did he inhabit? Was he a Christian martyr? A modern knight? A disabled body denied visibility? An avatar of a fragmented empire? As will be seen, much of this iconography omits the realities of injury – perhaps a sling here, a crutch there – instead opting for visual cues that simultaneously sanitised and sanctified, suturing the figure back into coherence through layers of moralising visual rhetoric. He thus emerges in paradoxical form: an ‘unwounded wounded man,’ a visual construction that offered the public a commodified iconography of gendered national resilience. That such a paradoxical image could be rendered coherent underscores the very duplicity that make postcards such a valuable medium for this study. Unlike other media forms, postcards were not strictly beholden to plausibility; they were, after all, objects of explicit artistic construction and commercial design. Yet for all their manufacture, they retained an aura of realism, afforded by the pseudo-authority of the printed form and the everyday familiarity of their circulation. They were, in other words, embedded in a complex media ecology, wherein ideology, commerce, and sentiment operated in overlapping registers.

Recognising how this network functioned is crucial. Postcards occupied a uniquely flexible representational space, situated at the triangulated intersection of state messaging, commercial enterprise, and personal exchange. What this means, fundamentally, is that they cannot be binarily categorised as either propaganda or non-instrumental cultural expression. On the one hand, reading postcards solely as top-down ideological artefacts is simply reductive. Bürgschwentner himself notes that, alongside official designs issued by the *k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier* (‘Imperial and Royal War Press Office’) or affiliated charities, a vibrant commercial sphere operated in parallel, with private publishers producing the majority of cards

according to popular taste.¹² Many cards were commissioned by print houses and charitable enterprises seeking to profit from, or participate in, the cultural economy of war. These were artefacts of persuasion, yes, but also of profit, whose circulation was driven not simply by state authority but by the emotional appetite of a society at war.

On the other, to acknowledge the commercial sphere is not to deny the presence or influence of the state. The very fact that the commercial sphere operated ‘in parallel’ to the state reminds us of this, and indeed, many postcards were produced under the auspices of officialdom, being designed to boost morale and encourage patriotic sentiment with an undeniable propagandistic function. Even privately produced cards, operating outside of the state’s direct reach, remained subject to wartime censorship laws, which restricted the kinds of imagery and sentiment that could be publicly circulated.¹³ In this way, postcard production was shaped simultaneously from above and below; from the state’s regulation of visual norms and permissible content, and from the commercial logic of what would sell to a wartime public. We must, therefore, move beyond viewing propaganda and popular culture as opposing forces, and instead consider them as overlapping participants within a shared visual and ideological field.

Further underscoring this complexity is the sheer scale of postcard production during the war. Between 1914 and 1918, an estimated 50,000 war-related postcard designs were issued across the Habsburg Empire, a testimony to the medium’s ubiquitously deep entrenchment in the cultural fabric of wartime life.¹⁴ As Elisabeth von Hagenow has described, the postcard became a ‘*Spiegel der damaligen Mentalität*,’¹⁵ a mirror of the mentality of the time, capable of revealing both what the state sought to impose and what society was willing, and perhaps

¹² Bürgschwentner, ‘War Relief, Patriotism and Art’, 119.

¹³ Bürgschwentner, 115.

¹⁴ Bürgschwentner, 102.

¹⁵ Bürgschwentner, 103, citing Elisabeth von Hagenow, “Mit Gott für König, Volk und Vaterland. Die Bildpostkarte als Massen- und Bekenntnismedium,” in *Bildpropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Raoul Zühlke (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2000), 145.

even eager, to see. Whether passed between friends and families or preserved in personal albums, their simultaneous abundance and intimacy allow us to tangibly access the symbolic and affective economies that animated wartime Austria.

This centrality of the postcard within Austro-Hungarian wartime culture reinforces its value as an object of study, but it also prompts a necessary clarification regarding geographical scope. This thesis focuses specifically on the Viennese postcard market, here meaning those cards produced and published by printers based in the Austrian capital. Whilst this choice is shaped in part by practical considerations of archival access, it also reflects the city's historical role as a key centre of wartime visual production, with Vienna housing many of the monarchy's major publishing houses, charitable organisations, and artistic institutions. The city's infrastructural and symbolic prominence within the empire thus renders it a particularly rich site for examining how representations of injury were made culturally legible.

This specificity is also methodologically advantageous. Given the multipolarity of administrative and military institutions found within the Dual Monarchy, focusing dedicatedly on Vienna is a useful way to offer a more coherent institutional and cultural framework, which also ensures that the specificities of Viennese cultural production do not become lost under the weight of a broader, and perhaps less cohesive, imperial narrative. The aim is not to elide the wider imperial context, but to maintain a coherent framework through which one can examine the representational practices influencing how injury was imagined and circulated. In line with this, focusing on Vienna also allows us to ask how one of the monarchy's political and cultural centres attempted to stabilise meaning in a time of material and symbolic crisis. The wounded soldier, in this context, beyond being a simple passive icon, can be read as a cultural artefact through which loss, masculinity, and national identity were actively processed.

Beyond these methodological advantages, Vienna also presents a compelling case in its wartime transformation. As the Wien Museum notes, the influx of wounded and sick soldiers following the outbreak of war was immediate and overwhelming, with 40,000 men arriving in the city in September 1914 alone.¹⁶ Within the first year of war that number had climbed to 250,000, a figure that the pre-existing medical infrastructure struggled to keep up with.¹⁷ By 1915, Vienna had over 300 hospital-like facilities, up from just 38 prior to the war, hastily established in spaces never intended for convalescence like schools, universities, the parliament, and even the Secession Building.¹⁸ The city, in effect, became a hospital.

This represents a significant cultural transformation. When the urban fabric is medicalised, when streets and landmarks double as wards and triage centres, it causes the line between civilian and patient, between citizen and convalescent, to blur. In such a context, all inhabitants become, in some sense, witnesses to institutionalised injury. This proximity to woundedness, as something ubiquitous yet routinised, may help explain the visual logic that emerged in Viennese postcards, where there was a representational preference for symbolic containment over visceral rupture. If everyone lived within the wings of a hospital, then perhaps visual culture responded by sublimating pain beneath images that reinforced normalcy in a city reordered by suffering.

Furthermore, whilst this urban weighting naturally lends the project a specific regional inflection, it does not necessitate precluding broader interpretive conclusions. Vienna, after all, was not a culturally homogenous space.¹⁹ As one of the monarchy's capitals, it was also hub of

¹⁶ Wien Museum, 'Vereins-Reservespital Nr. 2 der Österreichischen Gesellschaft vom Roten Kreuz, Filialspital im Gebäude der Gartenbaugesellschaft (Krankensaal)', Wien Museum Online Sammlung, accessed 26 May 2025, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/28065-vereins-reservespital-nr-2-der-oesterreichischen-gesellschaft-vom-roten-kreuz-filialspital-im-gebaeude-der-gartenbaugesellschaft-krankensaal/>.

¹⁷ Wien Museum.

¹⁸ Wien Museum.

¹⁹ For a longer look at Vienna's social development, see: Josef Ehmer, 'The Making of the "Modern Family in Vienna" 1780-1930,' in *History & Society in Central Europe*, ed. Véra Bácskai (Budapest: Hajnál István Kör, 1991), 7–29.

migration and diversity, home to artists, printers, and consumers from across the realm. To treat the category of ‘Viennese’ as synonymous with ‘German-Austrian’ is, in fact, to risk falling into the aforementioned retrospective trap of post-1918 national segmentation. The city’s visual culture was equally shaped by Polish, Czech, Hungarian, and other imperial influences, all of which informed the production and reception of its postcards. To assume that the tastes and priorities of Vienna’s postcard industry reflected a single cultural voice is to misread the heterogeneity of the city itself. Just as importantly, the medium itself resists strict geographical containment. Postcards were objects in motion. Even when retained as collectible ephemera, their primary purpose was to circulate across regional and national borders as instruments of communication and sentiment. Thus, even a study anchored in the Viennese market inevitably gestures outward, shaped by the postcard’s intrinsic mobility and its capacity to operate across spatial and cultural boundaries.²⁰

The postcard also provides fertile ground for a cross-class analysis, as despite often being associated with a distinctly middlebrow register, they were shaped by a spectrum of social actors. At the institutional level, for example, figures such as Eduard Prinz von und zu Liechtenstein, the head of the *Kriegshilfsbüro* (‘War Relief Office’), made clear that postcard production was a kind of aristocratically driven civilising mission guided by ‘the aspiration to promote patriotic sentiments as much as possible and to give the utmost consideration to artistic sensibilities.’²¹ Many artists, too, came from elite circles, including members of the aristocracy and court-affiliated portrait painters.

²⁰ For more on the idea of how postcards began ‘globalising the gaze,’ see: Konstantinos Andriotis and Mišela Mavrič, ‘POSTCARD MOBILITY: Going Beyond Image and Text’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 40 (1 January 2013): 18–39, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.07.004>.

²¹ Bürgschwentner, ‘War Relief, Patriotism and Art’, 110, citing Eduard von und zu Liechtenstein, ‘Offizielle Kriegsfürsorge. Einleitung,’ in *Viribus Unitis: Österreich-Ungarn und der Weltkrieg*, ed. by Gesellschaft vom Silbernen Kreuz zur Fürsorge für heimkehrende Soldaten und Invaliden (Vienna: 1919), 3.

At the same time, these same cards frequently depicted the ordinary soldier, thereby rendering the working-class body a visible subject of cultural mediation. Even when not purchased directly, postcards were also encountered (and thus emotionally engaged with) by diverse publics. Situated between institutional control and mass appeal, postcards thus embodied a reciprocal aesthetic economy, wherein visual language was shaped by both the imperatives of governance and the appetites of the governed. In this schema, the recurrence of certain motifs, such as the wounded men shown upright across official and privately produced cards, suggests a societally shared visual vocabulary, implying that such representations emerged from broader cultural logics, such as shared gendered norms, artistic conventions, and emotional needs.

Yet one cannot begin to explore visual representations of pain and rupture without acknowledging the growing field of disability studies, which has offered historians with critical perspectives on how societies construct notions of the body, normalcy, and deviation. As Kim E. Nielsen has argued, disability history is not simply the history of disabled people, but a lens through which broader societal values and power structures are revealed.²² This thesis adopts such a lens, using close visual analysis to examine how postcard representations both affirm and negotiate prevailing norms of bodily coherence and recovery. In doing so, it seeks to uncover what these images disclose about wartime cultural attitudes toward injured and impaired bodies through asking how normalcy was visually and ideologically enforced.

In the context of the First World War's production of mass injury on an unprecedented scale, this insight proves particularly crucial. However, it is also worth drawing a careful distinction between the categories of the wounded and the disabled, for these are not entirely commensurate. The figure that recurs most frequently in the sources examined here is not a

²² Kim E. Nielsen, 'Historical Thinking and Disability History', *Disability Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (31 July 2008), <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v28i3.107>.

veteran with permanent disabilities, but the recovering soldier, whose injuries are read beneath the primacy of his path to restoration. This is not a lacuna in the material collected so much as a reflection of the source base itself, which privileges recuperation over permanence. The relative absence of visibly and enduringly disabled bodies in the postcard archive is, in this sense, a cultural signal that gestures toward a broader societal discomfort with permanent impairment. That which could not be healed was often made invisible; and in that erasure, we begin to glimpse the contours of a wartime masculinity that insisted on coherence even where the body had been broken. This thesis, then, draws on such insights from disability studies whilst remaining outside its core critical commitments. As Simi Linton has argued, ‘Disability Studies moves beyond the corrective. It is the socio-political-cultural model of disability incarnate,’²³ concerned with the lived experience and political positioning of disabled people.’ By contrast, this project remains within the domain of wartime visual culture, concerned with how the idea of injury was visually reassembled to convey symbolic and affective meaning.

To investigate this visual logic of selective visibility, this work draws primarily upon postcard collections held in the Wien Museum, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, and the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus. A key point of entry was the Wien Museum’s digitised *Soldatenleben* (‘Soldier’s life’) collection, comprising 1,075 First World War postcards. This body of material served as a concentrated sample through which to gain an initial sense of the dominant visual trends in circulation surrounding soldiers and military life, including recurring images of the Emperor, depictions of men in battle, scenes of camaraderie, and moments of homecoming or rest.

From this larger corpus, attention turned to the approximately 120 postcards that emerged from this survey as representing injury in some way, whether explicitly or

²³ Simi Linton, ‘Disability Studies/Not Disability Studies’, *Disability & Society* 13, no. 4 (1998): 526, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599826588>.

symbolically. In identifying relevant material, the research adopted a broad yet considered approach to injury. Whilst figures marked by bandages, slings, crutches, or visible wounds were the most immediately recognisable, injury was also read through more subtle visual cues, such as a soldier collapsed on the ground, grasping a limb, or supported by another figure. This interpretive judgement reflected an understanding of injury not merely as a medical condition, but as a culturally constructed and symbolically encoded visual status. The task was to understand not just which images circulated, but why certain types of woundedness might have proven commercially viable and culturally resonant.

It was through this process of observation and interpretation that this thesis' central figure of the unwounded wounded soldier came into view, as a visual type whose suffering was signalled but rarely shown. The final source base consists of twenty-four postcards that exemplify this figure, either through the physical concealment of his wounds or the social reframing of his injured body within networks of care and meaning. These images are examined in detail and selected for the clarity with which they reflect broader visual and ideological patterns. They are supported by two complementary wartime postcards and two supplementary images, which help to elucidate broader visual patterns. Together, these sources provide the foundation for an analysis of how visual culture in wartime Austria minimised the disruptive reality of bodily injury by reframing it through allegorical and symbolic strategies that rendered the wounded soldier emotionally legible, spiritually redemptive, and ideologically coherent.

It is also worth noting that whilst none of the selected postcards were themselves circulated, the focus of this study is not on tracing patterns of dissemination. Rather, it centres on analysing the visual languages that were reproduced and rendered commercially viable. Here, it is by virtue of their production and thematic recurrence that they offer insight into culturally resonant attitudes toward the male body and wartime suffering. A dedicated study of reception would, of course, make a valuable complement to this visual and symbolic analysis.

This work also places emphasis on how theological and sentimental frameworks were visually mobilised to render injury as a form of moral clarity. To illuminate the full symbolic depth of these images, the analysis actively engages with Christian hagiographic narratives to unpack how these visual echoes transformed physical suffering into spiritual legibility. These motifs are interpreted in relation to the broader narrative cues that frame the wounded soldier as a morally sanctified figure whose suffering acquires symbolic resonance within the collective imagination. In this way, the thesis engages with religious iconography to explore how cultural scripts of sanctity and sacrifice shaped the representation of wartime injury.

Running parallel to this theological thread is a sustained engagement with gender, asking how bodies were made legible as masculine, and how injury was visualised in ways that reinforced the ideals of militarised manhood.²⁴ If sanctified suffering provided one axis of symbolic coherence, gendered conformity provided another.²⁵ The thesis therefore treats masculinity as a visual performance that sought to both contain and erase vulnerability within frames of patriotic discipline.

At the core of this approach lies close visual analysis: cards are examined for their compositional choices, iconographic motifs, and emotional cues, with particular attention to how they frame the wounded figure in relation to the aforementioned gendered, religious, and national ideals. This qualitative reading is supported by a basic typological tracking of recurring visual tropes across the corpus, thereby situating individual examples within the broader workings of how visual logic could be used to stabilise meaning in a time of symbolic volatility.

²⁴ For a detailed exploration of militarised masculinities as mechanisms of social control and symbolic power, see: Rebecca Tapscott, 'Militarized Masculinity and the Paradox of Restraint: Mechanisms of Social Control under Modern Authoritarianism', *International Affairs* 96, no. 6 (1 November 2020): 1565–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa163>.

²⁵ For more on debates around hegemonic masculinity, visibility, and the evolution of critical masculinity studies, see: Ulf Mellström, 'Masculinity Studies – More Relevant than Ever?', *NORMA* 18, no. 3 (3 July 2023): 155–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2023.2238990>.

If the method lies in close reading, the structure lies in thematic differentiation. This thesis is therefore organised around the dominant visual logics that recur throughout the postcard corpus, with each chapter centring on a distinct mode through which the wounded soldier was made culturally legible. The first chapter examines the (in)visibility of injury, focusing on how the wounded male body was visually sanitised to fit ideological scripts of symbolic coherence. Drawing on examples ranging from humorous caricatures to Marian and Christocentric iconography, the chapter explores how postcards rendered injury visible only in stylised or symbolic forms, rarely confronting the grotesque or chaotic realities of bodily damage. Through analysing images in which the soldier appears remarkably unbroken, it argues that this visual reticence actively contributed to constructing a cultural grammar in which woundedness could be seen as something spiritually redemptive and even aesthetically pleasing.

The second chapter turns from the symbolic erasure of wounds to the social and spatial contexts in which they were framed, analysing how woundedness was staged through its proximity to figures such as comrades and caregivers. Tracing a visual progression from battlefield camaraderie to institutional convalescence, it argues that masculinity and vulnerability were brought back into alignment with another through the co-construction of gendered caregiving and spatial choreography. Homosocial scenes of support uphold martial brotherhood and stoic endurance, whilst images featuring female caregivers (particularly Red Cross nurses) invoke emotional recuperation through the feminisation of healing. Alongside these, the chapter also examines the presence of other figures, such as Emperor Franz Joseph, whose visual appearances often imbue the wounded body with imperial grace and symbolic legitimacy. By contrast, the relative absence of male medical professionals such as doctors prompts a deeper inquiry into the visual logic at work, suggesting a preference for allegorical or affective representations of care over clinical ones.

Ultimately, the chapter treats the wounded body as a relational surface, arguing that gender shaped these representations in two primary ways: by minimising difference between men in scenes of masculine solidarity, and by heightening it in depictions where the wounded body is stabilised through its juxtaposition with domesticised divine femininity. When taken together, these chapters trace how Viennese wartime visual culture rendered injury in a legible form, stabilising collective anxieties by absorbing rupture into a repertoire of symbolic, often sentimental, coherence. The wounded soldier thus emerges as a quasi-mythologised figure, shaped by overlapping imperatives of morale, ideology, gender, and aesthetic conventions.

Finally, the contribution this thesis seeks to make is twofold. Firstly, to the historical understanding of the First World War and its cultural production within Austrian historiography, it offers a focused examination of how the wartime postcard was mobilised to navigate the fraught terrain of masculinity, injury, and national coherence. In doing so, it speaks simultaneously to the cultural life of the Habsburg Monarchy during its final years, and to the wider history of propaganda and symbolic resilience in times of crisis. Secondly, whilst grounded in historical specificity, this thesis also gestures toward contemporary relevance and the ongoing conversation about how societies mediate trauma through visual forms. As modern conflicts continue to generate images of injured soldiers and heroic recovery, now disseminated not through postcards, but through news, media, film, and digital platforms, the questions raised here remain relevant. How do images of wounded bodies shape public perceptions of war? Whose pain is made visible, and whose is obscured? And how is suffering transformed into a vehicle for moral or national coherence? By interrogating these questions in the context of wartime Vienna, this thesis seeks to present a framework for understanding the visual politics of injury that may help us read the present with greater critical acuity and historical depth.

Chapter 1



Figure 2: 'Verwundet.' (1914).²⁶

Vienna, 1914. A man enters his local stationery shop, there to buy something ordinary (ink, perhaps, or maybe a length of string) and pauses, briefly, before the postcard rack near the door. He turns it without urgency, letting the cards flick past his fingers. Here is an image of the Emperor produced by the *Bund der Deutschen in Böhmen* ('Association of Germans in

²⁶ Oscar Schaffer and B. L. W. I., *Verwundet. (Original Title)*, 1914, Postcard, 1914, KS 16320294, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/baa14672477>.

Bohemia’). There, an official card for the Red Cross, War Relief Office, and the War Welfare Office shows a young girl offering a drink of water to a soldier. In another, slightly lower down, he glances at a quiet interior scene of a man in uniform, seated in what might be a parlour, surrounded by signs of rest. The card is titled *Verwundet* (‘Wounded’).

The image shows a plump soldier lounging back to smoke in a comfortable wooden chair, one hand slipped into the pocket of his trousers, resting atop his stomach, whilst the other flicks through the pages of a small book. His uniform is relaxed and unbuttoned, and his soft house slippers peek out beneath his trouser legs; behind him, a hatstand completes the illusion of domestic calm, collapsing the battlefield into the drawing room. One may notice, then, that despite having been formally styled as wounded, there is neither visible blood nor any hint of strain here, with the only trace of injury at all being the cartoonish swathe of white bandage tied around his head, tipped jauntily on his crown like a soft cap. In other words, what we see here is a form of woundedness without consequence – a vision of injury stripped of suffering, in which the central figure dons the visual vocabulary of affliction like an actor would a costume, signalling his role through props for the benefit of his audience.

Whether *Verwundet* was produced just before or just after the outbreak of war remains unclear, but its visual logic belongs unmistakably to a moment not yet overtaken by the full violence of industrialised warfare. That ambiguity makes it an especially useful place to begin, not simply for its chronological positioning, but for the way it illuminates a visual grammar still in the process of formation. The First World War, whilst catastrophic in scale, did not arrive as an epistemic rupture. Rather, it unfolded both within and against a longer genealogy of representation, one in which inherited conventions were not discarded, but reworked and

reinscribed under the pressures of modern war.²⁷ *Verwundet* stands as an example of this logic in action, revealing how visual codes of injury could be mobilised to aestheticise and reframe the trauma they gave the impression of recording. It is with these concerns in mind that this chapter turns to the representational logic of the wounded body itself, asking: what kinds of wounds could be seen, and in what ways? How did certain injuries become stylised into consumable, sentimental currency, whilst others were aesthetically obscured?

From this vantage, the logic of *Verwundet* becomes clearer. Belonging to a broader trend in wartime postcard culture in which the wounded body was often curated to veil the more jarring realities of injury, *Verwundet* is particularly telling for what it reveals about the representational logic of this moment in time. Rather than confronting the physical consequences of war, such images relied on visual shorthand such as the head bandage or the hospital bed to signal woundedness whilst preserving the soldier's narrative integrity.²⁸ Injury, where it surfaced at all, therefore had to do so through a language of metaphor or adornment, with each card a veritable *tableau vivant* in which the damaged body was emptied of pain and reassembled into symbolic use. Across the broader archival survey, such visual tropes emerge with frequency, suggesting that *Verwundet* belongs to a widely circulated mode of depicting injury in which pain is displaced by recognisable markers of convalescence rendered as visual costume. These accessories signified woundedness without disrupting the soldier's composed, legible form. Rather than confronting the abject realities of war, these images also transformed injury into a recognisable emblem of sacrifice and survival, presenting injured men as *Helden!* ('Heroes') whose experiences of trauma are nothing more than simple *Kriegsgeschichten* ('War Stories').

²⁷ For more on how wartime accounts, particularly those of nurses and noncombatants, reworked earlier narrative forms to express trauma, see: Margaret R Higonnet, 'Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I', *Modernism/Modernity* 9, no. 1 (2002): 91–107.

²⁸ Alison S. Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing: Other Fronts, Other Spaces', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 11, no. 4 (2 October 2018): 270, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2018.1523779>.



Figure 3: 'Helden!' (1915).²⁹



Figure 4: 'Kriegsgeschichten' (1915).³⁰

²⁹ Wiener Rotophot-Gesellschaft, Blüh & Co. and Leonhard Wintorowski, *Helden!* (Original Title), 1915, Postcard, 9.3cm × 14cm, 1915, 40076, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/104251-helden/>.

³⁰ Rotes Kreuz, Kriegsfürsorgeamt, Kriegshilfsbüro and Karl Feiertag, *Kriegsgeschichten* (Original Title) *Kriegspostkarte No. 172* (Descriptive Title), 1915, Postcard, 8.9cm × 14cm, 1915, 40244/13, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/106253-kriegsgeschichten/>.

It would be tempting here to draw easy distinctions between institutional and commercial imperatives, and to suggest, for example, that Red Cross imagery remained conservative whilst private publishers traded in fantasy or irony. Yet the reality is far more entangled. Across both spheres, we find a shared commitment to sanitising suffering, and a common grammar of woundedness that oscillates between absence and display. As Jay Winter reminds us, ‘sites of memory are places where historical remembrance happens’;³¹ they shape the past into something usable, actively constructing meaning and emotional resonance in the present. Whether visible or invisible, the wound in this medium becomes a site of narrative control and a means to stabilise the soldier’s dignity whilst containing the horrors of violence. Thus, in lieu of opposing seen and unseen wounds, this chapter deliberately attends to their complicity, examining the ways in which all degrees of visibility participated in a visual economy that rendered bodily pain into a legible fiction of meaning.

It is in this context that images such as these take on a foundational prescience within this chapter. Beneath *Verwundet*’s levity, for example, lies a visual logic already fluent in the symbolic terms that would come to define much of the postcard corpus in the years that followed. Through its playful tone and stylised aesthetic, the card exposes how the wounded body was already being framed, even before the full horrors of trench warfare had taken hold. The bandage-as-accessory, the intact body marked symbolically rather than physically – these tropes, which would become near-ubiquitous as the war progressed, are already in place, awaiting their full mobilisation into the symbolic and emotional repertoire demanded by modern warfare. As Alex Mayhew observes, postcards were not simply snapshots of sentiment but ‘a canvas for ideas, feelings, and thoughts... rarely [having] one meaning,’³² offering a

³¹ Jay Winter, ‘Sites of Memory’, in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 314.

³² Alex Mayhew, ‘A War Imagined’: Postcards and the Maintenance of Long-Distance Relationships during the Great War’, *War in History* 28, no. 2 (2021): 306.

layered mode of wartime communication that helped ‘share and recreate similar ideas and events in [the] mind’s-eye’³³ of sender and recipient alike. In this sense, the semiotic fluency of *Verwundet* speaks to the very stratification Mayhew describes, activated within a medium whose interpretive openness allowed inherited tropes to be reinscribed with new emotional and ideological weight.

Of course, whilst *Verwundet* does affirm several visual patterns that would persist throughout the war, it also gestures toward certain elements that would not endure, chief among them being the comic framing of the soldier himself. There is an undeniably humorous excess to this image, a result of the gentle sarcasm of the idea that this well-fed, comfortable figure has been sent home unfit to fight. Woundedness, in this early visual logic, is something to be enjoyed, and wounded men are playfully indulged.

By comparison, whilst humour certainly remained a feature of visual depictions of woundedness as the war unfolded, it began to reorient rather quickly, with *Verwundet*’s particular register of humour becoming much less common. Instead, later postcards and periodicals tended towards rooting comedy in absurdity or sexual innuendo, deliberately positioning humour at a distance from the wounded body and instead stemming from the surreal or the risqué. Take, for instance, the postcard *Heil Neujahr!*, produced in 1915, which depicts a cheerful Red Cross nurse presenting a live piglet to a wounded soldier who is propped upright in a hospital bed.

³³ Mayhew, 308.



Figure 5: 'Heil Neujahr!' (1915).³⁴

The scene is patently ridiculous and deliberately absurd: the pig, symbolic of good fortune (though generally not offered literally) visually evokes the hope of a new year offering bodily repair and emotional restoration. The New Year's framing, meanwhile, situates the image within a civilian temporal rhythm, rather than a military one, which reintegrates the wounded

³⁴ Bund der Deutschen in Niederösterreich and Fritz Gareis, *Heil Neujahr!* (Original Title), 1915 1914, Postcard, 14.1cm × 9cm, 1915 1914, 41098/5, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/113904-kriegspostkarte-offizielle-karte-fuer-rotes-kreuz-kriegsfuersorgeamt-kriegshilfsbuero-nr-315-gefallener-oder-verwundeter-soldat-mit-betender-madonna/>.

man into ordinary life through spirited seasonal rituals. However, despite the image being seeming similarly comic in tone to *Verwundet*, there is a subtle (but crucial) difference between the two images' treatment of humour. For where *Verwundet* invites us to laugh at the wounded soldier, *Heil Neujahr!* invites us to laugh alongside him. This image stages a form of levity that is collaborative and restorative, one in which woundedness need not be an alienating or solitary experience. As Pip Gregory argues in her study of wartime cartoon humour, images that encouraged inclusive laughter (wherein characters and viewers shared in the joke) helped sustain emotional resilience during a time of radical upheaval, reasserting familiar social roles whilst gently adapting them to shifting wartime realities.³⁵ Such inclusive humour, she suggests, was 'present[ed] to audiences utilis[ing] traditional, recognisable and at times iconic forms of illustration incongruously to provide reassurance and comfort,'³⁶ gently disarming the shocks of wartime life by couching them in the visual grammar of the familiar and the benign. In *Heil Neujahr!*, the joke hinges on incongruity, but its effect is to unify the wounded and his caregiver into a singular scene of domestic sociability.

What remains stable between both, however, is the core conceit that the wounded man is a performed figure, situated within a recognisable symbolic tableau within which injury must be acknowledged, but not dwelled upon. That performance, whether comic or solemn, runs deeper than genre or tone. It points to a representational system that quite ironically was so embedded in shaping how woundedness could be made publicly visible that it no longer required any engagement with the wound itself. In both *Verwundet* and *Heil Neujahr!*, humour becomes the

³⁵ Pip Gregory, 'A Visual History of First World War Women and Humour Identified in Contemporary Cartoons', *First World War Studies* 13, no. 2–3 (2 September 2022): 103–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2023.2179519>. Whilst Gregory's study does focus primarily on women in wartime visual humour, her concept of inclusive laughter and its emotionally stabilising function remains applicable here as the postcard's humour hinges on a shared comic dynamic between the wounded male soldier and the female nurse. Their interaction thus reflects the kind of reciprocal humour Gregory identifies as being one which reaffirms social cohesion whilst simultaneously accommodating the shifting gender roles of wartime.

³⁶ Gregory, 117–18.

register through which that containment is made palatable, with the wound being referenced, but never enough to rupture the coherence of the body or the scene.

As Suzannah Biernoff has observed in her work on British visual media, wartime imagery often reframed disfigurement through highly symbolic means, crafting narratives that neutralised trauma by offering coherent, if fantastical, alternatives.³⁷ She argues that ‘the mutilated body was discursively remade,’ and that rhetoric itself had ‘a prosthetic function,’³⁸ acting as a kind of narrative patch for physical absence which helped audiences absorb and reinterpret the visual consequences of mechanised war. In *Verwundet*, this aestheticising function is still light-hearted: that the man is fat (and thus suggestively untouched by the physical demands of fighting) reminds us that we are still at the precipice of a shifting representational order, a moment when woundedness had not yet become a universalised or fully traumatic condition.

What makes these images so revealing, then, is their underlying logic, which reappears with remarkable consistency across even the most reverent and solemn representations. The visual strategies that govern laughter and lightness are not discarded when the tone darkens; rather, they are transposed into more elevated keys, maintaining the same ideological imperative to render the wounded body coherent. It is to one such example that we now turn.

³⁷ Suzannah Biernoff, ‘The Rhetoric of Disfigurement in First World War Britain’, *Social History of Medicine* 24, no. 3 (December 2011): 666–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkq095>.

³⁸ Biernoff, 677.



Figure 6: [The Wounded Hussar] (1914-1918).³⁹

At first glance, it may well strike us that this image seems to be quite different to both *Verwundet* and *Heil Neujahr!*. Indeed, not only does its visual composition differ as an artistically staged photograph (set against a painted backdrop) but its tone is also markedly more solemn, saturated with theological symbolism. Unlike the stoutly protagonist of *Verwundet*, woundedness here is stripped of any comedic tone, instead being sanctified – deified, even – to

³⁹ Österreichische Photographische Gesellschaft, *Verwundet* (Descriptive Title), 1918 1914, Postcard, 1918 1914, KS 16320018, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/baa14681038>. Due to the archival title being the same as a previously discussed source, I shall refer to this image as ‘The Wounded Hussar’ from here.

elevate the figure into a register of imperial grace and Catholic piety. Yet, beneath these surface level disparities lies the same foundational structure: just as the wound remains elusive, the body stays intact. What we encounter, once again, is the figure of the unwounded wounded, who has been deliberately composed and costumed for his audience.

Dressed entirely in uniform with his head held high and expression firm, the image does not rely on any sign of injury to convey to us his wounded status, instead supposing that the image of a soldier laying on the ground (when he should naturally be stood to attention) will be enough. Despite his position, he is not devoid of his strength: his shield rests behind him, certainly, but we can see that he is holding himself up with his own force, rather than needing it for support. The same can be said for his sword, which he holds fairly loosely; again, not used so much as a crutch as it is a feature of his uniform.

Here, then, the visual language is markedly similar to that of *Heil Neujahr!* and *Verwundet*, with the visibility of the wound once again displaced by symbolic markers and narrative cues. Yet whilst their motivation in deploying this strategy does differ, with our previous sources intending to provoke gentle amusement where *The Wounded Hussar* uses it to engage with the weightier ideological concerns of national unity and spiritual fortitude, the body of the wounded soldier in both cases is handled through the same set of visual conventions. What this suggests is not only a repetition of aesthetic choices, but the existence of a shared representational grammar through which the wounded soldier could be made to serve a variety of rhetorical ends. That such a degree of formal continuity existed across divergent tones points to a deeper, more unified cultural attitude toward injury itself, wherein woundedness was not understood primarily as a material or physiological condition to be revealed, but as a symbolic role to be inhabited.

If the comparison with *Heil Neujahr!* and *Verwundet* reveals a shared visual grammar, then *The Wounded Hussar* individual symbolism invites us to consider how that same grammar could be inflected through theological means. In aligning the wounded body with traditions of martyrdom and moral purity, the image also works to reposition suffering as spiritually aspirational, gesturing towards a deeper ideological project in which religion could both reflect and structure cultural sentiments. Indeed, the convergence of theology and visual representation emerges as a particularly potent arena for negotiating cultural norms, precisely because both religion and visibility are deeply implicated in how wartime societies codified meaning and moral legibility.⁴⁰

Consider, for example, the outreached hand of the Virgin Mary. Here, in the heavenly light beaming down upon the wounded man from her, one may find two meanings. The first, perhaps more immediate reading of this imagery, is to understand it as directly congruent with the doctrine of Catholicism, the predominant religion of the Dual Monarchy, and thus serving to emphasise dualistically the ideals of devotion and duty.⁴¹ Mary's gesture is one of divine approval, a sanctification of his role as a soldier and a child of God. Through her presence, the soldier comes to embody more than just militarised masculine strength; he is now a paragon of Catholic piety, fulfilling his duty to both God and Emperor.

In this manner, the Virgin Mary's blessing reflects Austria's historical self-conception as a stronghold of Catholicism, a status it maintained both through its battles against Protestant

⁴⁰ Jonathan Ebel, for example, showed how American soldiers, nurses, and aid workers understood the First World War as a spiritual trial that deepened their Christian faith and framed national suffering as a path to redemption. See: Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton University Press, 2010), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rxrq>.

⁴¹ Whilst Austria-Hungary as a whole entity was religiously diverse, as the predominate religion of both Austria and Hungary the Roman Catholic Church was still the most important religious community. According to the 1910 census, there were 22.5 million Catholics in Cisleithania (representing 79 per cent of the population) and 10.5 million in Hungary (representing 49 per cent, the largest single religious group). For the 1910 census, see: Verlag des Wiener Magistrates, 'Ergebnisse Der Volkszählung Vom 31. Dezember 1910 in Der k. k. Reichshaupt- Und Residenzstadt Wien : Bericht Erstattet Im Einvernehmen Mit Dem Magistratsreferenten von Der Volkszählungs-Zentralsektion' (Paul Gerin, 1910), urn:nbn:at:AT-WBR-504667, Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, <https://resolver.obvsg.at/urn:nbn:at:AT-WBR-504667>.

reformers in the Counter-Reformation and its mythicised defence against Ottoman forces during the early modern period.⁴² As Dieter Binder notes, ‘Catholicism was the de facto state religion in the Habsburg realm,’ and the dynasty remained ‘uncompromisingly true to the Roman Catholic Church,’⁴³ forging a baroque religio-political identity grounded in Marian veneration and imperial sanctity. This narrative of Austria as *defensor fidei* became central to the political theology of the Habsburg Monarchy, whose legitimacy was deeply entwined with Catholic piety in a tradition retrospectively canonised as *Pietas Austriaca*, the emblematic virtue of the House of Austria. In such a framework, imperial devotion and divine favour were often visually entwined – whether that be through Marian benedictions extended to wounded soldiers or scenes of Franz Joseph himself kneeling in intercession for the allied armies - sustaining an image of the empire as both spiritually steadfast and morally consecrated.

⁴² For more on how Austria came to see itself and was seen by others as a bastion of Catholicism, and how this view was reinforced through both institutional power and cultural self-mythology, see: Hans Gerald Hödl and Lukas Pokorny, eds., *Religion in Austria: Volume 1* (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2012).

⁴³ Dieter Binder, ‘Pietas Austriaca? The Imperial Legacy in Interwar and Postwar Austria’, *Religions* (Basel, Switzerland) 8, no. 9 (2017): 171, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8090171>.



Figure 7: 'Kaiser Franz Josef im Gebet für die verbündeten Armeen.' (1915).⁴⁴

(*'Emperor Franz Joseph in prayer for the allied armies'*)

The *Wounded Hussar*'s Marian blessing thus serves as a symbolic reaffirmation of Austria's sacralised historical mission; in her divine sanctioning of the individual man, the Virgin Mary in fact acts to provide her blessing to Austria and its historical claim to divine favour as a collective. The deliberate choice to depict the injured soldier as remaining strong and pious also reinforces an image of Austria as spiritually and morally resilient, even in the face of the

⁴⁴ A. F. and Adam Setkowitz, *Ja! Sein Auge Sieht Uns Immer, Hilfsbereit Ist Seine Hand, Gut Und Blut Für Unsern Kaiser, Gut Und Blut Fürs Kaiserland!* (Original Title), 1915, Postcard, 13.9cm × 8.9cm, 1915, 40057/4, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/en/object/104082-ja-sein-auge-sieht-uns-immer-hilfsbereit-ist-seine-hand-gut-und-blut-fuer-unsern-kaiser-gut-und-blut-fuers-kaiserland/>.

geopolitical crises of the First World War. The soldier's unwounded state is a metaphor; he is the personification of imperial resilience, a figure through whom the fractures of war are effaced in favour of a restored icon of devout strength. Quite crucially, though, if *The Wounded Hussar* offers a microcosmic glimpse into how theological meaning could be mapped onto the wounded body, then a wider constellation of sources reveals just how recurrent and malleable this mode of representation truly was.

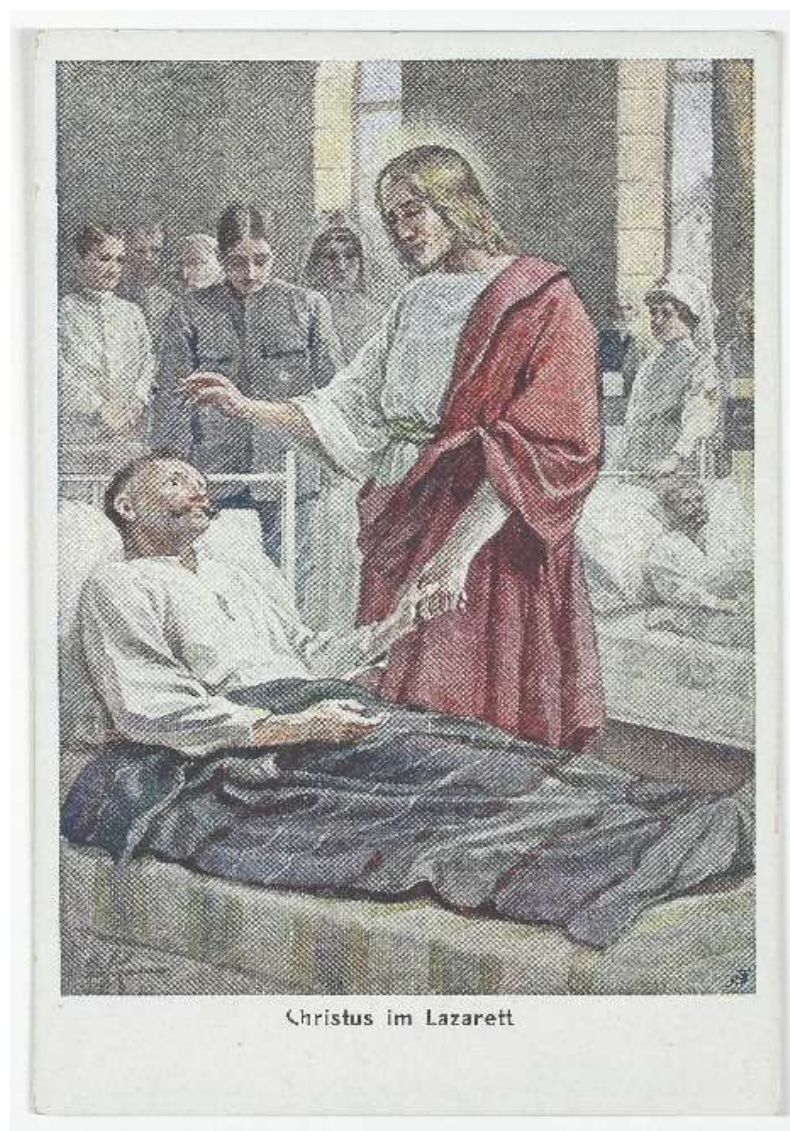


Figure 8: 'Christus im Lazarett' (1915).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Rotes Kreuz, Kriegsfürsorgeamt, Kriegshilfsbüro, Eduard Reckziegel, and C. Angerer & Göschl, *Christus Im Lazarett (Original Title)*, 1915, Postcard, 14.1cm × 9cm, 1915, 40253/2, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/106344-christus-im-lazarett/>.



Figure 9: 'Wenn die Not am höchsten, Ist Gott am nächsten.' (1914-17).⁴⁶

In both cards here, we see the hand of Christ extended in benediction, gently touching the forehead of a soldier whose body remains largely unmarred. The man in the hospital bed sits upright, clear-eyed, and calm, whilst the stretchered figure wears only the light trace of a bandage, the now-familiar leitmotif that marks woundedness without revealing it. Their captions, too, help frame the encounter: *Christus im Lazarett* (Christ in the military hospital) names the space as holy by virtue of Christ's presence, whilst *Wenn die Not am höchsten, ist Gott am nächsten* ('When need is greatest, God is nearest') assures the viewer that suffering guarantees divine proximity. What begins to emerge from these images, beyond simple religious motif, is a ritual grammar in which the wound, once again, need not be seen to be made meaningful, and the soldier's pain can be transfigured into spiritual currency.

⁴⁶ A. F. W., *Wenn Die Not Am Höchsten, Ist Gott Am Nächsten!* (Original Title), 1914, Postcard, 9cm × 14cm, 1914, 39700/3, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/114840-wenn-die-not-am-hoechsten-ist-gott-am-naechsten/>.

In this sense, Christ's touch affirms the soldier's physical survival whilst simultaneously confirming his moral worth, shaping a shared imagination wherein divine recognition substitutes bodily disrepair. This form of ritualised action functioned within an emotional economy that Alex Mayhew described as allowing 'the lived experience of the war [to play] out in the minds of its participants [...] projected and crafted by those involved'⁴⁷ ensuring the maintenance of emotional and moral coherence even across distance. What's more, one finds in Maggie Brennan's work a fuller articulation of how institutional religion participated in this imaginative economy, demonstrating that Catholicism saw a marked revival in public engagement during the war due to its spiritual presence being reinvigorated by the emotional and moral needs of the moment.⁴⁸ Far from disappearing under the weight of modernity, the Church used the war as an opportunity to reassert its pastoral legitimacy and spiritual authority through providing humanitarian service and symbolic leadership amid the violence.⁴⁹ Brennan notes that 'more than anything, World War I reaffirmed the universality of Catholicism,'⁵⁰ by entwining its ties to both state and soldier, forging a renewed symbiosis between faith and military duty.

Together, Brennan and Mayhew illuminate a tripartite architecture of meaning-making, in which individual imagination, institutional religion, and nationalist ideology formed their own kind of Holy Trinity. When read alongside postcards such as *Christus im Lazarett* and *Wenn die Not am höchsten[...]*, their work suggests that religion was much more than a background belief vis-à-vis visual culture, instead marking an active instrument through which both individuals and institutions could sustain meaning under extreme pressures. Rather than

⁴⁷ Mayhew, 'A War Imagined', 308.

⁴⁸ Maggie Brennan, 'A Light in the Darkness: The Interaction between Catholicism and World War I', *The Purdue Historian* 6, no. 1 (14 November 2013): 20.

⁴⁹ Brennan, 19.

⁵⁰ Brennan, 32.

signalling the demise of religious worldviews, as authors like Charles O'Connor have argued,⁵¹ these postcards exemplify their recalibration, fusing liturgical intimacy with nationalist purpose to preserve a spiritual grammar under modern strain.



Figure 10: [Kriegspostkarte No. 315] (1915).⁵²

⁵¹ Charles A. O'Connor III, *The Great War and the Death of God: Cultural Breakdown, Retreat from Reason, and Rise of Neo-Darwinian Materialism in the Aftermath of World War I* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing / The Spring, 2014).

⁵² Bund der Deutschen in Böhmen, Anton Marussig, and C. Angerer & Göschl, *Bundeskarte 347, Vision Eines Verwundeten: Der Kaiser Die Tapferkeitsmedaille an Seine Brust Heftend* (Descriptive Title), 1915, Postcard, 14cm × 9cm, 1915, 40312/6, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/107033-kriegspostkarte-des-bundes-der-deutschen-in-boehmen-bundeskarte-347-vision-eines-verwundeten-der-kaiser-die-tapferkeitsmedaille-an-seine-bruste-heftend/>.

This postcard, meanwhile, returns us to a familiar configuration, with it vividly echoing the prior image seen in *The Wounded Hussar*. Issued as the 315th official war postcard of the Austrian Red Cross, *Kriegsfürsorgeamt* ('War Welfare Office'), and *Kriegshilfsbüro*, it too presents Mary as a figure of divine intercession, but with the emotional register intensified. Here, she no longer offers a gesture of benediction to a lucid, upright man; instead, she cradles the soldier in her lap, recalling with deliberate clarity the traditional motif of the Pietà. The man's head tilts backward, his eyes shut, and his limp form calls into question whether he is meant to be seen as wounded or already gone. The ambiguity is deliberate. Were it not for the deeply iconic structure it references of Mary mourning her dead son, the image might seem morbid to the point of unsellable. Yet within this consecrated visual vocabulary, even fatal injury is reframed as sanctified sacrifice, transfiguring the fallen sons of Austria into saints of the nation. A small, unmistakable bloodstain on the soldier's tunic, shaped as a cross, reaffirms this logic, transmuting pain into redemption and enacting a scene of sacred mourning in which the fallen man assumes the posture and symbolism of Christ himself.

Beyond her role in the evocation of Christ's Passion, the presence of Mary also carries additional weight. If Christ's touch in the previous cards affirmed the soldier's righteousness through benediction, then here, Mary's act of holding reorients the wounded man into a maternal logic of grief. Her presence mediates between divine compassion and earthly mourning, thereby serving as a surrogate for the innumerable mothers whose sons were consigned to the machinery of war. That the Marian images we have seen engage more directly with the spectre of death is also significant. Unlike Christ, whose proximity reinforces strength and endurance, Mary presides over a quieter scene of love and lamentation, making space for emotional rupture even as the image remains visually restrained. In this sense, Marian postcards perform a delicate balancing act. They offer comfort through abstraction, allowing viewers to imagine the soldier consoled by a Holy Mother rather than haunted by his own, and in doing

so, they aestheticise maternal pain into religious allegory, transmuting the horrors of war into a redemptive narrative legible to both faith and nation.

There is certainly something to be said about the fact that this image was produced by the Austrian Red Cross, a body deeply entangled in both state and civil efforts to sustain morale amid mounting casualties. As Ke-Chin Hsia has shown, whilst Austria's war welfare system certainly did serve important material functions, it also became a site for moral reparation, particularly at the end of the war as the state sought to redeem itself in the eyes of those it had wounded.⁵³ Faced with the limits of their capacity to rescue the war-wounded by medical means, institutions like the Red Cross leaned heavily on symbolic forms of consolation. Nor was this limited to the battlefield alone. Hsia characterises both the Dual Monarchy and post-war Austria as a 'victim's state' that sought to justify itself morally and politically by caring for those it had helped to injure.⁵⁴ 'The war's disastrous impact on individual lives,' Hsia writes, 'had to be cushioned, if not really overcome, on the home front.'⁵⁵ In this context, the Marian image operates as a visual palliative, offering the viewer with a redemptive script whereby bureaucratic and surgical failure gives way to spiritual elevation.

This focus on an unwounded yet sanctified soldier across all of these sources also reveals the role of societal norms in shaping these representations. Cultural historian Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as the socially ingrained dispositions and expectations that shape individual and collective behaviour is especially useful here.⁵⁶ The Austro-Hungarian society, steeped in Catholic values, actively participated in sustaining a cultural script that valorised sacrifice and piety as intertwined ideals, with this script informing both the production of these images and

⁵³ Ke-Chin Hsia, *Victims' State: War and Welfare in Austria, 1868-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 148, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197582374.001.0001>.

⁵⁴ Hsia, 148.

⁵⁵ Hsia, 9.

⁵⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 16 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

their reception. By engaging with such representations, public consumers took on a role as active participants within a cultural dialogue that reinforced societal norms. Such postcard's imagery must not, therefore, be understood as simply a reflection of Catholic ideals, but also as a mechanism for their reproduction and enforcement, particularly in a time of war.

However, beyond this Biblical fidelity, one may note that an inescapable shadow of death lingers. Despite us having no visible sense of exactly how he is injured, the soldier of *Kriegspostkarte No. 315* is visibly suspended between the mortal world and the next. The Virgin Mary's physical proximity to the man, her solemn prayer, the blood marking his shirt; all of these can also imply that the soldier is on the cusp of being delivered to the Heavens. It is interesting here to see the extent to which such postcards could therefore engage with morbid themes, without the need to depict explicit physical injury, and furthermore, how such allusions to death and violence did not necessarily predicate the loss of any sense of palatability for the audience. Quite contrarily, this allusion to death and injury through a framework of retained dignity and a marked lack of suffering was a means to posit warfare as something ultimately good and inherently noble; injury and death do not represent a defeat, but a transcendence, a passage consecrated by divine light, which renders the soldier's sacrifice both meaningful and eternal. In Bürgschwentner's words, we see here how 'the picture postcard... [was] an ideal means to influence the masses, contributing to a positive image of the war and helping to keep up morale on both home front and battle front.'⁵⁷

When taken together, these Marian and Christocentric images illuminate a broader visual culture in which the role of care was cast not as clinical or institutional, but as something rooted in faith. Whether produced under the aegis of the Red Cross or by private publishers, these postcards converge on a shared register of religious iconography, transforming medical venues

⁵⁷ Bürgschwentner, 'War Relief, Patriotism and Art', 102.

into sacred spaces and the wounded body into the relic supreme, ultimately displacing the responsibility for care away from the state and onto a visual register of piety, virtue, and Christian charity. In this displacement of care from state to symbol, from flesh to faith, one glimpses the deeper ideological mechanisms by which wartime suffering in could be managed through sanctification in wartime visual culture. These images relieved institutions of having to represent the messiness of physical trauma by offering viewers instead a cleansed, sacramental version of what it meant to be wounded, one grounded in piety and visual coherence.

This sanctification of soldierly suffering and its emphasis on spiritual vitality over physical damage also intersects with gendered ideals of wartime masculinity. As Christa Hämmerle has shown, wartime nursing accounts often depicted soldiers as ‘brave warriors who give their life and blood to protect our hearth and home,’⁵⁸ rhetoric that both dovetails with the religious exaltation seen in these postcards and further supports the idea that ideals of resilient, virtuous masculinity were not simply imposed from above but were actively negotiated across the cultural terrain. Within this framework, the theological lens can thus be understood as a rehabilitative tool, ensuring that woundedness did not detract from martial masculinity, transforming physical vulnerability into proof of spiritual and patriotic strength.

Through this logic, the wounded soldier was doubly transformed, firstly into a symbol of divine grace, as well as into a visual cipher for the state’s own moral credibility. That these depictions so often elide visible injury or turn to sanctification is no coincidence. Rather, it is a strategic act of ideological consolidation, through which the trauma of the individual is subsumed into a redemptive national mythos. By presenting the wounded soldier as a figure of

⁵⁸ Christa Hämmerle, ‘“Mentally Broken, Physically a Wreck...”: Violence in War Accounts of Nurses in Austro-Hungarian Service’, in *Gender and the First World War*, ed. Christa Hämmerle, Oswald Überegger, and Birgitta Bader Zaar (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 96, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137302205_6.

dignity and divine favour, the postcard avoided the unsettling implications of bodily harm and mutilation, which could suggest vulnerability or failure. Instead, it reimagined the wounded body as spiritually whole, aligning personal sacrifice with a transcendent, eternal purpose. This relationship to visible injury is exemplary of exactly how cultural artifacts such as postcards functioned as sites of negotiation, where both societal anxieties about individual men and wider concerns about the state's potential instability could be sublimated into reassuring narratives of faith and strength.

What's more, the visual grammar of Christocentric and Marian care was not always tethered to the literal presence of Christ or Mary. One source that exemplifies this idea is *Vision eines Verwundeten* ('Vision of a wounded man'). In this composition, it is Emperor Franz Joseph who appears at the bedside of a supine soldier to bestow the *Tapferkeitsmedaille* (Medal of Honour) upon his chest. The Emperor's very presence serves as a form of visual absolution, with his deigning to appear and lay his hands upon the wounded man mimicking the Christocentric benediction seen in the previous religious cards. Here, though, divine grace has been reimagined through the earthly body of imperial authority. One notes the soldier's expression is unusually vivid for the postcard medium, with his face twisted in visible fear. It is within this discomfort that the Emperor's presence emerges as a sanctifying force; like Christ touching the brow of the wounded, he too transforms agony into honour.



Figure 11: [*Vision eines Verwundeten*] (1915).⁵⁹

This religious vision is all the more striking when one considers the physical impossibility it stages. Unlike the divine figures of Christ or Mary, whose miraculous battlefield appearances sit comfortably within the theological imagination, the Emperor is a real man who is bound by earthly constraints. He would not, and did not, appear at a wounded soldier's side on the front. In this sense, the image becomes paradoxically more fanciful than its religious counterparts, as

⁵⁹ Bund der Deutschen in Böhmen, Marussig, and C. Angerer & Göschl, *Bundeskarte 347, Vision Eines Verwundeten: Der Kaiser Die Tapferkeitsmedaille an Seine Brust Heftend* (Descriptive Title).

a metaphysical fiction wherein sovereign visitation can be conjured from within the soldier's mind. Similar renderings recur across other postcards too, where Franz Joseph materialises in ethereal form, his likeness drifting above the battlefield to gaze down upon advancing troops, casting him less as a corporeal ruler than as a sanctified emblem of patriarchal constancy.



Figure 12: *'Ja! Sein Auge Sieht Uns Immer, Hilfsbereit Ist Seine Hand, Gut Und Blut Für Unsern Kaiser, Gut Und Blut Fürs Kaiserland!'* (1915).⁶⁰

('Yes, His eye always sees us, His hand is ready to help, Good and blood for our Emperor, Good and blood for the Empire')

⁶⁰ A. F. and Setkowitz, *Ja! Sein Auge Sieht Uns Immer, Hilfsbereit Ist Seine Hand, Gut Und Blut Für Unsern Kaiser, Gut Und Blut Fürs Kaiserland!* (Original Title).

Woundedness, here, emerges through an implicit framing, with the emotional and physical severity being absorbed into the ceremonial logic of the medal bestowal and the sacral touch of imperial presence. What might otherwise unfold as a deathbed scene, marked by fear and physical decline, is redirected into a vision of purposeful sacrifice able to sidestep the intimacy of familial farewell in favour of a solemn affirmation that this suffering serves the greater calling of one's country.

Along a similar vein, we can also find an example of Marian imagery that does not rely on the figure of Mary herself, with the card *Rosa Zenoch* also drawing directly from the visual language of the Pietà. In the image, a young girl cradles the head of a reclining soldier in her lap, providing him tenderly with water in the middle of an active battlefield.



Figure 13: 'Rosa Zenoch' (1914).⁶¹

This image continues the broader representational logic at play throughout these postcards, with pain being stylised and symbolically contained beneath a veneer of order and sentiment. Whilst the image draws on a real event, when a young Polish girl brought water to wounded soldiers during the 1914 Battle of Rawa Ruska, its visual narrative subordinates

⁶¹ Rotes Kreuz, Kriegsfürsorgeamt, Kriegshilfsbüro, Adolf Karpellus, and Albert Berger, *Rosa Zenoch* (Original Title), 1914, Postcard, 14.1cm × 9cm, 1914, 39335/3, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/117221-rosa-zenoch/>.

historical realism to allegorical function. Thus, when we turn to the wounded men in the image, familiar visual cues reappear, with the central figure appearing more parched than injured. Even the man in the background, whose closed eyes signal a deeper vulnerability, shows no marks of serious trauma. The image participates in the same aesthetic tendency found throughout these postcards to render pain symbolically rather than physically, shaping woundedness into something ultimately visually contained.

However, this image conceals injury in more than one way. The most significant injury being obfuscated here, in fact, belongs to Rosa Zenoch herself. As a *Reichspost*⁶² article from the October of 1914 makes clear, Rosa was ‘seriously injured by an enemy projectile, so that after being transported to Vienna she had to have a foot amputated.’⁶³ This detail is entirely absent from this postcard, as it is too from a later card showing her recovering in hospital, titled *Rosa Zenoch, das Heldenmädchen von Rawaruska*, which depicts her upright in bed, torso shown, smiling gently.

⁶² A Viennese daily newspaper aimed at the Catholic population of Austria-Hungary.

⁶³ ‘Dem Heldenmädchen Rosa Zenoch’, *Reichspost*, 28 October 1914, 25, urn:nbn:at:AT-WBR-33261, Wienbibliothek im Rathaus.



Figure 14: 'Rosa Zeno, das Heldenmädchen von Rawaruska' (1914).⁶⁴

Far from exceptional, this form of omission draws our attention to the almost total erasure of permanent bodily loss running throughout not only this corpus of woundedness, but the wider visual culture of the war too. That Zeno's amputation exists only in the textual margins, discoverable at best through supplemental material, is telling. To be clear, the argument is not that this child should have been depicted without her foot – such visualisation of female childhood amputation during wartime would be fraught with ethical complications. Yet the quiet omission of her injury, even textually, in both postcards underscores the limits of what wartime visual culture was prepared to confront. These absences speak volumes about what kinds of wounds were permitted to circulate and which ones remained quietly elided, with the omission of permanent mutilation implicating its potential to disrupt the visual grammar of sanctified suffering.

⁶⁴ Rosa Zeno, *Das Heldenmädchen von Rawaruska*, 1914, Postcard, 9cm × 14cm, 1914, 101722654, National Library of Medicine Digital Collections, <http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/101722654>.

Indeed, what emerges across this visual archive is a disquieting logic in which woundedness appears almost exclusively as ephemeral or symbolic, with permanent injuries like amputations quietly displaced from view. The men depicted are either on the brink of transcendence, their suffering absorbed into a sacrificial script of imminent death, or else already recuperated, marked only by the symbolic trace of a bandage or a hospital bed to signal injury without fully committing to showing it. Much as Rosa's permanent injury escapes the visual record, the soldiers' woundedness is also rendered temporary, displacing the long durations of pain and the slow attrition of war on body and mind with a redemptive temporality in which meaning always arrives swiftly.

It is in this context that the 1917 poster for the *Landes-Kriegsfürsorge-Ausstellung* ('National War Welfare Exhibition') in Pozsony (Bratislava) provides an interesting aside, suggesting how the representational strategies explored here extended beyond the postcard medium and circulated across different forms of public display. Though not a postcard, it shares much of the visual logic and communicative purpose of the wartime ephemera examined thus far, being intended for mass public viewing and the persuasive recruitment of injury as a site of patriotic engagement.



Figure 15: 'Landes-Kriegsfürsorge-Ausstellung.' (1917).⁶⁵

It is in this image that we finally encounter the permanently wounded body of a man with an amputated arm, engaged in the everyday act of harvesting. His figure dominates the composition, sharply foregrounded against a golden field that ripples with stylised motion, depicted in bold strokes and stippled texture. His expression is unreadable, suffusing the image with a quiet yet unsubtle form of stoicism, and his strong grip on the farming tool reinforces

⁶⁵ Paul Suján, *Landes-Kriegsfürsorge-Ausstellung Pozsony Juli-August 1917 ... Eröffnung Am 18. Juli. 1917.*, 1917, Postcard, 124.5cm x 63 cm, 1917, AC10574658, Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, <https://permalink.obvsg.at/wbr/AC10574658>.

this mood. The prosthesis itself glints with mechanical intricacy, its metallic joints catching the light, yet it is seamlessly integrated into his gesture. This figure, then, is dualistically representative, as both a man historically wounded, but also (and much more importantly to the current composition) as a man reintegrated into the rhythms of civilian life.

Unlike the postcards examined thus far, this image undoubtedly addresses permanent wounding head-on, a fact perhaps best explained by its institutional provenance as an item produced for a state-organised welfare exhibition rather than a commercial postcard market. The limb is gone, and the prosthesis is plainly visible. Yet, what makes this image quite so compelling is how effortlessly it re-establishes the figure within the visual codes of functionality and masculine labour. The field stretches behind him in an idealised pastoral expanse, suggesting not just fertility and productivity, but belonging. There is no rupture here, no visual discord between body and environment, injury and purpose. If anything, the man appears as a model citizen, whose heroism is rooted in his ordinariness. His loss is thus visually neutralised by the very terms of the image, which conspire to make the prosthesis a badge of continued utility whereby the missing limb is not an affront to normalcy, but an updated version of it. In this way, the image avoids visualising impairment as impairment, relying instead on the same rhetorical structure observed in the postcards whereby the wound is acknowledged but immediately contained within a narrative of strength and renewal. In other words, he may no longer be an active soldier, but he is reborn as a productive farmer. In this way, the poster directly reinforces the broader claim of this chapter that such imagery operated as one cog in a larger cultural mechanism, smoothing the disruptive force of woundedness into legible, redemptive form.

Of course, the true realities of post-amputation life were hardly ever so seamless. Across Europe, representations of injury tended to obscure its long-term toll, replacing disruption with decorum. A revealing analogue can be found in the British context, where *Reveille*, a

publication for wounded veterans, grappled with this same tension. As Seth Koven notes in his study of the magazine, its inaugural issue featured a preface by novelist John Galsworthy warning of the creeping social abandonment of the war maimed: ‘In every street, on every road and village-green we meet them-crippled, half crippled, or showing little outward trace, though none the less secretly deprived of health.’⁶⁶ These men, Galsworthy wrote, risked becoming ‘an eyesore to a nation which will wish to forget there ever was this war.’⁶⁷ Koven characterises this tension as emblematic of a wider cultural logic in which societies sought simultaneously to ‘memorialize those who sacrificed their lives or limbs for the country’ and yet also ‘allow themselves to forget the wounds of war so that these could begin to close, to be concealed,’⁶⁸ a process that elevated symbolic value whilst eliding bodily truth. The farmer in the Poszony poster thus fits squarely within this logic, a reminder that the smoothing of the war-torn body into a figure of virtue and continuity was a gesture echoed across borders through which modern states sought to narrativise bodily loss without confronting its destabilising implications. Though visibly amputated, his difference is aestheticised and narratively smoothed into a tableau of civic renewal, ensuring that the loss of his arm need bear no consequence beyond its visual substitution by a prosthetic tool.

Yet this visual sleight of hand, where permanent injury is shown, but never truly seen, draws attention to something conspicuously absent across the broader archive: facial disfigurement. Suzannah Biernoff’s work on the visual rhetoric of disfigurement in Britain identifies this absence as no accident, but the result of a ‘culture of aversion,’⁶⁹ in which the loss of a face was perceived not merely as a bodily injury but as a loss of selfhood itself. ‘Unlike amputees,’ she

⁶⁶ Seth Koven, ‘Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain’, *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (1994): 1168, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2168773>, quoting John Galsworthy, ‘The Gist of the Matter,’ *Reveille* (August 1918): 14, 11.

⁶⁷ Koven, 1169, quoting Galsworthy, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Koven, 1169.

⁶⁹ Biernoff, ‘The Rhetoric of Disfigurement in First World War Britain’, 668.

notes, ‘these men were never officially celebrated as wounded heroes,’⁷⁰ because facial disfigurement could not be reconciled with the ideals of soldierly dignity and stoic endurance that dominated the public imaginary. Such injuries breached the boundaries of the representable. They could not be aestheticised, and thus they were silenced.

What this suggests is that the cultural limits of wartime representation were not defined merely by degrees of damage, but by the perceived legibility of the body within shared social codes. The prosthetic limb could be framed as a symbol of adaptation, even progress; the missing face, by contrast, threatened to collapse the very category of the human.⁷¹ The near-total absence of facially disfigured men in postcard culture, then, goes beyond being a matter of taste or sensitivity, providing an indication of what wartime society could and could not tolerate. As Biernoff puts it, these visual absences mark the ‘limit case’⁷² of First World War representation, and the point at which cultural negotiation gives way to symbolic collapse.

In this sense, the broader iconographical tropes of wartime imagery, from its smooth aestheticisation of injury to its theological glosses of resilience and sanctity, tells us less about the lived experience of war wounds than about the ideological boundaries of representability. The wounded soldier could be reabsorbed into the national fold only insofar as his injury could be made legible within the existing symbolic frameworks of sacrifice, redemption, productivity, and faith. Where wounds threatened to rupture those frameworks (whether by lingering too long, by marring the face, or by rendering masculinity ambiguous) they were erased. This selective visibility reveals the ideological work these images performed, constructing a moral and emotional architecture in which only certain kinds of suffering could be visually redeemed.

⁷⁰ Biernoff, 668–69.

⁷¹ Biernoff, 670.

⁷² Biernoff, 669.

To fully grasp the symbolic stakes of these visual strategies, one must turn to George Mosse's foundational concept of the 'Myth of the War Experience,' a conceptual framework that has shaped decades of scholarship on how modern societies rendered mass violence legible.⁷³ Mosse's thesis that the First World War amplified long-standing ideals of noble sacrifice into a redemptive narrative of heroic suffering offers a critical lens through which to read the visual culture of woundedness which has emerged throughout this chapter. As he points out, whilst this myth of noble bloodshed was certainly present already in the nineteenth century, it was amplified to a great deal by the events of the First World War, which saw the scale of death reach unprecedented levels - twice as many men perished in this conflict compared to major wars from 1790 to 1914.⁷⁴ Within this mythic logic, the emphasis of the soldier's devout heroism and dignified sacrifice allowed war time death and injury to become idealised as a higher calling and a hegemonically masculine duty. The uninjured wounded man, when understood in such terms, thus served both a literal and symbolic bridge; he is the very embodiment of the intersection between humanity and myth, mortality and divinity, and individual sacrifice and collective purpose. Through this framing, the concept of war moves beyond simple tolerability towards being something desirable, a realm wherein virtue, courage, and honour could be both tested and celebrated.

In Mosse's Myth of War Experience, though, something else jumps out: chronology. Mosse's work primarily considered how this myth came to exist as a reaction to the events of the war – a framework developed to make sense of the mass death and suffering after it had occurred. Yet here, we have seen examples of sources which could not simply reinforce a glorified memory of war, as even by 1918, no such retrospective memory of World War I as a singular event existed yet. Instead, and as has been emphasised, such objects took on a role as

⁷³ George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁷⁴ Mosse, 3.

mediators of cultural narrative, constructing a mythology of war which simultaneously shaped and reflected public perceptions in real time. In other words, they were not simply reactive, but responsive. In pre-emptively positing the conflict as a morally uplifting and purposeful endeavour, this mythology thus embedded a narrative of dignified sacrifice and heroic resilience into the cultural consciousness, even before the full horrors of modern, industrialised warfare could disrupt this idealised vision. This is what makes these sources quite so interesting: they allow us to move beyond a retrospective understanding of war, and towards a fundamentally aspirational narrative attempting to engage with how war (and those injured and killed throughout it) would be remembered and valorised as the conflict itself was still unfolding.

In tracing the (in)visibility of the wounded soldier across Austrian postcard culture, then, what ultimately emerges is not just a visual language of war, but a cultural blueprint for how injury could be absorbed into national myth. These images enacted social values, constructing a fantasy of woundedness that was ultimately containable. Yet crucially, this negotiation was never conducted in isolation. The wounded soldier was frequently relational, almost always being positioned in proximity to other soldiers, attending nurses, or blessed saints. If Chapter 1 has focused on how wounds were concealed and symbolically legible through visual strategies of minimisation, Chapter 2 turns to the relational architectures that sustained that legibility, exploring the constellation of characters who helped shape his meaning within the broader visual economy of care. It is through these gendered interactions that the wounded soldier gains contour, and it is there that the politics of representation shall continue to reveal themselves.

Chapter 2

*'Here love dwells, yes, and it unfolds, coupled with compassion and mercy,
The most beautiful blossoms here and reign in every form in these difficult times.
Not only are the doctors our dearest, but also friends in the truest sense of the word,
for their ever-understanding consolation often reaches our ears in a friendly manner.
The same applies to the nursing staff. They are all eyes and ears for every sorrow,
And kindness and friendliness unite everyone with an indestructible sense of humour...'*⁷⁵

These lines appeared on the first of December 1914 in the *Reichspost*, attributed to a convalescent soldier named Anton Bederngana. A Senior Huntsman (*Oberjäger*) from the Tyrolean *Kaiserjäger*,⁷⁶ Bederngana had been brought to Vienna 'severely injured' from the Eastern Front, but thanks to the Viennese medical intervention, he was eventually declared 'completely healed.'⁷⁷ During his recovery at the Steinhof hospital, he composed what the newspaper admiringly described as a 'hymn of thanks,' a gesture, it noted, 'one would not have expected from the simple soldier.'⁷⁸ The poem chronicles his passage through the city, from the Northern Railway Station to the military hospital at Am Steinhof, and finally into the arms (both figurative and literal) of a system of care that enfolded him in love and imperial solidarity.

But Bederngana's poem does much more than express simple gratitude. It offers a relational map of wartime healing, one in which the wounded soldier is never alone, but buffered by a network of bodies who transform his injury into something collectively witnessed.

⁷⁵ 'Poesie eines verwundeten Kriegers vom Verwundetenspitale Am Steinhof.', *Reichspost*, 1 December 1914, 47, urn:nbn:at:AT-WBR-33279, Wienbibliothek im Rathaus.

⁷⁶ The *k.u.k. Kaiserjäger* (officially the *k.u.k. (1.-4.) Tiroler Jäger-Regiment 'Kaiserjäger'*) were four infantry regiments of the Joint Army of Austria-Hungary. Although designated Tyrolean, recruitment drew from both the crown land of Tyrol (including Vorarlberg) and other parts of the monarchy.

⁷⁷ 'Poesie eines verwundeten Kriegers vom Verwundetenspitale Am Steinhof.', 47.

⁷⁸ 'Poesie eines verwundeten Kriegers vom Verwundetenspitale Am Steinhof.', 47.

This is the logic that animates the postcards explored in this chapter. Where Chapter 1 centred on how the wounded body was made visually coherent through symbolic tropes and the aesthetic containment of trauma, this chapter turns to the relational sphere, exploring how meaning emerges through the soldier's social placement among others.

It is not enough, however, to simply say that this chapter considers the visual relationships between bodies. We must ask exactly what kind of relationships these images propose, and what kind of gendered roles they perform. This chapter thus follows the work of historians such as Kathleen Canning, who have interrogated the conceptual slipperiness of the body in gender history and called for greater attention to the processes through which bodies are shaped, positioned, and made legible within historical discourse. In her reflection on the place of the body in historical method, Canning notes how bodies 'as signifiers, metaphors or allegorical emblems'⁷⁹ help illuminate wider structures of meaning such as nation, morality, welfare, and ideology. Furthermore, her emphasis of Elisabeth Grosz's argument that bodies must be read as relational surfaces where 'laws, morality, values, power are inscribed'⁸⁰ is particularly useful here, reminding us that bodies are never meaningful on their own: they derive intelligibility through positioning, through scripted contact with others, and through the social and symbolic networks that render them visible. Such ideas are especially relevant to wartime visual culture, where the wounded soldier's image gains clarity through his spatial and affective placement amongst other figures. This chapter thus reads gendered relationships as Canning suggests we read the body, as something 'shaped by the violent polarisations of

⁷⁹ Kathleen Canning, 'The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History', *Gender & History* 11, no. 3 (1999): 500, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.00159>.

⁸⁰ Canning, 500, citing Elisabeth Grosz, 'Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason', in *Space, Time, and Perversion*, ed. Grosz, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 33.

wartime, between people and state, class and nation, trenches and home front, women and men.’⁸¹

Attending to these spatial and symbolic logics also opens a methodological possibility to pace the sources according to the imagined journey of the wounded man himself: from the place of injury, where comrades become carriers, toward institutional care and domestic reintegration, culminating in his bodily restoration within the symbolic order of imperial loyalty. The journey begins, then, with *Der verwundete Kamerad* (‘The wounded comrade’), a 1915 postcard from the same joint Red Cross, War Welfare Office, and War Relief Office series previously examined. Here, however, the touch of the Holy Mother gives way to a new act of fraternal holding.

⁸¹ Canning, 509.



Figure 16: 'Der verwundete Kamerad.' (1915).⁸²

The image depicts three soldiers moving across a snow-covered hillside, their figures alone against a backdrop of winter trees and distant hills. One man, clearly wounded, is suspended between the other two, his legs lifted just clear of the ground by a makeshift sling fashioned from the stock of a rifle. It is a quiet moment, absent of battlefield or blood, reduced to the elemental fact of movement: two men helping another forward. The title draws our attention to the injured man, as does his central placement in the composition. Yet despite being framed as

⁸² Rotes Kreuz, Kriegsfürsorgeamt, Kriegshilfsbüro, *Der Verwundete Kamerad* (Original Title), *Kriegspostkarte No. 38* (Descriptive Title), 1915, Postcard, 14cm × 9cm, 1915, 39662/5, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/114150-der-verwundete-kamerad/>.

the image's textual and visual centre, his figure is not destabilised by overt trauma, with the simple white bandage he wears returning us once again to the familiar shorthand for injury encountered throughout Chapter 1. The men flanking him stand with ease, their postures suggesting that this supposed burden is not a burden at all. In this moment of carried care, no one appears weak. The composition works instead to mitigate difference, presenting woundedness as more of a momentary deviation from masculine strength than any form of exclusion. The wounded man does not appear diminished, and the men who carry him do not appear transformed. In fact, aside from his altered stance, the men are visually near-identical, ensuring that even when wounded, the three men remain legible as one singular martial unit. Together they sustain the illusion that nothing vital has changed, absorbing woundedness into a masculine collective and framing injury as something that is shared.

When coupled with its peaceful, snow-covered backdrop, *Der verwundete Kamerad* offers an almost idyllic vision of woundedness – one seemingly untouched by the brutalities of winter where, as Jason C. Engle notes, 'snowstorms often swallowed patrols whose compasses froze' and 'victims fell prey to 'der weiße Tod,'⁸³ hungry wolves, or in some cases, both, in that order.'⁸⁴ In this postcard, however, the image of snow is far removed from any such connotations of threat or attrition, instead being used to lend the scene a sense a calm in the face of injury. This aesthetic logic recurs throughout the visual corpus. The printing house C. Angerer & Göschl, for example, produced numerous snowy wartime scenes over the course of the conflict, whilst the reproduction technician Andreas Krampolek contributed to this visual vocabulary with cards such as *Am Wege zum Hilfsplatze* ("On the Way to the Aid Station").

⁸³ 'The White Death,' a nickname used by soldiers to describe the snow.

⁸⁴ Jason C. Engle, "'This Monstrous Front Will Devour Us All' The Austro-Hungarian Soldier Experience, 1914-15", in *1914*, ed. Günter Bischof, Ferdinand Karlhofer, and Samuel R. Williamson, vol. 23, Austria-Hungary, the Origins, and the First Year of World War I (University of New Orleans Press, 2014), 157, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1n2txft.10>.



Figure 17: 'Am Wege Zum Hilfsplatze!' (Original title, 1914/15).⁸⁵

Here, the wounded man no longer needs to be carried, walking upright alongside two companions who appear physically smaller than him. As in *Der verwundete Kamerad*, the snow here is quasi-paradoxical, lending the scene a sense of visual serenity whilst also framing the men's strength through their resistance to the effects of cold. In this way, the bond between body and landscape becomes equally as telling as the bond between men, with the environment

⁸⁵ Rotes Kreuz, Kriegsfürsorgeamt, Kriegshilfsbüro, Emil Ranzenhofer, and Andreas Krampolek, *Am Wege Zum Hilfsplatze* (Original Title), *Kriegspostkarte No. 102* (Descriptive Title), 1915, Postcard, 14.1cm × 9cm, 1915, 39763/10, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/116204-am-wege-zum-hilfsplatze/>.

able to frame resilience in much the same way as homosocial proximity can minimise vulnerability.

What is especially interesting here is that the spatial relationship between body and environment also evokes a homosocial dynamic, as the mountainous environment itself was constructed as masculine. As Julia Secklehner reminds us, the alpine landscape had long served in Austrian visual culture as a metaphor for national fortitude, especially in the stylised imagery of the late Habsburg period.⁸⁶ The playwright Hermann Bahr's 1899 claim that the Alps' rugged terrain preserved them as 'male, forceful, and thoroughly German'⁸⁷ had already cast these terrains as ideologically charged, and this postcard draws on that very tradition, reworking it into a wartime language of cohesion and resilience. The environment, then, must also be understood here as another structuring masculine body, one which confirms the soldier's place within a collective of strength and reflects it back in the stoic language of the landscape itself. *Am Wege zum Hilfsplatze* is doubtlessly worlds away from the Carpathian fronts of frostbite, disorientation, avalanches, and logistical collapse that Graydon Tunstall so vividly describes.⁸⁸ But of course, these postcards were never meant to depict war; they were meant to narrate it. In doing so, they substitute allegory for attrition, offering the home front a legible image of injury that is never chaotic, and always contained.

Still, not all postcards depicting scenes of fraternal care embraced such environmental quietude. *Halloh, Sanitätspatrouille, Hieher!* ('Hello, medical patrol, come here!') presents a near-identical configuration of a soldier bearing his wounded comrade toward medical intervention, but this time, the scene is transposed to the heat of battle.

⁸⁶ Julia Secklehner, 'A New Austrian Regionalism: Alfons Walde and Austrian Identity in Painting after 1918', *Austrian History Yearbook* 52 (May 2021): 217, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237821000072>.

⁸⁷ Secklehner, 213, citing Hermann Bahr, 'Die Entdeckung der Provinz (1899),' in *Hermann Bahr. Kritische Schriften*, ed. Claus Pias (Weimar, 2010), 147.

⁸⁸ Graydon A. Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow: The Carpathian Winter War of 1915* (University Press of Kansas, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvbqs59r>.



Figure 18: 'Halloh, Sanitätspatrouille, Hieher!' (1915).⁸⁹

The image is immediately striking. Shells flare in the sky, and bodies writhe or lie prone across a scorched, chaotic ground. The soldier at the image's centre is caught mid-step, clutching a wounded comrade in his arms as he strides toward unseen help. Yet despite this heightened atmosphere, beneath the surface of immediacy and action one may notice that the man being carried appears oddly composed, a visual rhetoric that should feel familiar by now.

⁸⁹ Jos. Roller & Co. and Alexander Pock, 'Halloh, Sanitätspatrouille, Hieher!' (Original Title), 1915, Postcard, 14.2cm x 9.2cm, 1915, 39842, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/128911-halloh-sanitaetspatrouille-hieher/>.

The signs here are more subtle, but their impact is powerful nonetheless; one hand rests in his lap, held in place against the forces of gravity that would be pulling it down, whilst a sabre dangles from his other, gripped purposefully, as though he might yet rise and rejoin the fray. We are left to wonder what his supposed injury is, too, with our biggest clue to his physical disarray perhaps being represented by the loss of his hat. If the terrain around him suggests chaos, his body's stability resists it, as does the image's core message.

Like in the previous card, woundedness here is carefully distanced from incapacity, framed instead as a state that may trouble but does not unmake masculine strength. In closing the physical proximity between them, the two male bodies begin to function as a single visual and symbolic unit, a kind of conjoined figure that blurs the boundary between strength and vulnerability. The uninjured soldier supplies motion and urgency, yet his facial expression suggests a heightened degree of emotional exposure, even panic. In contrast, the wounded man, though passive in posture, appears much more composed, whilst his sabre keeps him adjacent to battle. Together, they form a kind of yin and yang of wartime masculinity, each body compensating for what the other lacks. Woundedness here becomes framed and sustained by the proximity of health, just as health is given direction and purpose through its encounter with injury. In their fusion, they collapse the dichotomy between the broken and the whole, becoming one shared male body carrying itself through war.

That this image was produced to raise funds for the Widows' and Orphans' Relief Fund makes this all the more telling. Though tied to the realities of death, the postcard instead performs a masculinised form of survivability, offering an image of martial care so composed that loss itself seems temporarily suspended. Indeed, upon closer inspection one may notice there are other seemingly wounded figures in the scene, half-subsumed into the tangled background, reminding us that not all injuries qualified for narrative attention, with the image itself selecting which wounds to stage and which to blur according to their narrative utility. This

act of selection is privileges a particular kind of redeemable woundedness, whilst relegating other forms of suffering to the periphery. The central figures are granted symbolic clarity as their reward for stabilising this vision of war in which care flows between men in a strictly regimented choreography. In this arrangement, survivability becomes less about bodily integrity than about the capacity to enter into this visual contract of being seen and being composed within the war's masculine grammar of endurance.

Of course, whilst the motif of the wounded man borne across the battlefield by a healthy comrade certainly remains one of the most prevalent homosocial pairings in these sources, it was by no means the only way male bodies were staged in relation to one another. Off the battlefield, and away from the immediacy of combat, men also found a visual companion in their fellow wounded comrades. We find a particularly interesting example here in the form of a postcard titled *Deutsche, russische und ungarische Verwundete* ('German,⁹⁰ Russian and Hungarian Wounded'), produced between 1914 and 1915 as part of a series documenting scenes from the 'Austro-Hungarian war front and its hinterland.' Though photographic, the image is far from candid, straddling a position on the threshold somewhere between documentary and display.

⁹⁰ Here meaning German-Austrian soldiers, as is clear by their uniform.



Figure 19: 'Deutsche, russische und ungarische Verwundete.' (1914)⁹¹

It is, ostensibly, a captured image of genuinely wounded men, yet their composition is no less deliberate than that of painted or illustrated scenes. Indeed, what makes the image particularly revealing is how its structure invites the eye to read it spatially as a concentric arc of rehabilitation. At the visual centre lies the most incapacitated figure, barely visible beneath a heavy blanket, his eyes obscured by cotton. Radiating outwards from this point sit those in the transitional stages of recovery, one of whom leans back rather comfortably with a crutch tucked beneath his leg, as though it is something of an afterthought. Finally, on the outermost edge, two figures are stood upright, restored to health. The standing men thus lend their stature to the seated, and the seated, in turn, offer proximity and recognition to the supine.

⁹¹ *Deutsche, Russische Und Ungarische Verwundete. (Original Title)*, 1914, Postcard, 9cm × 14cm, 1914, 39751/1, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/115914-deutsche-russische-und-ungarische-verwundete/>.

These men have still been carefully posed, arranged under the photographer's direction into a tableau that conforms to the conventions of dignity and decorum. No amputations, no contorted limbs, no unruly evidence of war's brutality interrupts the neatness of the frame. Of course, we oughtn't to be surprised by this, as the commercial context remains ever-present. Though this image may well be more so grounded in real injury than previous cards we have seen, it ultimately still circulated as a wartime postcard, and was thus shaped by the same imperatives of palatability and symbolic clarity that govern more overtly artistic media.



Figure 20: 'Österreich.-Ungarische Verwundete' (1915).⁹²

It is telling that the visual choreography of this photographic postcard finds a mirror in illustrated sources of the same genre. One such example, titled *Österreich.-Ungarische Verwundete* ('Austro-Hungarian wounded'), presents three soldiers arranged around a wooden bench, two of whom seem engaged in easy conversation. To the right, a man with his arm bound

⁹² Rössler & Jonas and Mathilde von Sachsen, *Österreich.-Ungarische Verwundete* (Original Title), 1915, Postcard, 8.9cm x 14cm, 1915, 40060/1, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/104109-oesterreich-ungarische-verwundete/>.

in a sling; beside him, a man sporting the familiar Hussar jacket, whose bandaged hand now rests freely in his lap; behind them, a standing figure appears fully restored, unmarred by injury. The composition turns clockwise, with each figure marking a stage in the journey from damage to rehabilitation, embedding temporal progression into a spatial sequence of recuperation.

This directional flow is not only legible but neurologically intuitive. As studies in perceptual neuroscience have shown, humans overwhelmingly exhibit a bias toward clockwise spatial mapping, organising information, motion, and memory in this orientation as a matter of cognitive economy.⁹³ Rezaul Karim et al., for example, argue that ‘seeing and perceiving clockwise is perhaps the parsimonious and convenient way of understanding the surrounding for the majority of us.’⁹⁴ Whether deliberately composed or unconsciously patterned, the image speaks fluently in this visual language of rightward recovery. Through such framing, this card ultimately reads almost identically as a sketched twin to the photographic imagery of *Deutsche, russische und ungarische Verwundete*, with both images arranging male bodies in a reciprocal spatial relation, smoothing regional distinctions into a recuperative fraternity, and stabilising woundedness into a cohesive image of imperial resilience.

There is also the interesting matter of the image’s artist, the Archduchess Mathilde of Saxony, whose presence in the largely male-dominated visual sphere invites reflection on how women, too, shaped the cultural framing of woundedness. A German noblewoman trained in the arts, Mathilde was the sister-in-law of Archduke Otto Franz of Austria, the father of (the future) Emperor Charles I. This elite status offers a compelling vantage point on military representation, particularly in the light of John Deak’s observation that the monarchy’s role in army life was marked by a persistent tension between the Emperor’s symbolic authority and

⁹³ See: A. K. M. Rezaul Karim, Michael J. Proulx, and Lora T. Likova, ‘Anticlockwise or Clockwise? A Dynamic Perception-Action-Laterality Model for Directionality Bias in Visuospatial Functioning’, *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 68 (September 2016): 669–93, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2016.06.032>.

⁹⁴ Karim, Proulx, and Likova, 678.

the army's institutional structure.⁹⁵ In Mathilde's depiction, though, those tensions disappear, with the seated Hungarian and the sling-bound Austrian appearing as visual stand-ins for the Dual Monarchy itself, vividly blurring the lines between the body of the individual and the body of the state.

However, beyond this immediate proximity to the Austro-Hungarian monarchical sphere, her cultural relationship to the wounded male body was much more removed. Mathilde herself never married, bore no sons, and her brother, the King of Saxony, did not serve in combat; indeed, her closest serving family members were her three nephews stationed in general staff posts, who were kept largely protected and ultimately unscathed by war. What is interesting, then, is that despite this personal distance from war's physical consequences, there is a remarkable conventionality to her work. Like the male illustrators elsewhere in this corpus, Mathilde arranges woundedness into narrative legibility which stabilises masculine bodies through collective framing and relational positioning. Regardless of whether the image was commissioned or selected post hoc by publishers, her choice of visual grammar fits cleanly with countless other cards in this genre, suggesting a perceived commercial viability that crossed gendered lines both in terms of who created these images, and the audiences presumed to consume them. Indeed, that such a figure should produce so canonical an image of masculine recuperation and that this could then be repackaged for middle-class consumption speaks to the remarkable permeability of wartime aesthetics.

When taken together, the visual logic of *Deutsche, russische und ungarische Verwundete* and *Österreich.-Ungarische Verwundete* construct an imagined narrative of healing where woundedness is rendered comprehensible by its many gradations. In this schema, each man becomes intelligible through his neighbours, absorbed into a collective whose very

⁹⁵ John Deak and Jonathan E. Gumz, 'How to Break a State: The Habsburg Monarchy's Internal War, 1914–1918', *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 4 (2017): 1105–36.

structure works to assure us of his eventual return to health. Significantly, the male body here is relational not only in its dependence on others for care, but in how it draws legibility (such as its meaning or place) from its alignment with the surrounding bodies. This circular choreography ensures that even those most visibly injured remain included and legible within a shared visual space of masculine recovery, enacting a vision of resilience that draws its power directly from the way these bodies relate to one another.

Of course, it should come as little surprise that within this visual culture of relational wartime bodies, one of the most recurrent pairings is that of the wounded soldier and the attending nurse, that enduring gendered dyad that so often encapsulates the imagined moment of recovery. A fittingly titled example for beginning this investigation appears below in the postcard *Rotes Kreuz* ('Red Cross'), which was issued by the Central Viennese Landstraße branch of the Red Cross.



Figure 21: 'Rotes Kreuz' (1914-1918).⁹⁶

The image depicts a uniformed soldier seated calmly on a tree stump while a young Red Cross nurse, dressed in a modest habit reminiscent of a nun's robes, kneels before him to bandage his hand. The tableau is soft in tone and meticulously arranged, and the wound itself is entirely bloodless, more hinted at than shown, reduced to the symbolic gesture of the nurse's touch. Unlike the fraternal configurations seen in earlier postcards, which minimised difference

⁹⁶ Haufner & Lehmann, *Rotes Kreuz (Original Title)*, 1918 1914, Postcard, 14cm × 9cm, 1918 1914, 312694, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/2724647-kriegspostkarte-rotes-kreuz-offizielle-ansichtskarte-des-zweigvereines-landstrasse-nr-3/>.

to fold woundedness into a shared masculine continuum, this scene leans into visual contrast, asserting masculine stability through feminine grace. Where male companions carried one another in gestures of solidarity and sameness, here, strength is reaffirmed through difference. As the nurse tends, the soldier endures; as the woman kneels, the man remains seated.

The surrounding landscape echoes this shift. The snow we once saw has melted, giving way to rolling green fields. A cannon peeks from the background in a whispered reminder that this is still war, but the foreground is all springtime, with blooming flowers and a decorative floral frame enveloping the scene with gentle ornamentation. Just as the male body is flanked by the feminine, so too is the battlefield reimagined as a garden. His physical resilience is thus heightened by her softness, whilst his readiness to return to battle is made legible by her stillness and wholly domestic pose. More so than being carried or accompanied by a comrade, the wounded man here is briefly tended to by someone who is categorically unlike him, reinforcing strength through difference.

However, the clearest insight into how the female body frames male woundedness comes through the particular choreography of tending that feminine care assumes. The nurse, though present in a caregiving capacity, does not perform complex medical intervention, nor does she appear burdened by the emotional or physical tolls of war. No blood stains her uniform, nor does any sign of stress creep its way onto her pretty face. Are we truly to believe this is a woman dealing with the quotidian of wartime medical care?

Naturally, we are not the first to notice the nurse's visual role as being something more Madonna than medic. As Alison S. Fell notes, popular wartime imagery such as postcards relied on 'stylized poses and heavy symbolism,' with soldiers bearing 'neatly bandaged and aesthetically pleasing head wounds,' attended to by nurses in 'spotlessly clean flowing white

uniforms' who resembled 'classical or religious statues.'⁹⁷ In remaining untouched by war's realities, the nurse in these images become something of a simulacrum of the Home Front itself, a version of femininity which further heightens the gendered distance between herself and the visibly battle-ready soldier. He, by contrast to her, seems all the more aligned with the theatre of war, his uniform neat and backpack in place as though he has merely paused *en route*. This bearing implicitly invites comparison to a boy submitting to his mother's fretting over a scraped knee, as a gesture that allows her femininity to register whilst his own fortitude remains intact, framing the soldier's body through a version of care that never undermines his autonomy. Instead, this care, much like the wounds we have already discussed, remains essentially invisible, present only enough to allow its symbolic workings, and never so real as to destabilise the myth of masculine fortitude.

This idealised logic extends beyond the pictorial and into the textual frame of the postcard itself, which reads: 'Those who work for the Red Cross help heal wounds, alleviate suffering, and fight disease; they work for all of humanity and fulfil one of the most beautiful and noble patriotic duties. Therefore, become members of the Red Cross!' The language is genteel and sanitised, abstracted to a level of universality that is conspicuously devoid of any real detail. The card's caption, much like its image, participates in a symbolic translation of the gritty reality of nursing into a noble patriotic act, situating the nurse's labour within an emotional register of beauty and honour that, as Fell argued, 'could be aligned with a range of different understandings of what constituted virtuous and patriotic femininity in wartime.'⁹⁸ This, on turn, also grants the male body with a stable visual function able to ritualise the medical space, ennobling his pain through his proximity to divine, feminine purity.

⁹⁷ Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing', 270.

⁹⁸ Fell, 269.

Elsewhere in the corpus, the wounded male body is similarly shaped through the interplay of text and image, with female figures providing both a visual and narrative scaffold for rendering pain meaningful. A comparable aesthetic appears in *Offizielle Postkarte der Gesellschaft vom Roten Kreuze* ('Official postcard of the Red Cross Society'), which depicts the bedside scene of a hospitalised soldier, reclined back with his rosary partially visible around his neck, whilst a Red Cross nurse leans over him to apply a head bandage.



Figure 22: 'Offizielle Postkarte der Gesellschaft vom Roten Kreuze' (1914-1915).⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Kilophosphère (KL), *Offizielle Postkarte Der Gesellschaft Vom Roten Kreuze* (Original Title), 1915 1914, Postcard, 14cm × 9cm, 1915 1914, 39611, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/110476-kriegspostkarte-offizielle-postkarte-der-gesellschaft-vom-roten-kreuz-verwundeter-soldat-gepflegt-von-rot-kreuz-schwester/>.

As with the previous example, the nurse's uniform in this image is pristine, and the absence of visible urgency ensures that her presence remains symbolically restrained. Whilst the soldier gazes directly at the viewer, she remains wholly absorbed in him in a visual dynamic that enacts, with quiet intensity, what Maureen Healy describes as wartime labour cast as an 'act of love.'¹⁰⁰ In her words, 'all women, regardless of prior affiliation, were experts in nurturing and 'drying tears'; they possessed natural defences against the hate, vulgarity, and greed that mushroomed in wartime.'¹⁰¹ Beneath the image, a short verse intensifies this logic:

*'A white angel moves through the land,
A red cross adorns her robe of light,
And where death burns on bloodied fields,
And where he lurks beside my sickbed,
There too, to wrest his prey from him,
The angel with the red cross is to be found.'*

In evoking a bloodied image of death, the poem introduces an intensity that the image itself evades, only to sublimate it through the figure of the angelic nurse. This transformation of suffering into a kind of spiritual threat recasts nursing as a spiritual vocation, thereby erasing any suggestion of technical competence or training with the idea that this is simply an extension of feminine virtue. Such framing explicitly echoes Healy's observation that caregiving was imagined as an innate feminine quality, with the nurse's ability to heal appearing as something she embodies by virtue of her sex, not something she learns or earns.¹⁰² The male patient is thus ennobled by association, his suffering seeming worthy of divine attendance and his body

¹⁰⁰ Maureen Healy, 'Becoming Austrian: Women, the State, and Citizenship in World War I', *Central European History* 35, no. 1 (2002): 9, citing Christa Hämmerle, "'Zur Liebesarbeit sind wir hier, Soldatenstrümpfe stricken wir . . .': Zu Formen weiblicher Kriegsfürsorge im Ersten Weltkrieg' (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1996), 159.

¹⁰¹ Healy, 9, citing 'Frauen-Hilsaktion,' no. 11, *Der Bund: Zentralblatt des Bundes österreichischer Frauenvereine* 12, no. 9 (November 1917): 12–13.

¹⁰² Healy, 14.

rendered symbolically pure through her touch. Her presence also affirms his honour thanks to her implication as being something ultimately untouched by war's violence, a visual reminder for the viewer that beyond his fight for king and country, he also serves to protect the sanctified domestic order she embodies.

This spiritual framing of the nurse as a figure of moral purity and domestic sanctity is made all the clearer in the following photographic postcard showing Archduchess Maria Josefa aiding in the care of a wounded soldier in her palace, which had been converted into a military hospital.



Figure 23: 'Weltkrieg 1914. Ihre kais. Maria Josefa als Samariterin in ihrem Palais.' (1914).¹⁰³

(*'World War 1914. Her Imperial Highness Maria Josefa as a Samaritan in her palace.'*)

¹⁰³ Kilophot G.m.b.H., *Weltkrieg 1914: Ihre Kais. Hoheit Frau Erzherz. Maria Josefa Als Samariterin in Ihrem Palais*, 1914, Postcard, 9cm × 14cm, 1914, 101684109, National Library of Medicine Digital Collections, <http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/101684109>.

If one were to ignore the caption, then the scene may well appear to offer nothing more than another instance of a nurse symbolically applying a bandage to a soldier's head, whilst another, similarly dressed in Red Cross uniform, assists her. Indeed, what is quite remarkable here is the complete lack of visual throughfare. There is no visual clue to the Archduchess's status, no courtly framing or imperial insignia; in terms of her framing, she appears as no more important than any other nurse.

Of course, this indistinguishability is entirely the point. In the visual economy of wartime care, the nurse no longer appears as an individual woman but as the embodiment of a semi-deified position that occupied the same conceptual space as angels.¹⁰⁴ The nurse's uniform, in this framework, comes to stand for a moral vocation so culturally exalted that even the noblesse were vessels for its performance. Such an image crystallises the nurse's status as a consecrated figure, with her presence shaping the wounded body as something morally good through its proximity to those saintly women in white who minister to it.

One can also note that the image directly mirrors the visual choreography seen in *Offizielle Postkarte der Gesellschaft vom Roten Kreuze*, with the wounded man once again meeting the camera's gaze directly, composed and self-aware, whilst the women beside him remain absorbed in their labour. Quite ironically, for a scene featuring an Archduchess, it is the man who appears sovereign within the frame, his strength underscored by the quiet devotion of the women around him. Together, these compositional elements reiterate the gendered script that defines care as feminine action in service of masculine fortitude, reinforcing the domestic ideal that runs throughout these visual narratives.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing', 269.

¹⁰⁵ Healy, 'Becoming Austrian', 24.

Yet few postcards offer as visually direct an example of how the wounded male body could be framed through the domesticity of the nurse as *Raucher, gedenket durch eine Spende der verwundeten Soldaten!* ('Smokers, remember the wounded soldiers with a donation!'). Drawn by Hermann Torggler, a war artist active in the Imperial and Royal War Press Headquarters, the card was part of a *Kriegsfürsorge* ('War Welfare') appeal calling upon to smokers to donate in support of wounded soldiers.



Figure 24: 'Raucher, gedenket durch eine Spende der verwundeten Soldaten!' (1914-1915).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Hermann Torggler, *Raucher, Gedenket Durch Eine Spende Der Verwundeten Soldaten!* (Original Title) *Offizielle Karte Zugunsten Der Kriegsfürsorge*, No. 23 (Descriptive Title), 1915 1914, Postcard, 14cm × 9cm, 1915 1914, 39710/1, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/115099-raucher-gedenket-durch-eine-spende-der-verwundeten-soldaten/>.

Here, we see a soldier stood on crutches with one leg bandaged, though the placement of the crutch in front of the injured foot, rather than in a stabilising position behind, suggests he needs little actual support. In keeping with the card's overarching purpose, the man is pictured smoking a cigarette which the nurse lights for him in a moment of calm companionship between the two. What unfolds is a visibly domestic scene, reminiscent of a husband and wife, in which the act of lighting a cigarette becomes the full extent of the woman's nursing role. Medically superfluous, she reinforces the soldier's resilience through her decorative presence, offering affirmation where care is unnecessary.

This form of aesthetic idealisation, encapsulated across all three of these images, sits at the heart of Fell's broader argument that the 'rose-tinted images of nursing in war-time propaganda' often betrayed the realities that 'for many women the experience of nursing often challenged rather than confirmed their beliefs and identities.'¹⁰⁷ Indeed, this logic that cast the nurse as an unsullied, white-robed guardian sits in sharp tension with the actual experiences of Austro-Hungarian war nurses documented by historians like Christa Hämmerle in her work on the testimonies of Austro-Hungarian nurses like Marianne Jarka and Maria Pöll-Naepflin.¹⁰⁸ Worn down by exhaustion and trauma, these women encountered the brutal realities of modern warfare on a daily basis, from grotesque injuries to psychological collapse, leading some to develop a dependence on morphine.¹⁰⁹ Such images haunted their memories long after the war had passed. Jarka, for example, opened her memoir with reference to the 'torn bodies' that would 'haunt [her] until [her] last breath,'¹¹⁰ whilst Pöll-Naepflin's described herself in a 1916 diary entry as returning to Vienna from her nursing post as "mentally broken, physically a wreck."¹¹¹ Within this violent proximity, the nurse's role simply could not be purely symbolic

¹⁰⁷ Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing', 272.

¹⁰⁸ Hämmerle, "Mentally Broken, Physically a Wreck...".

¹⁰⁹ Hämmerle, 98.

¹¹⁰ Hämmerle, 89.

¹¹¹ Hämmerle, 98.

or emotionally detached, demanding a great deal of strength and often a resignation to scenes that obliterated the stoic ideals still projected onto wounded men. If the very act of care threatened the gendered script that sought to preserve male heroism and female softness, it is no wonder that postcards opted for staging femininity as a visual balm rather than recording its true, destabilising agency.

Though perhaps a seemingly tangential divergence from the wounded male body itself, this focus on the figure of the nurse offers an essential lens through which to understand two significant facets of wartime suffering's broader visual culture. First, whilst our own emphasis lies on representations of wounded soldiers, they are far from the only figures filtered through allegory. To treat the nurse as little more than a passive backdrop to the soldier's symbolic journey is to miss how her own image is likewise sculpted and repurposed, and how her real experiences could be displaced in favour of a sanitised ideal of narrative cohesion. We see this clearly in Fell's observation that 'idealized representations of women at war drew on familiar tropes of femininity... adapted for the particular circumstances of 'total war'',¹¹² a process through which even real women's labour was reconstituted into cultural shorthand for national virtue. Just as the wounded man is stylised into a symbol of masculine resilience, then, so too is the nurse transformed into a visual embodiment of caregiving femininity. In this way, it is crucial we remember that all figures within the wartime visual lexicon were shaped by the same imperative to render experience as something both legible and emotionally consumable.

What's more, this shift in focus reminds us of the need to resist reading postcards as a single-issue medium. Anxieties over gender, injury, care, and national strength bleed across representational boundaries, often surfacing simultaneously within the same scene. There is no tidy separation between visual cultures of masculinity, of religiosity, of nationalism, because

¹¹² Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing', 269.

these are forms of cultural anxieties that naturally overlap and define one another. It would be a mistake to imagine discrete spaces for each cultural concern, as though one postcard captured fears of woundedness, another explored spiritual redemption, and another reflected the strain of shifting gender roles. These anxieties exist concurrently, collapsing the symbolic field into a single visual economy wherein allegories bleed into one another. The wounded body invites reflection on gender; representations of gender evoke concern for national strength; strength, in turn, echoes back to the body, in a singular, entangled network. This is precisely why an intersectional lens is essential as a practical methodology for decoding how wartime imagery functioned, as although focusing closely on one figure (in this case, the wounded soldier) permits a sharper understanding of the broader cultural machinery in which he is embedded, it is only through his intersecting narratives that he can truly come to exist.

This allegorical logic also helps us to make sense of another notable corporeal absence in the wartime postcard industry; namely, that of doctors. Throughout these images, one notices that the very figures most associated with active healing are conspicuously rare, with care instead being rendered primarily through the emotionalised labour of nurses or the physical support of comrades. With few exceptions, the visual material surveyed for this study finds doctors appearing regularly in only two specific settings. The first of these occurs in posed group photographs of entire hospital staffs, such as in the example seen below. These images present the hospital as an institutional whole, with doctors, nurses, and patients arranged in orderly rows, often before a recognisable facade or in the hospital wing itself. Crucially, though, such scenes still do not present doctors as active agents of healing in the act of administering care. In these compositions, the doctor represents a form of professional oversight, contributing to an image of medical orderliness without breaching the gendered visual codes that otherwise prioritise either feminine devotion or masculine fraternity.



Figure 25: [Vereins-Reservespital Nr. 2 Der Österreichischen Gesellschaft Vom Roten Kreuz]
(1914-1917).¹¹³

(‘Association Reserve Hospital No. 2 of the Austrian Red Cross Society’)

The second context in which doctors surface (albeit again in a secondary role) is in a context of postcards depicting Emperor Franz Joseph visiting wounded soldiers in military hospitals. Below, two examples of such cards can be found: *Unser Kaiser bei den Verwundeten im Augartenpalais am 19. September 1914* (‘Our Emperor with the wounded in the Augarten Palace on 19 September 1914’) and *Besuch des Kaiser Franz Josef bei den verwundeten Soldaten* (‘Emperor Franz Joseph visits the wounded soldiers’), a colourised postcard based on an original by Emil Ranzenhofer.

¹¹³ *Vereins-Reservespital Nr. 2 Der Österreichischen Gesellschaft Vom Roten Kreuz, Filialspital Im Gebäude Der Gartenbaugesellschaft (Krankensaal)* (Descriptive Title), 1917 1914, Postcard, 12.9cm × 17.9cm, 1917 1914, 41961/2, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/28065-vereins-reservespital-nr-2-der-oesterreichischen-gesellschaft-vom-roten-kreuz-filialspital-im-gebaeude-der-gartenbaugesellschaft-krankensaal/>.



Figure 26: 'Unser Kaiser bei den Verwundeten im Augartenpalais am 19. September 1914.'

(1914-1915).¹¹⁴



Figure 27: 'Besuch des Kaiser Franz Josef bei den verwundeten Soldaten.' (1914-1915).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Hans Hausner (H. H. i. W.), *Unser Kaiser Bei Den Verwundeten Im Augartenpalais Am 19. September 1914.* (Original Title), 1915 1914, Postcard, 9cm × 14cm, 1915 1914, 312643, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/2722621-kriegspostkarte-unser-kaiser-bei-den-verwundeten-im-augartenpalais-am-19-september-1914/>.

¹¹⁵ Brüder Kohn KG (B. K. W. I.) and Emil Ranzenhofer, *Besuch Des Kaiser Franz Josef Bei Den Verwundeten Soldaten.* (Original Title), 1915 1914, Postcard, 9cm × 14cm, 1915 1914, 39650, Wien Museum Online

Yet much in the same way, the doctors here act as markers of institutional legitimacy, whose inclusion affirms the hospital's reputability by lending it the formal weight expected of an imperial site. In a caregiver setting that may otherwise become saturated with an allegorical femininity where the nurse's authority stems from moral virtue rather than learned competence, the doctor's uniform introduces a register of bureaucratic and medical authority that secures the institutional propriety of the space. Thus, though they do not frame the wounded body through intervention, they do implicitly frame it by upholding the setting in which that body can be honourably seen.

Ultimately, however, the true focal point of these images is not the relationship between the wounded and the medical staff, but between the wounded and the Emperor himself, whose presence frames the male body in a distinctively sovereign register. Both postcards depict the same essential scene of Emperor Franz Joseph visiting a group of injured soldiers in a hospital ward. Whilst those around him are all clothed in standard medical or military uniforms, the Emperor himself is dressed in his Austrian-style ceremonial wear. In the second image, this distinction is made especially clear by the use of colour, which reveals his double-breasted blue tunic with gold and red piping, adorned with his medals and sword.

A careful visual balancing is thus struck within these images maintain between sovereign and subject. On the one hand, the Emperor is undoubtedly focalised through both his central location within the composition, and the fact that all eyes are directed towards him. Yet simultaneously, the artists in both cases have taken care not to make the Emperor overwhelm the image. In the first image, his body is partially obscured as he turns toward the soldier, whilst in the second, he leans down gently, his hand resting on the shoulder of a wounded man in a gesture of compassion for his subject. The lack of diversity in military dress (with all men in

Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/114006-besuch-des-kaiser-franz-josef-bei-den-verwundeten-soldaten/>.

Austrian uniform) suggests the focus is not on an abstract representation of the empire but on the personal, intimate relationship between ruler and soldier, inviting the viewer to imagine their own loved ones in the scene, under the direct protection of the Emperor.¹¹⁶

There is also the more ambiguous question of how to categorise the gendered dynamics at play in these images. Unlike the nurse, whose femininity structures her role as caregiver, or the comrade, whose masculinity reinforces a fraternal bond, the Emperor occupies a space that resists clear definition. His gestures echo the gentleness of nursing, his touch both sanctifying and offering solace, yet his symbolic position remains elevated as something imperial, not intimate. He is not a brother, nor quite a father in the traditional sense; ‘father of the nation,’ perhaps, but this too is a position that hovers above domestic and martial roles alike. What’s more, as Ursula E. Koch reminds us, this was the ‘golden age’ of female personifications of the nation across Europe, with Austria also frequently cast as a feminine allegory.¹¹⁷ So what, then, is Franz Joseph to her? Spouse, guardian, heir? If he is Austria incarnate, we are left to wonder what this implies for his own gendered role. These questions remain open, but what becomes clear is how his presence reframes woundedness as an occasion for imperial encounter. The damaged male body is elevated by the sovereign gaze and sanctified by his proximity. In this ritualised encounter, care is a gesture of the wounded man’s allegiance, and healing a process overseen by monarchy. In turn, the soldier’s suffering is recontextualised, his woundedness eclipsed by this brilliant spectacle of imperial recognition.

What becomes especially striking at this stage is that despite the differences in visual strategy (from the homosocial solidarity of comrades to the tender domesticity of nurses and

¹¹⁶ Notably, this image of Franz Joseph draws on a much older visual tradition. A near-identical scene can be found, for example, in a copperplate engraving from 1849 (during the Italian campaign), affirming the broader continuity at work and reinforcing how long-established tropes of sovereign care were reactivated during the First World War to reframe the wounded male body within an enduring dynastic order. See Appendix 1.

¹¹⁷ Ursula Koch, ‘Female Allegories of the Nation’, *Encyclopédie d’histoire numérique de l’Europe* [online], 26 May 2025, <https://ehne.fr/en/node/12185>.

the regal affirmation of the Emperor) the narrative motion remains relatively consistent. In all cases, the wounded male body is framed and fortified by proximity to an ‘othered’ figure, whose presence serves to reaffirm his strength. Whether that figure is another man or a woman, the surrounding body functions as a stabilising device, a visual support structure that renders injury legible without undermining resilience. This raises a compelling question: if both male and female bodies are recruited to uphold the same symbolic function, are they serving fundamentally different representational purposes? Does gender matter, or does it recede beneath the shared goal of reinforcing masculine coherence?

The answer, inevitably, is ambivalent. Gender clearly shapes the way these bodies are staged; where homosocial scenes evoke comradeship and continuity, feminine figures invite associations of the domestic. Yet at a more abstracted level, both become tools of visual containment, positioned around the wounded figure as allegorical supports that scaffold a vision of intact masculinity. This is not to suggest that these bodies are gender-neutral; on the contrary, we have seen exactly how they are steeped in visual codes of masculinity or femininity. However, it seems their gendered presence often matters less in terms of subjectivity than in how effectively it can stabilise the wounded man.

One cannot help but wonder whether the absence of doctors overall stems from the fact that the act of being medically ministered to by another man was perhaps too destabilising a vision to circulate. After all, to receive institutional aid from a male figure might imply a reversal of the expected power dynamic, positioning the wounded soldier as subordinate within the very space where his fortitude was meant to be reaffirmed. Instead, the nurse’s gentle attentiveness is recast as devotional rather than clinical, and the fellow soldier’s aid is framed as an extension of shared endurance rather than dependence. In both cases, the wounded man does not appear to receive care so much as command it, ensuring that even in vulnerability, he remains the gravitational centre of the scene.

Conclusion

Reflecting on his visit to Vienna's Rothschildspital in October 1914, the Austrian author Arthur Schnitzler wrote in his diary of two wounded men he had observed on the operating table: 'Watched Otto Zuckerkandl operating; on two wounded men; a terrible wound to the jaw; then a bullet in the pelvis; - who almost bled to death; [...] Here is the essence of the war. Everything else could be thought away - diplomacy - world history - fame - enthusiasm - even death. Only suffering is the essence. And I see the millionth part of a millionth.'¹¹⁸ His words lay bare the uncomfortable truth haunting this work. Behind every grand narrative of war lay a body, wounded and in pain, irreducible to rhetoric or myth.

This thesis has investigated how such wounded bodies were visually constructed in Viennese postcards during the First World War. Yet Schnitzler's observation captures the crux underpinning these sources. These postcards did not aim to depict injury as it was lived. Instead, they served to make it culturally legible, acting as representational spaces in which the 'abnormal' body of the wounded soldier could be worked out, as it were, into something more stable. Thus, it is not so much that these sources haphazardly gloss over the realities of injury, as it is that the figure they depict was not meant to be read as a literal representation. Instead, he emerges as an ideologically flexible allegorical figure, one whose meaning lies in what he can be made to signify, with the invisibility of his wounds being a feature of his very design. What proves most striking then is that for all their tonal and intentional divergences, these sources ultimately converge in their portrayal of a single archetypal figure.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Ballhausen and Günter Krenn, '»Eleganzen und Eitelkeiten, und draußen der Krieg«. Arthur Schnitzler und die propagandistisch überformte Medienlandschaft während des Ersten Weltkriegs' 33, no. 1 (1 September 2008): 191, <https://doi.org/10.1515/iasl.2008.009>.

By reading these images as artefacts of real-time mediation rather than retrospective memorialisation, the thesis has argued that the postcard functioned as a site where visual culture negotiated the unprecedented bodily ruptures of mechanised war through deeply conventional visual codes. Indeed, this is the very paradox at the heart of this visual corpus. On the one hand, the First World War represented a moment of profound bodily rupture, where mechanised conflict unleashed injuries on a scale and with a brutality that defied earlier norms of wounding and care regimes. Yet on the other hand, the visual strategies used to represent these injuries remained deeply rooted in older, familiar aesthetic and cultural forms. Christocentric pathos, Marian compassion, chivalric stoicism; these well-worn tropes were hardly new visual idioms. The unfamiliar was, in other words, processed through the familiar and repurposed to contain the trauma of the new.

The result is neither a clean break from the past, nor a seamless continuation of it, but a jagged continuity; a cultural negotiation in which rupture was refracted through tradition, and crisis was made legible by dressing it in the garments of precedent. These postcards, then, reveal to us how the impact of modern warfare was metabolised through continuity, and how the shock of modern injury was made culturally comprehensible by staging it within the visual logics of tradition. It was there, in those murky waters of modernity, that these postcards constructed a symbolic iconography of masculinity, with the injured soldier emerging like Venus as the paradoxical ‘unwounded wounded’ archetype.

This argument has unfolded across two core chapters. Chapter 1 explored the (in)visibility of injury, showing how postcards avoided graphic depictions of trauma in favour of symbolic containment, with wounds being stylised through bandages, allegory, and theological iconography to render pain spiritually redemptive. Chapter 2, meanwhile, shifted focus to relational framing, analysing how woundedness was mediated through proximity to the framing bodies of other men and women. These images upheld stoic masculinity and

patriotic virtue by embedding the wounded body within emotionally legible networks of support.

Across both chapters, what emerges is a consistent symbolic logic, whereby injury becomes visible only when it is narratively managed and ideologically palatable, whilst pain is displaced into forms of sacrifice and patriotic service. From comic illustrations to solemn religious prints, the same visual vocabulary recurs, cutting across official and commercial divides. These repetitions underscore how visual culture worked to re-contain the bodily instability of war within familiar symbolic frameworks. Ultimately, the wounded body becomes a cultural site of negotiation, with the soldier's body standing in for the fractured body politic. He is both individual and emblem, caught between private pain and public narrative. He stood at the crossroads of corporeal definitions, falling somewhere between the individual body and that of the nation, and it was through him that Vienna (and perhaps the Monarchy proper) sought to visualise coherence in this moment of crisis, no matter how fictionalised that coherence may have been.

Of course, the arguments presented here are shaped as much by the constraints of the source base as by its richness. As emphasised at the beginning of the work, most of the postcards consulted were preserved in institutional archives as unsent commercial stock or private collections later donated. As such, they do not typically capture the interpersonal dynamics of exchange, namely the written messages and interpretive responses of their audience. Yet even in their uncirculated form, these cards remain profoundly revealing. Their very production presupposed a viewer, and their design decisions were guided by assumptions about what would prove either legible or consoling to a wartime public. They thus allow us to glean the broader mechanisms at work behind how woundedness was imagined and commodified during the war. Given that the opportunity for a closer study of annotated postcards fell beyond the scope of the present study, one only hopes to invite further work that bridges representational analysis

with reception history to trace how these artefacts moved through social worlds. Likewise, while the decision to focus on Vienna has offered a coherent institutional and cultural framework, a more sustained focus from on rural perspectives or alternative urban hubs such as Prague or Budapest would undoubtedly offer a valuable avenue for future research, particularly in tracing how regional identities interacted with, or diverged from, these visual rhetorics of injury and endurance at play in Austria's capital.

This work posits many additional further questions. One such example concerns the potential for applying a synchronic, wartime-focused methodology to other forms of ephemeral media. What might hospital theatre programmes or wartime sermons reveal, for example, if read in the same way as artefacts of immediate cultural negotiation? How did such sources mediate suffering through performance, ritual, or narrative? These questions also extend beyond the wounded male soldier. If we were to turn this approach outward, how might it refocus our understanding of war nurses or women on the home front beyond their roles as ancillary figures in postwar narratives, towards one rooted in their active participation in the emotional and symbolic labour of war? At a time when historical scholarship increasingly seeks to recover marginalised voices and read against the grain of institutional archives, attending to temporality as a method, and treating sources as situated in flux, rather than hindsight, may offer new pathways for understanding how meaning was made, resisted, or refracted in the present tense of crisis.

Another productive avenue for further study concerns how visual media operated within the multilingual conditions of the Habsburg Empire. Tamara Scheer, for example, has shown that the monarchy's military and bureaucratic systems relied on a shifting mosaic of linguistic accommodations, with language functioning as a fluid tool negotiated between speakers of

German, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, and other tongues.¹¹⁹ In such an environment, the visual offered an alternative communicative mode, one less encumbered by the inconsistencies and exclusions of written language. Indeed, the postcard's pictorial immediacy may have allowed it to function as a kind of symbolic lingua franca, particularly well-suited to navigating the empire's internal heterogeneity. Just as electroshock therapy gained prominence in Austrian psychiatric practice due to the impracticality of verbal therapies in multilingual army units, so too might we ask how the non-verbal legibility of postcards met a similar communicative need.¹²⁰ Future research might explore to what extent publishers designed imagery with diverse publics in mind, or how different regions and linguistic audiences received the various iconographies we have discussed. Such questions invite a deeper theorisation of how visual culture both responded to and was shaped by the Monarchy's polyglot social fabric.

What remains perhaps the most visibly unrepresented in this corpus is psychological injury, a trend which tracks across much of public wartime visual culture. Whilst injuries to the flesh are consistently aestheticised, there is little trace of psychic trauma, an absence which no doubt speaks to the deeper discomforts around mental vulnerability and its visual legibility. Julia Köhne's work on scientific films of 'war hysterics' reveals just how fraught and gendered the visual staging of psychic trauma became, particularly as physicians employed cinematographic strategies of both feminisation and re-masculinisation to regulate the wounded male psyche.¹²¹ These films, whilst ostensibly medical, functioned much in the same way as the postcards we have discussed, serving as cultural scripts that both produced and controlled

¹¹⁹ Tamara Scheer, 'Die Sprachenvielfalt in Der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Armee Während Des Ersten Weltkriegs: Mobilisierung Und Kriegserfahrung', in *Mehrsprachigkeit in Imperien / Multilingualism in Empires*, ed. Marijan Bobinac, Wolfgang Müller-Funk, and Jelena Spreicer (Zagreb: Leykam International, n.d.), 240.

¹²⁰ For more on Austria-Hungary's approaches to military medicine in the face of multilingual armies, see: Helmut Konrad, ed., 'Krieg, Medizin Und Politik. Der Erste Weltkrieg Und Die Österreichische Moderne.', *Studien Zur Moderne*. 11 (Wien: Passagen-Verl., 2000).

¹²¹ Julia Barbara Köhne, 'Visualizing 'War Hysterics': Strategies of Feminization and Re-Masculinization in Scientific Cinematography, 1916–1918', in *Gender and the First World War*, ed. Christa Hämmerle, Oswald Überegger, and Birgitta Bader Zaar (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 72–88, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137302205_5.

the spectacle of psychological breakdown. Such institutional visualities still remain largely unexplored in the Austro-Hungarian context. Further research might therefore explore how psychiatric trauma was visualised in private, experimental settings in the Dual Monarchy, or whether its invisibility within public visual culture points to a broader epistemic refusal to acknowledge wounds that defied redemptive representation.

Thinking in more contemporary terms, one might ask what this visual archive reveals about the politics of representing pain in the present. In an era where injury circulates in aestheticised digital forms, whether that be stylised photojournalism or TikTok testimonials, the emotional economies surrounding the wounded body remain equally potent today as they were one hundred years ago. Much like their postcard predecessors, the images we see being produced around us often serve less to expose suffering than to contain it within affective scripts of resilience and national coherence. How might we understand heroic portrayals of veterans on social media or curated depictions of wartime trauma in global news cycles as a continuation of this treatment of the wounded body as a symbolic medium? How do we, in our own lives, engage with curated images of injury as a means to soothe collective anxieties or narratively manage mass violence? The historical case of Viennese postcards, in this framework, may also offer a critical framework for interrogating how pain is filtered and consumed in the digital age.

In all cases, one hopes that this study may contribute to the growing scholarly effort to recover the First World War in Austria-Hungary from beneath the sediment of post-1918 teleologies. Too often, Austria's wartime experience is framed primarily through its origins or aftermath with it either being the spark that ignited the conflict or the collapse that ensued that captures the most immediate scholarly attention. By placing Vienna's postcard culture at the centre of analysis, this thesis has thus worked to re-assert the interpretive value of the war as it was lived and seen. The wounded soldier who populates these images is certainly a curated

figure onto whom Austria projected coherence, yet this does not mean we cannot see him as anything more than a premonition of decline.

Quite fittingly, in his complexity, we may say he mirrors Austria-Hungary itself. He is a body imagined in crisis, yet rendered coherent; retrospectively thought of as fractured, yet visually made legible through aesthetic order. Somewhere between movement and stasis, he offered multiple publics a symbol that was surprisingly adaptable, despite the many constraints that governed his form. In that fragile, bandaged coherence, we cast a light upon the shadow of collapse, illuminating the symbolic labour of a culture striving to make injury intelligible amid uncertainty.

If later generations came to imagine Austria-Hungary as already disintegrating, ‘shattered on the primordial ground of the worlds,’¹²² as Josef Roth’s own Franz Joseph reflects, then this thesis has shown that the wartime visual culture of Vienna tells another story. What we find in these postcards is quite different to Roth’s clear-eyed foresight that ‘the great golden sun of the Habsburgs [was] setting [...] disintegrating into several small solar spheres,’¹²³ but a veritable effort to render meaning amid disorder and to realise symbols that gestured toward continuity. These were images that composed the story much more than they ever anticipated its ending.

Perhaps, then, that is where Austria was. Not in the bureaucracies or the battlefields, nor even in the figure of the Emperor alone, but in the quiet choreography of symbolic life. ‘Every Sunday, Mr Nechwal’s band played the Radetzky March. Once a week, on Sunday, there was Austria.’¹²⁴

¹²² Joseph Roth, *Radetzkyarsch* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1950), 284.

¹²³ Roth, 284.

¹²⁴ Roth, 377.

Appendix 1



Figure 28: 'Kaiser Franz Josef I. besucht das Krankenlager seiner Tapferen verwundeten Krieger.'

(1849).¹²⁵

('Emperor Franz Josef I visits the sickbed of his brave wounded warriors.')

¹²⁵ Mathias Mossbeck and Andreas Krampolek, *Kaiser Franz Josef I. Besucht Das Krankenlager Seiner Tapferen Verwundeten Krieger*. (Original Title), 1849, Copperplate Engraving, 20.7cm × 23.9cm, 1849, 55515, Wien Museum Online Sammlung, <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/3502-kaiser-franz-josef-i-besucht-das-krankenlager-seiner-tapferen-verwundeten-krieger-im-italienfeldzug-1849/>.

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