‘Next to godliness?’. Exploring *cleanliness* in Peace and War

Abstract

In the history of English, the early moral centring of *cleanliness* is conventionally depicted as having been eroded. This paper aims instead to explore its continued moral dynamism, using language as prime resource. Examining the complex semantic trajectories of *cleanliness* from Middle English onwards, it documents its shifting status in a number of disparate registers, including chastity, domestic virtue, and health, alongside the forms of moral expression these reveal. The conventionalised alliance of *cleanliness* with *godliness* forms part of this process of critical re-evaluation. The salience of cleanliness as moral device comes to the fore in a detailed study of language practice in the First World War. Across a range of discourse types, cleanliness is shown to retain potent moral and ideological force, not least in constructing both nationhood and enemy in a time of war.

Keywords: Cleanliness, language change, WW1, Oxford English Dictionary, disgust, John Wesley

The proximity of ‘cleanliness’ to ‘godliness’ is a commonplace of modern English usage. It can appear in encouraging better cycling habits (‘Cleanliness is next to godliness…never has that been more true than when it comes to your bike’) or in advising on Scandinavian style (‘Banish that carpet. The mantra “cleanliness is next to godliness” is essential’). Comparable uses are easily located in domains such as business and beauty. ‘Remember cleanliness is next to godliness’, readers of *The Times* were exhorted in 2013: ‘It’s a dirty fight but the giants of India’s $3 billion soap market have found a new battleground in which to promote

their brands'. '"Cleanliness is next to godliness" is no longer merely an ideal, it's a lifestyle', the *Sunday Times* declared one year later, if to somewhat different ends.[1]

This pervasiveness comes at a cost. As with other formulaic or set expressions, the syntagmatic predictability by which *cleanliness* is followed by *godliness* can seem a meaningless reflex rather than a form of considered moral evaluation. 'Where thought should be provoked, there is repetition, the confirmation of the mundane', as Fountain, echoing Partridge, contends with reference to conventionalised utterances of this kind.[2] Often attributed to a sermon given by the Methodist preacher John Wesley in December 1786 (though a range of earlier precedents – including use by Wesley himself -- can, in fact, be found),[3] the stated affiliation of cleanliness and godliness has become a cliché – a stereotyped adage or well-worn platitude that, in its construction of virtue, is less rather than more than the sum of its parts. *Godliness*, as in the examples above, is semantically bleached, functioning as a wholly secular affirmation that is, on a range of levels, strikingly remote from its core definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*)): 'The quality of being godly; devout observance of the law of God; piety'.[4] *Cleanliness*, by the same token, is apparently reduced to the state of being clean or free from visible dirt – a social good, perhaps, but one which arguably lacks moral force.

Iteration – a fundamental feature of idioms of this kind – nevertheless yields interesting problems when seen from a linguistic standpoint. The consonance between Wesley's 1786 statement on godliness and cleanliness and its diverse appropriation in 21st-century news discourse is, in this respect, more apparent than real. In each, *cleanliness* as lexeme indeed assumes the same formal identity. Yet – given a gap of some two hundred years – what it 'means' is, of necessity, very different. The same mutability marks the wider narrative history of *cleanliness*. Cleanliness, as Katherine Ashenburg states, is, in reality, 'a

[1] See, respectively, Graham Hutson. 'One squirt away from a happy, shiny bike', *The Times*, 1 August 2014; Signe Johansen, 'Give us a hygge', *The Sunday Times*, 2 October 2016; Robin Pagnamenta, 'Remember cleanliness is next to godliness,' *The Times*, 7 March 2013; Edwina Ings-Chambers, 'Cleaning up. Still using shampoo and face wash? Time to turbocharge your beauty regime', *The Sunday Times*, 17 August 2014.

[2] Nigel Fountain, *Avoid Them Like the Plague: A Book of Clichés* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 2015), 8. See also Eric Partridge on the cliché's status as a 'well-worn substitute for thinking' in *A Dictionary of Clichés: With an Introductory Essay.* 5th edn. (London: Routledge and Paul, 1978), ix.

[3] See John Wesley, Sermon 88 'On Dress'. In *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1986), III, 249. On Wesley's earlier use, see further pp.**.

[4] *Godliness* (n.). *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2016. [Accessed 28 February 2017].

complicated cultural creation and a constant work in progress'.[5] Historical exegesis, using language as prime resource, readily supports this claim, whether with reference (as the first part of this paper will explore) to *cleanliness*'s changing role in English in relation to domains such as chastity, domestic virtue, and health, or (as in the second part) to the targeted uses of *cleanliness* as undeniably moral construct in the discourse of World War 1.

Language, lexicography, and the moral foundation of *cleanliness*

The *OED* provides a useful preliminary resource for documenting *cleanliness*'s various semantic trajectories. Each entry in the dictionary, as James Murray, the *OED*'s first editor-in-chief, explained, was intended to provide a diachronic narrative of change 'illustrating the first and last appearance, and every notable point in the life-history of every word'.[6] For *cleanliness*, the relevant 'life-history' – here in an entry written by Murray himself and still in use today – appeared in 1889.[7] As this makes plain, modern associations of *cleanliness* with *clean* in the sense 'Free from dirt or filth; unsoiled or unstained' constitute a marked departure from its origin and earliest use.[8] As Murray's carefully documented etymology shows, *cleanliness* derives from the now increasingly archaic adjective *cleanly* (< Old English *claenlic*), denoting that which is 'Morally or spiritually clean; pure; innocent'.[9] *Cleanliness* hence begins life as an unambiguously moral concept, one pertaining to inner rather than external qualities, and to abstract rather than physical. Its primary sense is that of 'moral purity', a locution deployed across the *OED* in defining words such as *innocence* ('Freedom from sin, guilt, or moral wrong in general; … *moral purity*') or, in relation to its critical absence, in *corrupt* ('To render morally unsound or 'rotten'; to destroy the *moral purity* or chastity of') [my emphases].[10]

[5] Katherine Ashenburg, *Clean. An Unsanitized History of Washing* (London: Profile, 2008), 4.

[6] James A. H. Murray, *The Evolution of English Lexicography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 46.

[7] The original *OED*, under the title *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, was published in parts between 1884 and 1928. The entry for *cleanliness* (and related words) appeared in the section *Cast--Clivy*, edited by Murray in 1889. While the *Dictionary* is currently being revised for the on-line third edition (see *OED Online* at www.oed.com), *cleanliness* remains as first written by Murray.

[8] *Clean* (adj.), sense 3a. *OED Online* [Accessed 28 February 2017].

[9] See *cleanly* (adj.), sense 1. *OED Online* [Accessed 28 February 2017]. The sense remained in use until the seventeenth century.

[10] See, respectively, *innocence* (n.), sense 1, *corrupt* (v.), sense 3. *OED Online* [Accessed 28 February 2017].

'So is my meaning cleane devoyde of syn || Grounded and set vpon al clenlynesse', stated the poet (and prior) John Lydgate in his early 14th century *Auncient Historie and Onely Trewe and Syncere Cronicle of the Warres Betwixte the Grecians and the Troyans*. Lydgate's text – the earliest evidence provided in the relevant *OED* entry – usefully illuminates the state of complete purity (one 'devoyde of syn') on which cleanliness is said to rest. Similar moral associations inform William Caxton's statement (part of the same entry) that 'White ...signifyeth innocencie and clenlines'. Appearing in Caxton's translation of Christine de Pisan's *The Book of Faytte of Armes & of Chyualrye* (1489), *cleanliness* represents a moral absolute, something that is unconditionally either present or absent. As this pairing with 'innocencie' confirms, one cannot, in this early moral centring, be more or less 'cleanly' -- just as, say, *eternity* cannot be more or less eternal, or chastity more or less chaste. The scalar and quantitative models of meaning implicit in modern uses of *cleanliness* (as in the common use of *standards of cleanliness* that are realised to a greater or lesser extent)[11] are irrelevant in this context.

Other aspects of this moral construction are also worthy of note. If, in modern use, *cleanliness* is often depicted as something achievable by physical endeavour and targeted effort, these early appearances can seem curiously passive. Importantly, one is *cleanly* by virtue of what one has *not* done – just as, when *cleanliness* is applied to mind rather than body, one is *cleanly* by virtue of the absence of impure thought. Individual agency instead relates to self-control, to the maintenance of moral boundaries, and to the avoidance of transgression that this implies. While Wesley's dicta on *cleanliness* and *godliness* appear much later (and, as we will explore, with somewhat different socio-moral as well as semantic orientations), it is in these early uses that concepts of cleanliness and godliness draw closest – founded as they are on the complete and utter absence of sin and with interesting correlates in the moral absolutes of chastity and purity.

Caxton's text , importantly, offers further evidence of the Christian origins of such correlations, as well as illustrating the purity metaphors which, tellingly, are already at stake in conceptions of this kind: 'The scripture saith that the vestements of Ihū Crist dide seme to his apostles white as snowe', he adds. As Beck confirms, that which is morally *cleanly* is,

[11] See e.g. the illustrative examples for *cleanliness* at OxfordDictionaries.com: 'standards of cleanliness have been criticized by patients and visitors'. See also citations such as 'users are still not getting equal treatment within the NHS. Standards of cleanliness in mental health have been found to be markedly poorer' in concordance results for *cleanliness* in the 2006 Corpus of British English.

across a range of cultures, emblematised as visually pristine; sin, in contrast, is readily imaged as a source of pollution, both physical and moral.[12] As for Caxton, the difficulty of keeping white clothing clean – and the ease by which it might be sullied, either deliberately or inadvertently – readily suggests further symbolic resonances, reminding us that being *cleanly* is difficult, effortful (not least in relation to what one must not do), as well as underscoring the need for constant moral vigilance. If, as we have seen, *cleanliness* is, in its earliest use, an inner rather than an outer value, the prevalence of these more tangible correlates already starts to expand its patterns of signification, not least when seen alongside the semantic history of cognate forms such as *clean*, *cleanness*, *cleanly*, or, indeed, *unclean*.

Even in Old English, *clean* in the physical sense of 'Free from dirt or filth' had existed, for example, alongside meanings in which it signified the state of being 'Pure, undefiled, unsullied'. *Cleanness* likewise denoted 'Freedom from dirt or filth, purity, clearness', as well as – when placed in more ethically-orientated domains of meaning – 'Moral or ceremonial purity; chastity; innocence; undefiled quality'. *Cleanse* as verb shared similar features, encompassing, as the *OED* confirms, the meaning 'To make morally or spiritually clean; to purify or free from sin or guilt', as well as 'To make clean, purify, free from dirt or filth'.[13] *Cleanly* – which, as we have seen, originally existed in the sense 'Morally or spiritually clean; pure; innocent' – followed a similar trajectory, gaining a further sense-division in which the literal or visible absence of dirt gradually took precedence. The meaning 'Clean: as clothes, or the like' was well-established by late Middle English and increasingly dominant two centuries later.[14] *Unclean* reveals similar transitions.[15] Polysemy – the presence of multiple co-existing significations for a single word – is, as here, an entirely normal feature of use. Semantic splitting underpins a well-established pattern of physical alongside moral signification in this domain.

That *cleanliness* exhibits a parallel process of semantic drift is, in this light, unsurprising. Its earlier core meaning of 'moral purity' comes, in such ways, to be

---

[12] Richard Beck, *Unclean. Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2012), 8. See *unclean* (adj.), *OED Online* [Accessed 28 February 2017].

[13] See *cleanse* (v.), senses 1-2. *OED Online* [Accessed 28 February 2017].

[14] *Cleanly* as used with reference to material artefacts such as clothing is dated to 1340 in the *OED*.

[15] The sense 'Not physically clean; dirty, filthy, foul' exists for *unclean* alongside that of 'Morally impure or defiled; unchaste', though the former is, as the *OED* confirms, a later development. See *unclean* (adj.), *OED Online* [Accessed 28 February 2017].

accompanied by a newer sense, ascribed on the basis of its physical and observable manifestations. Murray's short defining statement on *cleanliness* in the *OED* ('The quality, state, or condition of being cleanly. In the earliest quot[ation]s. it is used, like the adj., of moral purity') suggests a neat linearity by which *cleanliness* moves from a quintessentially moral virtue to a quintessentially social one. The realities of English use are, as we might expect, somewhat more complex. Well into the early nineteenth century, writers could make effective use of both spheres of meaning, either singly or at the same time, depending on context and the connotations required.

'Cleanliness hath…been esteemed the chief corporal perfection in women', as Jonathan Swift famously stated in the 'Modest Defence' that he added to 'The Lady's Dressing Room' (1730), a poem in which gendered stereotypes of the physically pristine are unflinchingly unpicked.[16] Swift's emphasis on corporeality ('bodily form or nature; materiality' as glossed in the *OED*) here confirms the presence of the newer sense of *cleanliness*, based on the physical absence of dirt and unequivocally linked to body rather than soul. Yet elsewhere, as in his poem 'Cadenus and Vanessa' (1713), the meaning adroitly pivots between continuing polysemies of use. Reference to Vanessa's skin, anointed with nectar by the Graces, points to external qualities and their visual appraisal. It is, however, Vanessa's inner virtue 'incapable of outward stains' on which relevant readings of *cleanliness* ultimately rely:

> From whence the tender Skin assumes
>
> A Sweetness above all Perfumes;
>
> From whence a Cleanliness remains,
>
> Incapable of outward stains'.[17]

A similar conjunction of literal and metaphorical appears in the later statement (in Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia* (1823)) that 'The very garments of a Quaker seem incapable of receiving a soil; and cleanliness in them to be something more than the absence of its contrary'.[18] Rather than being displaced, the early moral legacies of *cleanliness* self-evidently

---

[16] Jonathan Swift, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), II, 691.

[17] Swift, *Poems* II, 525-30.

[18] Charles Lamb, *Elia. Essays which have appeared under that Signature in the London Magazine* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1823), 110.

linger on (in ways which, as Lamb suggests, were undoubtedly fostered by the kind of popular iconography of clothing and identity already discussed). 'To cherish stains impure…On the skin to fix a stain/ Till it works into the grain, Argues a degenerate mind, /Sordid, slothful, ill inclin'd, /Wanting in that self-respect /Which does virtue best protect', Lamb's poem 'Cleanliness' likewise decreed.[19]

Cleanliness, dirt, and the moral meanings of disgust

Swift's 'The Lady's Dressing Room' usefully serves to foreground a number of other aspects of the socio-moral history of *cleanliness* and its semantic reconfiguration. The disjunction between the goddess-like Celia, 'array'd in Lace, Brocade and Tissues', who emerges from her chamber after some five hours of concentrated endeavour, and the subsequent 'Inventory' of the dressing-room she leaves behind, is anatomised with precision. Celia's discarded 'dirty Smock' and the 'filthy Bason' that 'takes whatever comes /The scrapings of her Teeth and Gums' (ll.39-40) prompt a firmly physical reading of *cleanliness* and its absence, as does the climactic discovery that Strephon makes within the now empty room: 'Thus finishing his grand Survey, /Disgusted *Strephon* stole away /Repeating in his amorous Fits /Oh! *Celia*, *Celia*, *Celia* shits!' (ll.115-8).

Swift's catalogue of dirt, filth, and excreta is not obviously devoid of moral meaning, however. Swift constructs a narrative which is, in effect, the inverse of the kind of moral symbolism we earlier observed in Caxton. With Celia, what you see is not what you get. Instead, it is the clothing not worn and discarded – sweaty, impure, and sullied – which is made to symbolise the truth which Celia's finished form conceals. The conclusion, as Strephon stresses, is 'how damnably the Men lie, /In calling *Celia* sweet and cleanly' (ll.17-18). What is conventionally called cleanliness is, by implication, an illusion predicated on the concealment or displacement of the filthy reality. Even so, if we focus on Strephon's self-evident disgust, other available meanings are clearly at work, contributing to the wider understanding –and salience – of what *cleanliness* might be said to be. Disgust, as William Miller has argued, is an inescapably moral as well as physical emotion. 'Moral judgement seems…to demand the idioms of disgust', he states; it is 'disgust' that 'constrains the

[19] The poem appeared posthumously in Charles and Mary Lamb, *Poetry for Children to which are added … Some Uncollected Poems by Charles Lamb* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878), 31.

possible attributes of the pure, while the idea of the pure, in turn, supplies precise content to the disgusting'. Placed in a careful symbiosis, 'the influences work in two directions'.[20]

Strephon's own 'idioms of disgust', and their use by Swift, can thereby shed light on a similar moral dynamism within the on-going history of *cleanliness*. If on one level, disgust is directed at the absence of *cleanliness* as purely physical property, on another, its focus is on the morally as well as the physical unclean. In ways which also assume marked relevance in available readings of *cleanliness* and its linguistic history, such socio-moral disgust emerges as a highly effective mechanism for setting up what we might see as 'purity boundaries'. This can be directed not only against particular individuals, as by Swift, but also, notes Beck, against groups of individuals, or, indeed, entire races.[21] Addison's essay devoted to what he chose to term the '*Half-Virtue*' of 'Cleanliness', and its complex parameters, provides apt illustration. 'The different Nations of the World are as much distinguished by their Cleanliness, as by their Arts and Sciences. The more any Country is civilised, the more they consult this part of Politeness,' he comments. As a socio-moral virtue, cleanliness is identified as that which 'makes us agreeable to others' while its cultural value ('a Mark of Politeness') enables it to function as an index of civilisation. Yet outside the circle of cleanliness the forces of disgust are, once again, perceptible. 'No-one unadorned with this Virtue can go into Company without giving manifest Offence', Addison adds.[22]

Seen historically, notions of *cleanliness* can, by extension, display a high degree of plasticity and relativity. The amount of dirt which could be tolerated in a 'clean' person – without prompting disgust – could vary considerably. Whereas moral *cleanliness* was necessarily absolute, *cleanliness* in this sense could be limited one's face and hands – without extending to other aspects of the body – with perfect acceptability. In early modern England, personal cleanliness was 'defined primarily in terms of visibility', writes Keith Thomas.[23]

---

[20] William Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), xi.

[21] Beck, *Unclean*, 2.

[22] Joseph Addison, *Spectator* No. 631, December 10, 1714. In *The Spectator* ed. D. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 157.

[23] Keith Thomas, 'Cleanliness and Godliness in Early Modern England', in Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (eds.), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 59. See also Ashenburg, *Clean* , 101-2: 'What was visible needed attention, but only what was visible. Beginning in the sixteenth century, manuals of etiquette and health echoed the medieval handbooks' emphasis on washing the hands and face, but omitted…instructions for the body'.

Being as clean as one can afford to be, to paraphrase George Bernard Shaw's socialist parable *Pygmalion*, long informed the ways in which *cleanliness* was recognised and affirmed. What constituted *cleanliness* in one rank might simultaneously serve to indicate its absence in another. 'The easier or higher any one's Fortune is, this Duty [of Cleanliness] rises proportionately', as Addison observed.[24]

Well-documented, too, are other readings in which dirt rather than cleanliness confers protective benefits – while *cleanliness*, in contrast, connotes danger and distrust. 'I can remember when others boasted that *their* "children's feet had never been touched by water; no, nor any part of them but face and hands"' relates Florence Nightingale in reference to the hygiene practices of late Victorian Britain: 'Many a good, active, cleanly country housewife has told me with pride that she has never had her children's feet washed in all their lives, not let one of them ever touch himself with cold water'.[25] *Cleanliness* might, in uses of this kind, paradoxically signify danger and parental neglect (with its own moral imputations). As late as 1904, the novelist Arnold Bennett could allude to similar attitudes in describing the business premises featured in his novel *A Great Man*: 'At Powells, the old Dickensian tradition was kept alive by every possible means. Dirt and gloom were omnipresent. Cleanliness and daylight would have been deemed unbusinesslike, as revolutional and dangerous as a type-writer'.[26] 'At Powells', he adds, 'nothing but the stairs was ever put to the indignity of a bath'.

Between hygiene and decency

If, as Mary Douglas claims, 'the rules of hygiene change with changes in our state of knowledge', the same principles also apply to *cleanliness* and its own pragmatic – as well as semantic – reconfiguration.[27]As a trained nurse, Nightingale's own stance on the meaning of *cleanliness* was, as we might expect, very different from that of the 'cleanly housewife' in her anecdote. A preference for dirt against cleanliness is seen as constituting an 'extraordinary prejudice'; the 'want of…cleanliness' instead contributes to the spread of

[24] Addison, *The Spectator*, 157.

[25] Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing for the Labouring Classes* (London: Harrison, 1861), 64, 91.

[26] Arnold Bennett, *A Great Man* (London: Methuen, 1904), 96.

[27] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003), 8.

disease, making cleanliness both a private and a public responsibility.[28] Nightingale draws here on precedents already established in earlier medical writing. 'It is', the physician William Buchan had noted in his *Domestic Medicine* (1772), 'not sufficient that I be clean myself, while the want of it in my neighbour affects my health as well as his own'.[29] As attitudes to the various outbreaks of cholera and typhoid across late eighteenth and nineteenth Britain testify, a disregard for cleanliness was, in this respect, increasingly seen as morally culpable, involving wide-ranging social, civic, as well as personal guilt.

'It is culture, not nature, that draws the lines between defilement and purity, clean and filthy,' writes Miller.[30] The bacteriological revolution of the 1880s served, in effect, to draw these lines anew. Germ theory, as Douglas notes, was 'transformative for the idea of dirt as it came to exist in the modern world'. [31] It 'reinforced every single lesson of the old gospel of cleanliness', but in ways that reconstructed 'the psychology of pollution fear in a new and acute form', confirms Smith: 'Germs were now the invisible enemy, fought at every turn'.[32] *Cleanliness*, *health*, and *hygiene* ('the science of the establishment and maintenance of health') henceforth collocate with increasing frequency.

The embedding of *cleanliness* in medical discourse moreover went hand in hand with its commodification. Over the nineteenth century, notes McClintock, 'soap advertising took its place at the vanguard of Britain's new commodity culture and its civilizing mission'.[33] The rise of collocations such as the *great unwashed* (often attributed to Thackeray's 1849 novel *Pendennis* but used at least two decades earlier) is equally telling.[34] Here, too, *cleanliness*

---

[28] Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*, 5, 64.

[29] William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*: *or, a Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases by Regimen and Simple Medicines* (London: W. Strahan, 1772), 125.

[30] Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, 15.

[31] See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 44.

[32] Virginia Smith, *Clean: A Personal History of Hygiene and Purity* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007), 297.

[33] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 208.

[34] The 'life-history' of this idiom in the *OED* begins in 1830 with Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford*, I, xix: 'He is certainly a man who bathes and 'lives cleanly', (two especial charges preferred against him by Messrs. the Great Unwashed)'. *Unwashed* (n), *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2016. [Accessed 28 February 2017].

was made to suggest more than clean skin alone.[35] Soap, van Dijk affirms, 'emerged as the pre-eminent marker of personal hygiene and civilisation in European eyes'.[36] Cleanliness can inscribe the fault-lines of society in relation to both class and race.

Corpus analysis – the scrutinising of large amounts of digitised data – provides useful supporting evidence for these shifting trends and tendencies. If Caxton's preferred collocation with *innocence* proves strikingly time-bound, *cleanliness* is, by the late nineteenth century, firmly embedded in domains of health, sanitation, and medicine in ways which repeatedly testify to the presence of social virtue. The British National Corpus (100 million words, deriving from late 20th-century English) unequivocally confirms the statistical clustering of *cleanliness* in relation to hygiene and its modern sense-construction. While *cleanliness* can, as such, become a scientifically verifiable feature, it is plain that, at least in general (non-medical) domains of use, moral connotations will, however, remain active. *Cleanliness*, in a corpus examination of Dickens' works remains, for example, an iterated social good, collocating with 'comfort', 'decency', and 'quiet', and with positive attributes such as 'beauty', 'freshness', and 'good order'. It also collocates with *godliness*, if in ways which indicate a certain resistance. 'Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and some people do the same by their religion' (*Great Expectations*).[37]

If we return at this point to Wesley and the stated correlation of *cleanliness* and *godliness* with which we began, it is plain that a number of these patterns of sense-relation were, in reality, already present . As we might expect in a mid-eighteenth century writer, for example, *cleanliness* for Wesley clearly correlates with health and images of beneficial social order. 'Every one that wou'd preserve Health shou'ld be as clean and sweet as possible in their Houses, Cloaths and Furniture', he states in his *Primitive Physick* (1747), a manual of elementary medical advice that offers, in effect, a form of pragmatic and secular

[35] In the 1890s, Pears Soap famously depicted 'The birth of civilisation' in the image of a box of Pears soap which had been washed ashore on the coast of Equatorial Africa.

[36] Kees van Dijk, ''Soap is the onset of civilization'. In Kees van Dijk and Jean Gilman Taylor (eds.), *Cleanliness and Culture. Indonesian Histories* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 4.

[37] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861), I, 45. The corpus 'Works of Dickens' can be accessed at https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/dickens/.

sermonizing.[38] Overtly drawing on earlier physicians such as George Cheyne, Wesley institutes cleanliness as both an individual and a social prescription. The coupling of *cleanliness* with *decency* (and the socio-moral approbation this conveys) is likewise plain in Wesley's reported 'Conversations' of 1744, in which he states his resolve to 'preach expressly and strongly' on topics relating to right living. *Decency* (defined in the *OED* as 'Decent or becoming acts or observances; the established observances of decent life or decorum; proprieties') includes other aspects of virtuous socio-moral affirmation with which cleanliness is also aligned. 'Everywhere recommend decency and cleanliness', Wesley exhorts: 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'.[39]

Similar themes come to the fore in Wesley's 1786 sermon 'On Dress'. On one level, of course, this returns us to the focus on clothing (and its symbolic value) which constitutes a recurrent trope in the history of *cleanliness*. Yet Wesley adds a new twist: correctness in dress is depicted as a mean between the excess of display (in the kind of clothing and jewels which, as Wesley explains, inevitably lead to pride)[40] and the defect of slovenliness, implying absence of decency and running, in turn, the risk of disgust. Slovenliness is 'no part of religion', Wesley proclaims: 'neatness of clothing is a duty not a sin'. It is in this context that *cleanliness* is presented as 'next to godliness'. Its moral framing is such that it is the only adornment necessary for the 'plain clothes' which bespeak proper 'humility' and virtuous self-discipline before God.[41]

Into the twentieth century: rethinking *cleanliness* in WW1

By the early twentieth century, *cleanliness* was therefore in possession of a set of closely interlocking meanings which, if they no longer included chastity and innocence, nonetheless remained charged with active moral force, even where physical cleansing was concerned. While the headwords of a dictionary often tempt us to think atomistically, presenting us with words or concepts in isolation, it is only by examining the precise conditions of use – social,

[38] John Wesley, *Primitive Physick: or, an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (London: Thomas Tyre, 1747), xix.

[39] [Wesleyan Methodist Church Conference]. *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Reverend Messieurs John and Charles Wesley, and others* (London 1770), 27.

[40] See Wesley, *Sermons*, III, 251.

[41] The inverted commas with which Wesley frames his axiom on cleanliness and godliness confirm his awareness of its inherited status. It was already proverbial wisdom, prominently addressed by Addison in 1714, and with a lengthy descent in Hebrew religious writing. On its antecedents, see Wesley, *Sermons*, III, 249n.

cultural, historical, as well as linguistic – that we can probe the range of these semantic connections. As we have seen, disgust and slovenliness coincided for a range of writers. *Cleanliness* continued to be commended in ethical terms.[42] 'Dirt and dirty surroundings tend to lower the moral tone', Sir Andrew Balfour in 1939. 'Cleanly habit makes for decency', he added, reprising associative meanings that we have already encountered in Wesley (and Dickens). He offers a further reprise, too. There is, Balfour notes, 'an old saying that cleanliness is next to godliness'.[43] If some latitude is now offered as far as God is concerned, the status of *cleanliness* as socio-moral virtue remains indisputable:

> whatever views we hold about the latter, there is no doubt that the cleaner a man is in his person, his surroundings, his work, his thoughts, his reading, and his pleasures, the better he is; better in health, better as a citizen, better as a human being.[44]

Balfour's advice appeared in the *Man's Book of Health,* with its overarching motto 'Cleanliness pays'. I want, however, at this point to examine other ways in which cleanliness might be said to 'pay' in early twentieth-century discourse, looking in particular at the rhetorical and ideological functions it came to assume in WW1. I will, in this, draw extensively on the war-time archive of Andrew Clark, whose collection of annotated notebooks and clippings (now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford) sought to document language on the move in WW1. Advertising features prominently in Clark's archive; this was, as he noted, a particularly significant source.[45]

Perhaps predictably, as Clark confirms, there is, in this period, a marked gender divide in *cleanliness* and the ways in which it might be instituted and applied. On one level,

---

[42] See e.g. [Old Chatty Cheerful], *Household Management: Or, How to Make Home More Comfortable* (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1865), 13-14: 'Of all sights to disgust the eye, perhaps there is none so utterly disgusting as that of a thorough slattern, that is, a *dirty* woman'.

[43] Sir Andrew Balfour, *Cleanliness Pays. The Man's Book of Health* (London: The Health and Cleanliness Council, 1939), 4.

[44] Balfour, *Cleanliness Pays*, 12.

[45] Andrew Clark's war-time archive spans almost a hundred notebooks and folders, gathered together in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. On the 'Words in Wartime Project', see wordinwartime@wordpress.com. See also Lynda Mugglestone (forthcoming), *Words in War-Time. Andrew Clark and the Search for Meaning in WW1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). All images from Andrew Clark's war-time archives on language are reproduced by kind permission of Colin Oberlin-Harris.

women, the guardians of the household, were the main targets of *cleanliness* discourse. In war-time 'the motto of sweethearts and wives' is 'Cleanliness as Usual', runs an advertisement for 'Sunlight Soap'.[46] 'Cleanliness has to be maintained in the home at all times – there is no better way or means than with HUDSON'S SOAP', states a similarly persuasive missive from 1916.[47] *Cleanliness* as a physical desideratum is dominant, while the absence of slovenliness and dirt (returning us once more to Wesley) are depicted as salient qualities of the British way of life and the fundamental decencies that it embodies.

Even on the Home Front, the battlefield was very much in view. If 'courageous men have gone forth to war', as Hudson's soap likewise affirmed, it was made equally plain that 'Courageous women are silently doing their duty at home' in a form of domestic warfare in which cleanliness and victory are closely aligned. Whether in the form of the 'cleanliness campaign' (in war-time advertising for Electric Suction Cleaners), or in the 'spring cleaning manoeuvres' illuminatingly advocated in the *Evening News* in March 1915, women are repeatedly urged to seize the latest weapons of cleanliness to ensure symbolic victory in the home:

> if every directress of spring cleaning manoeuvres before formulating her plan of operations, were to con over the whole brood of inventions, polishing mops, gas water-heaters, mechanical carpet-beaters, vacuum cleaners, and the wonderful array of antiseptic cleansers, polishers, disinfectants, and the like she would find it well worth her while. Indeed, not to do so is to enter on the battle with dirt, dust, and decay equipped with obsolete weapons.[48]

'Spring Cleaning will undermine your health unless you have plenty of ammunition for the attack', warned another advertisement from May 1915, in this instance for the cleaning product Vim. The figuration of domestic products as weapons, dirt as enemy, and cleanliness as patriotic triumph was widespread.

The trenches themselves – and the male experience of active service – were prototypically seen rather differently. Dirt rather than cleanliness constitutes a refrain in letters from the Front. 'Can you picture how dirty we are?', a 1914 letter demands: 'I have not washed my hands for three days, but though I long for a tub the days appear to be one

---

[46] Advertisement, 'Sunlight Soap', *Daily Express*, 28 April 1915.

[47] Advertisement, 'Hudson's Soap', *Punch*, 8 November 1916.

[48] 'Mercurius', 'The Mother of Spring-Cleaning Inventions', *Evening News*, 29 March 1915.

long drawn-out period, and one gets accustomed to the state of affairs so long as you don't catch sight of yourself!'.[49] 'It's funny how our ideas about washing change under force of circumstances', Weston Amcotts wrote to similar effect in a letter from the Dardanelles: 'I used to imagine myself extraordinarily grubby if ever I missed my morning bath but, here, one is lucky if one gets water to wash ones hands and face once a day. A saving grace is the sea where one can go and get clean about every 3rd or 4th day with luck'.[50]

Cleanliness, in such contexts, is often presented as a quintessential object of desire, as for example in a set of apparently documentary images which appeared in the *War Budget* and *War Illustrated* in 1914. Headed 'Bathroom In The Trenches At Soissons', the former (see Figure 1), presents three vertically ordered pictures, while a caption, placed at the bottom of the page, provides an explanatory text: 'The top picture, taken in a camp in France, shows our Tommies "cleaning up." The bathroom in the centre picture is a luxury which the Allies near Soissons enjoy…below is a popular barber's tent'. The closing statement stresses, 'The British soldier likes a wash and a shave wherever possible – even before an engagement'.[51]

The images in *War Illustrated*, headed 'The Tidiness of Mr. Thomas Atkins', explore a similar theme: British soldiers are depicted as happily engaged in restoring personal cleanliness by washing and shaving in ways which are clearly intended to tap into particular constructions of national identity. 'A British solder shaving in great earnest, while a bearded Belgian regards it as an unnecessary waste of energy', states one caption. 'On returning to a rest camp from the trenches the first concern of kilted "Scotties" is to remove the mud from their knees', states another; '"Piou-Piou"' [the French equivalent of the British 'Tommy'] regards our solders' zeal in keeping clean under such difficulties as something incomprehensible', it continues.[52] The enemy was deemed to show still less comprehension of British endeavours: 'German soldiers scorn that 'extraordinary' sense of cleanliness, and when they see the British captive take shower-baths under the icy water tap, they shrug their shoulders and mutter, 'Einfach verrueckt' (Simply crazy)'.[53]

---

[49] *Daily Express*, 10 October 1914.

[50] Letter from Weston Amcotts to Lt-Col. Fane, August 24th 1915. In Julian Fane (ed.), *Letters from the Front from letters sent to Lt-Col. Fane During the 1914-18 War* (Grantham: Barny Books, n.d.), 51.

[51] 'Bathroom in the Trenches at Soissons', *The War Budget*, 19 December 1914.

[52] 'The Tidiness of Mr. Thomas Atkins', *War Illustrated*, 26 December 1914.

[53] *Daily Express*, 21 November 1914.

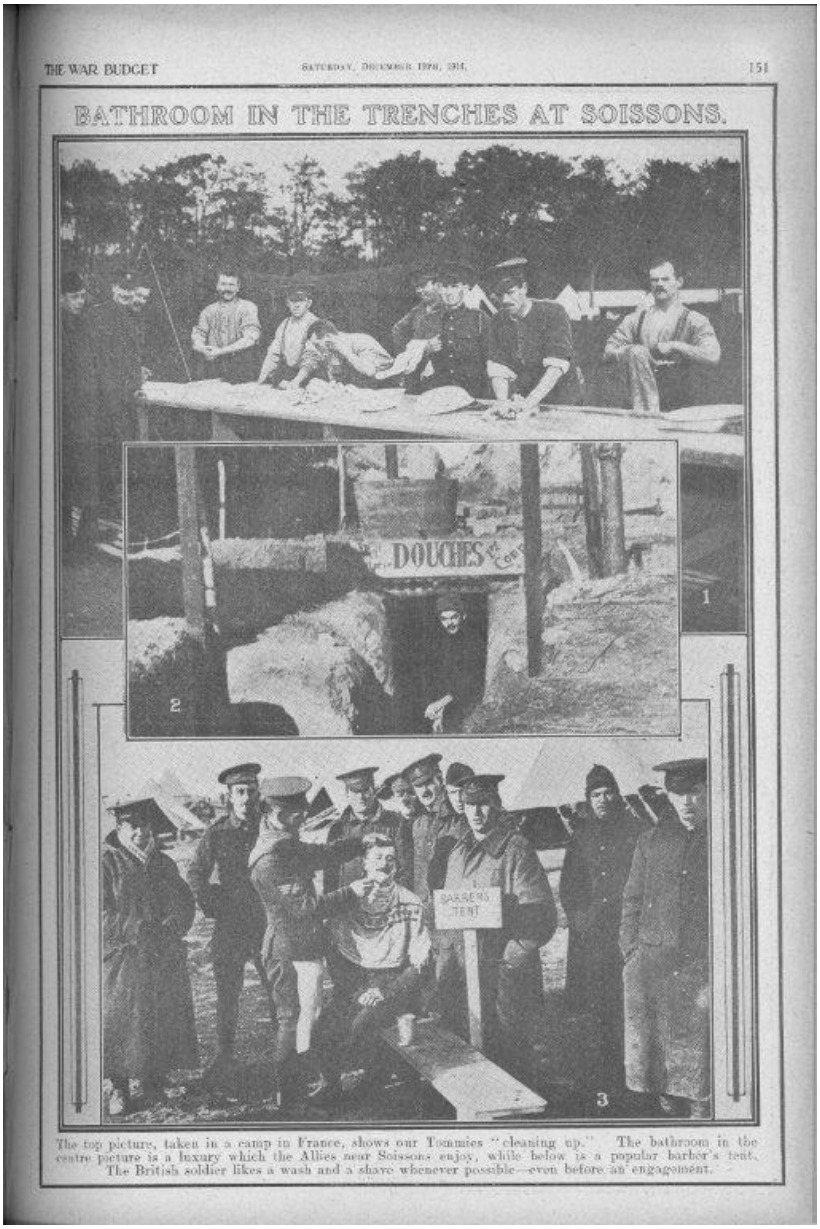

Figure 1. 'Bathroom in the Trenches at Soissons', *The War Budget*, 19 December 1914.

While such images can be taken as simply documentary, they had in reality potent symbolic force. A concern for cleanliness -- as other contemporary references make plain -- could equally be used as a form of moral (and national) validation.[54] Tommy is 'the Cleanest fighter in the World', proclaims an advert for sunlight soap, drawing on the polysemy by which Tommy – the iconic British soldier – is both literally *cleanly* (through his use of a

[54] See e.g. the analysis by Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War* (Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 56-7: 'the tidiness theme from *The War Illustrated* displayed unusual enthusiasm for the rule of uniform'.

particular commodity) and fights *cleanly* in the moral sense.[55] 'The clean, chivalrous, fighting instincts of our gallant soldiers reflect the ideals of our business life', it continues, overtly collocating cleanliness with chivalry and gallantry as other morally-informed ideals. 'The same characteristics which stamp the British Tommy as the *CLEANEST FIGHTER IN THE WORLD* have won equal repute for British goods. Sunlight Soap is typically British…£1000 GUARANTEE OF PURITY OF EVERY BAR' (see Figure 2). 'THE BRITISH LINE IS FIRMLY HELD BY THE CLEANEST FIGHTER IN THE WORLD', it affirms.[56]

The symbolic potential of cleanliness is, in texts of this kind, repeatedly made to characterise Allies against the enemy. 'Clean fighters' fighting for 'clean ideals' ran an advertisement for Gillette razors, a trope which received particular emphasis during the military triumph (and American engagement) of November 1918: 'The millions of big, strong-limbed supermen who fought to save Freedom from the attacks of an arrogant enemy are clean men in every sense of the word – clean fighters – clean of face – clean of action – clean-minded men who fought for clean ideals – and to make the world a cleaner place in which to live'.[57] The same moral potential was widely extended to peoples of the British Empire. 'The Australian is no stranger to Sunlight. The tan on his cheek…his smart bearing and clean appearance, all proclaim Sunlight; besides which there are his great and lasting records as a "Clean Fighter"', proclaimed another advertisement for 'Sunlight Soap', inviting readings which again transcend the purely physical.[58] 'Clean fighting' places Britain and Allies on the moral high ground – an image literalised in a further advertisement which places 'Tommy' and 'Jack' (the iconic British sailor) on a pedestal formed by a tablet of soap.[59] The assumption that since '[soap] purportedly belongs in the female realm of domesticity, [it] is figured as beyond history and beyond politics proper' clearly stands in need of some redress.[60]

[55] Advertisement, 'Sunlight Soap', *Daily Express* 12 May 1915.

[56] Advertisement, 'Sunlight Soap', *Daily Express*, 28 September 1915

[57] Advertisement, 'Gillette Safety Razor', *Land & Water*, 21 November 1918.

[58] Advertisement, 'Sunlight Soap', *Daily Express*, 7 September 1916.

[59] Advertisement, 'Sunlight Soap', *Daily Express*, 29 October 1915.

[60] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 209.

Figure 2. Advertisement, 'Sunlight Soap', *Daily Express*, 12 May 1915. Taken from Andrew Clark, Specimen Advertisements of Soaps 247927 c.13. 1915, 41. Bodleian Library Oxford. All images from Andrew Clark's war-time archives on language are reproduced by kind permission of Colin Oberlin-Harris.

This imaging of heroic cleanliness against a common enemy drew, in turn, on other targeted polysemies. War-time advertising for 'Vim' as a domestic weapon against dirt did not, for instance, shrink from representing such dirt in explicitly German form. 'Vim' provides 'Ammunition for the Spring', states an advert in the *Star* in May 1915; its target is

visualised as a German airship inscribed with the word 'Dirt'. 'Perfection' soap (see Figure 3, also from Clark's archive) provides a particularly telling example of visual rhetoric of this kind, not least in the sense of disgust it also exploits. Deploying a triple iconography of British national identity, Britannia, aided by 'Tommy' and 'Jack', surround a barrel of hot water. They are, as the framing text states, engaged in the attempt to cleanse 'the dirtiest' – a locution represented by the visually and morally unclean image of the German enemy, whose skin is depicted as black not as a result of any ethnographic observation but as a mark of his moral transgression. Rendered as a quite literal 'unclean' fighter, he is about to land in 'hot water' where he will, we are informed, get 'the roughest washing'.[61]

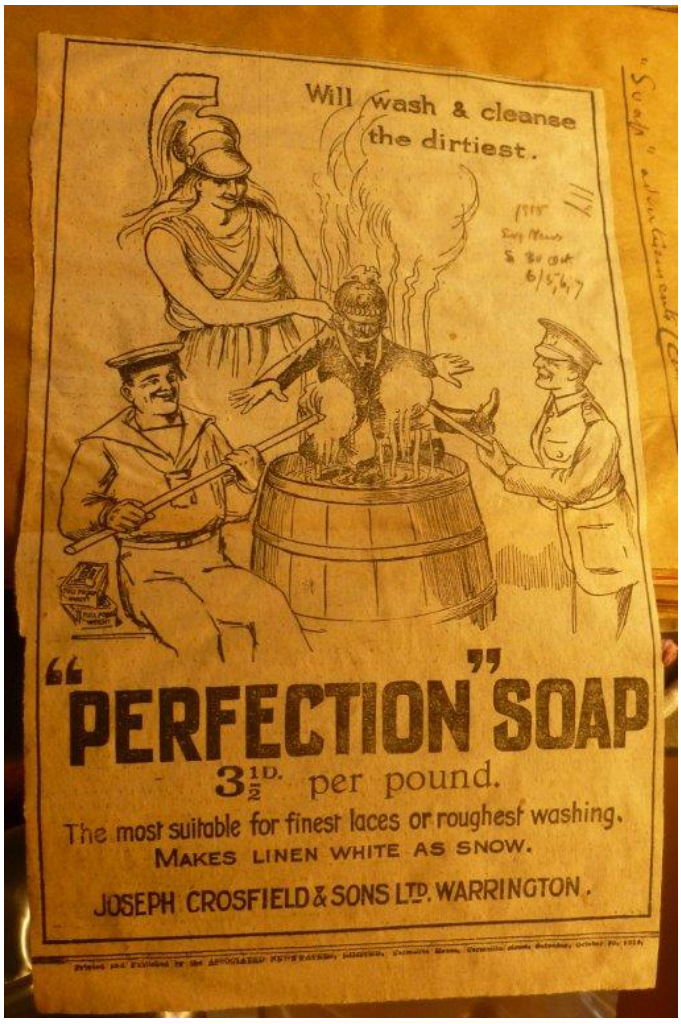

Figure 3. Advertisement, 'Perfection soap', *Evening News*, 30 October 1915. Taken from Andrew Clark, Specimen Advertisements of Soaps 247927 c.13. 1915, 117. Bodleian Library Oxford.

[61] Advertisement, 'Perfection soap', *Evening News*, 30 October 1915.

Another particularly good illustration of this moral potential is presented by the highly inventive wartime advertising for the cleaning product 'Zog'. This, too, had few qualms about visualising dirt as a military as well as domestic enemy in ways which engage overtly with national identities (see Figure 4). Here, a host of goose-stepping Germans are depicted as 'Zog fodder' (on analogy with *cannon fodder*) while German ambitions for '*der Tag*' ('the Day') – 'a day', explains the *OED*, 'on which an important event is expected to occur; esp. a day of military conflict or victory' – are deflated by the visual representation of 'der Tag after', when the Germans, as dirt, now lie slain upon the ground. 'Strafe Zog', the Germans cry, before surrendering to Zog's superior strength.[62] Purity boundaries and ethnocentric boundaries are deftly aligned. Zog, as the pre-eminently 'clean fighter', secures a victory over dirt which is at once physical and moral.

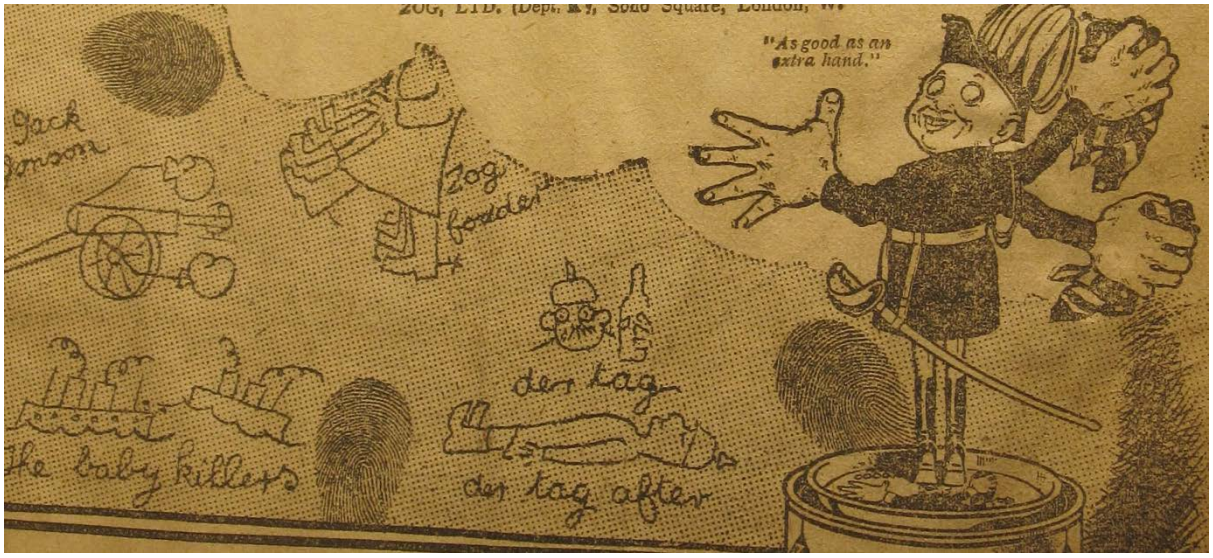

Figure 4. Extract of 'Zog' cleaning product advertisement, March 1915. Taken from Andrew Clark, Specimen Advertisements of Soaps 247927 c.13. 1915, 51. Bodleian Library Oxford.

If we return at this point to the image of British forces bathing in the *War Budget* and *War Illustrated*, it is plain that their stated desire for 'cleaning up' contains targeted polysemies of its own. To *clean up*, as Andrew Clark's wartime notebooks record, was a newly familiarised term meaning 'to remove from a district all stragglers of a defeated enemy's army'. It yielded predictable synergies with other forms of cleanliness and dirt and

[62] Advertisement, 'Zog', *Daily Express*, 25 April 1916.

the moral framing these also invite.[63] 'A Hun and the eventual disposal of the Huns is the eternal question at the front', the initial caption in *War Illustrated* declared: 'the one ideal is the essential of the other'. The British desire for cleanliness is also a form of military affirmation in which the 'Hun', as consummate enemy, is to be entirely eradicated.

As Clark documents, the imaging of dirt as a moral and military metaphor was pervasive. It informs a range of patriotic and propagandist discourses in which the enemy is depicted as a 'dirty fighter', replete with 'dirty tricks', as well as one who acts with 'dirty hands'.[64] *Dirty best*, coined on analogy with *level best*, was, Clark observed, yet another new idiom of WWI; it meant, he explained, 'Utmost efforts in the direction of harming someone' in ways which again served to foreground a sense of deliberate malevolence – and underlying moral deficit.[65] Other new collocations such as *doing the dirty*, again used in stereotyping German actions, operated in similar ways: 'The Germans have been "doing the dirty" on us by donning khaki and kilts to approach our trenches, shouting out to our fellows not to shoot as they have come back for ammunition', a letter from the Front in Clark's collection states: 'you can understand what a rotten crowd we are fighting'.[66]

The moral potential of *clean* and *dirty hands*, long antedates WW1, of course. 'The hands are put for the executive and instrumentall powers' by which sin can flourish, stated Richard Vines in his 1647 sermon 'The Purifying of unclean hearts and hands'; 'he that hath clean hands' has 'a pure heart', and 'shall receive the blessings from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation'.[67] *Clean hands* function in similar ways in war-time discourse, though to rather different ends. 'BRITAIN *WENT TO WAR WITH CLEAN HANDS*. And Tommy and Jack have worthily upheld the glorious traditions of clean fighters', another contemporary advertisement for 'Sunlight Soap' pointedly declared.[68] Similar motifs proliferated in the political justification of war. 'We are left with absolutely no

---

[63] Andrew Clark, Ms of 'English Words in War-Time', Notebook 1, entry 123. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

[64] See e.g. 'With a few notable exceptions the German was a dirty fighter, and had got to get the dirty fighter's punishment' (*Scotsman*, 19 Dec 1914); 'The German prisoners say that their generals have made up their minds that, whoever escapes, our army must be punished for its interference. Well, they are doing their dirty best to punish us' (*Evening News*, 4 Sept 1914).

[65] Clark, Ms 'English Words in War-Time', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Notebook 1, entry 67.

[66] *Daily Express*, 13 November 1914.

[67] Richard Vines, 3, 'The Purifying of Unclean hands and Hearts: Opened in A Sermon' (London: Abel Roper, 1646), 3, 7-8.

[68] Advertisement, 'Sunlight Soap', *Star*, 27 September 1916.

alternative, if we wish to maintain the honour and dignity of our beloved land, but to fight side by side with nations who are also threatened …Happily we go into it with *clean hands* …we fight the cause of freedom and the independence and security of the smaller nations of Europe', the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, had stated as conflict began.[69] 'You need not go back now to the origin of the war, though there we stand with *clean hands* and are not afraid of investigation', Lord Rosebery reiterated to an Edinburgh audience in April 1915 [my emphases].[70]

Dirty hands -- repeatedly ascribed to the enemy in the language practices of WW1 – conversely served, as they had for Lady Macbeth, to represent a moral transgression that no amount of cleansing could remove.[71] 'If their hands are red with the blood of women and children, will the spectacle of our own hands similarly stained bring us anything but loss of self-respect?', asked the *Evening News* in 1916, here (in another extract from the Clark archive) in relation to the prospect of retaliation attacks on German towns after the Zeppelin bombing of British non-combatants. 'The real remedy', it urged, 'is to wake up, to use our strength as a man's strength should be used, to bear ourselves so that we may at the last stand before God Whose aid we invoke with clean hands'.[72] As Preston and Ritter have argued, images of physical purity seem to embody personal morality and integrity with particular clarity.[73] The opposite is equally plain. Between 1914 and 1918, *cleanliness* and *dirtiness* both demonstrate the patterns of moral salience already discussed.[74]

Focussing disgust and moral judgement in a war of words

Moral disgust in war-time could also be focussed in more visceral ways. If, as we have seen, germs and bacteriology brought a new understanding of *cleanliness*, they also yielded new

---

[69] See Michael Senior, *Fromelles 1916. No Finer Courage: The Loss of an English Village* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2011), 30.

[70] 'The Edinburgh Bantam Battalion'. Prussian Militarism or Civilisation', *Scotsman*, 16 April 1915.

[71] See Chen-Bo Zhong and K. A. Liljenquist, 'Washing Away your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing', *Science* 313 (2006), 1152-3.

[72] *Evening News* 4 February 1916.

[73] Jesse Preston and Ryan Ritter, 'Cleanliness and godliness: Mutual Association between two kinds of personal Purity'. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48 (2012), 1365-1368.

[74] Germany made use of similar motifs. See e.g. the Kaiser's statement on entering the war that 'With heavy heart I have been compelled to mobilise my army against a neighbour at whose side it has fought on many a battlefield…We draw the sword with a clean conscience and clean hands. Cited in B. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 127.

possibilities of moral and political rhetoric, which war-time discourse exploited with marked effectiveness. ‘Lifebuoy soap is busy inflicting defeat upon the germs and microbes of disease. It never fails to destroy disease and win health, so please do not fail to use it’, concerned readers of the *Daily Express* were, for example, exhorted in 1915. The accompanying image depicts an outbreak of German measles in militaristic form.[75] As here, visual and moral metaphors of ‘germ warfare’ could be deployed in strikingly partisan ways.

War-time diction offered further synergies of this kind. In spite of the etymological heresies involved, Germans were, for instance, repeatedly constructed as *germ-Huns* or, in contracted forms, as simply *germs*, emanating from *Germ-huny*. ‘With Mr. Dimmer on the machine-gun we used to feel a bit safe’, states a letter from Lance Corporal H. Smith of the King’s Royal Rifle Corps in December 1914: ‘One day the tripod went astray, so he placed the gun on a bank, and you should have seen the ‘Germs’ scatter’.[76] ‘As the “Germhuns” are at present giving us a few minutes peace, I take the chance of writing you a few lines’, another letter from 1915 comments.[77] *Germ-hun*s was, notes Pauwels, ‘a nasty but potent combination’.[78] Usually ascribed to the violently patriotic British magazine *John Bull*, it would, in reality, percolate into popular use across the war, appearing (as in the examples below) in a letter from a French citizen in the *Star* in 1914, here with implicit reference to *John Bull*, and in a propagandist account of the spread of Spanish flu, attributed to the activities of what is termed the ‘Influenzal Hun’:

> Dear Monsieur, my letter has but this object: To express our gratitude to the English people who have come to our help, and who have resolved to destroy those whom a London paper calls the 'Germ-Huns.' Perhaps you will never hear from me again, for I have the firm hope of giving my life for my country, but I would like to die on the enemy's soil. Thus far God has not granted this wish, and has spared me, but it remains. Hurrah, hurrah for dear England. (*Star*, 24 October 1914)

> GERMS AND GERM-HUNS. The discovery in South Africa that the Germans are responsible for the outbreak of a violent form of influenza,

[75] *Daily Express*, 11 June 1915.

[76] *Daily Express*, 19 December 1914.

[77] ‘Experiences of a Motor Driver at the Front’, *Scotsman*, 15 May 1915.

[78] Jacques Pauwels, *The Great Class War 1914-1918* (Toronto: Lorimer, 2016), 248.

> which is working havoc in various parts of the world, probably accounts for the prodigal use of the word "Huns." They are "GermHuns" in a literal as well as a historic sense. (*Wairarapa Age*, 10 October 1918).

Similar tropes appear in articles on inoculation and the dangers of typhoid at the Front. For example, 'Dr Germ-Hun', complete with German military uniform, is placed ominously in the foreground of anti-inoculation propaganda issued by the British Union for Abolition of Vivisection.[79] Advertising for Kruschen Salts in the *Illustrated London News* likewise images disease as the ''Germ-Huns' in their trenches', while promoting Kruschen Salts for readers on the Home Front as the 'first line of defence'.[80] Attendant images of battle as cleansing or purifying readily gained wider ideological traction.[81]

The widespread figuration of Germans as vermin merely added a further layer of symbolism, synthesising physical and moral disgust to highly charged effect. 'Prussiaribus-Kaisericus—Swankioribus', a propagandist postcard from 1915, hence represents the *Germ-Hun* as a visual fusion of louse and helmet-wearing German officer. A bottle of 'Allied Mixture, Guaranteed to kill all kinds of Vermin' is strategically placed to the right. 'Kill that insect, Tommy' – the war-time slogan of 'Harrison's Pomade', a product which extolled its efficacy in eliminating bodily vermin – trades on similar metaphorical resonances.[82] It was often requested by soldiers at the Front. The fact that lice – and other vermin – are repeatedly depicted as German-speaking in texts of this kind is perhaps unsurprising. 'Kamerad,' a troop of beetles, waving a white flag, cry on being confronted by a bottle of 'Hawley's I.K. Insect Killer' in *Woman's Life Magazine* in 1917.[83] 'Germs' depicted as germanised dirt likewise

---

[79] See e.g. propagandist advertising for the 'British Union for Abolition of Vivisection … Inoculation against Tyranny', *Punch*, January 3, 1915. Literal as well as metaphorical uses of germ warfare were also in evidence. See e.g. the propagandist article 'Making War with Germs. Savage Proposal of an Austrian General'. By Lt.-Col. Roustam Bek (*Daily Express*, 17 December 1914): 'In some Russian newspapers, and especially in the "Army Messenger," which is issued by the staff of the armies at the front, it was recently stated that the use of cholera cultures as a weapon of modern warfare was proposed officially by General von Hoetzendorf for use against the Russians and Servians'.

[80] Susan Kingsley Kent. *Aftershocks* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). ProQuest Ebook Central. Web. 20 September 2016.

[81] See Jane Potter, 'A great purifier': The Great War in Women's Romances and Memoirs 1914-1918'. In Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate (eds.), *Women's Fiction and the Great War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 87.

[82] Advertisement, 'Harrison's Pomade', *Star*, 11 April 1916.

[83] Advertisement, 'Hawley's I.K. Insect Killer', *Woman's Life Magazine*, 26 May 1917.

surrender to the force of 'Zog', uttering 'Kamerad' as socio-moral cleanliness is restored.[84] Similar images appear in contemporary fiction. 'The Germans are seen as giant vermin', Potter notes of Ayer's *Richard Chatterton V.C.*, a novel of 1915 featuring 'pestilential Germans'.[85] 'In socio-moral disgust people and entire populations can be seen as sources of contamination', writes Beck.[86] Discourse across a range of text-types in WW1 illuminates this point with striking clarity.

As such examples suggest, the moral core of *cleanliness* could be incorporated into twentieth-century war-time diction with recurrent and xenophobic force. Widely used in constructing the patriotic ethics of war, readings of moral purity remained highly potent in their capacity to conceptualise right and wrong, ally and enemy. 'US vs. THEM; ME vs. YOU. These are crucial oppositions to a full theory of disgust', writes Miller.[87] They are oppositions which clearly extend, at a range of points, to *cleanliness* too. A 'full theory' of *cleanliness* must, as these twentieth-century examples attest, incorporate meanings which inhabit a moral sphere and which (contrary to the *OED*) by no means come to an end in early modern England. 'Ethnic cleansing', a phrase popularised during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, reminds us that the moral and political potential of *cleanliness* is far from exhausted.

[84] Advertisement, 'Zog', *Daily Express*, 25 April 1916.
[85] Potter, 'A great purifier', 96.

[86] Beck, *Unclean*, 74.

[87] Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, 50.