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OCCUPANTS OF MEMORY
War in Twentieth-Century Canadian Fiction

Peter Webb

Thesis submitted to the
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We must never allow ourselves to believe that progress is impossible. At the same time, we need not delude ourselves that “history” has accomplished much in the way of human improvement.

- William T. Vollmann, *Rising Up and Rising Down*, 22

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ABSTRACT

“Occupants of Memory: War in Twentieth-Century Canadian Fiction” examines key novels and short stories about wartime and post-war experience spanning nine decades. Beginning with Sara Jeannette Duncan’s *The Imperialist* (1904) and ending with Timothy Findley’s “Stones” (1988), this dissertation juxtaposes works by such well-known Canadian authors as Ralph Connor, Hugh MacLennan, and L.M. Montgomery with lesser-known but important works by William Allister, Charles Yale Harrison, Edward McCourt, and Colin McDougall. Unlike previous studies of Canadian war literature, most of which focus on an individual author, a single war, or a particular theme, this dissertation argues that war fiction is a tradition in which authors influence, reflect, and counter one another throughout the century. Discourses of social memory and nationalism/ anti-nationalism provide a theoretical basis for discussion, and descriptions of major events from the South African War, through the two world wars, to the Cold War form an historical context for authors and their works. References to European and American war literature and its critics show Canadian works to be comparable to, yet different from, their international counterparts. Particularly notable is the way in which Canadian works emphasize a dichotomy between romance and realism, rarely broaching the high modernism that is the hallmark of many international works. *Occupants of Memory* lays the groundwork for a broad critical discourse of Canadian war literature and its related subjects.

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Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my grandfather, Harry Aldridge (1914-2005). A tank driver in the Royal Artillery during the Second World War, he was a true gentleman and one of my best friends.

INTRODUCTION

The Tradition of Canadian War Fiction

In the autumn of 1916, Major Charles W. Gordon, a chaplain with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, on leave in London, entered the Alhambra Theatre to watch a performance of *The Bing Boys Are Here* starring George Robey, the era's best-loved music hall entertainer.¹ Gordon, known to the civilian world as Ralph Connor, Canada's most famous novelist, had just left France where his regiment, the Cameron Highlanders, fought at Pozières during the Battle of the Somme. The bloodiest and perhaps worst-organized battle in human history, the Somme killed or wounded 1.2 million soldiers between July and November 1916.² Gordon helped ambulance drivers to deliver the wounded to hospital tents that were so busy they "were forced to lay [the] wounded on the grass outside in the bitter October rain" (Connor, *Postscript* 264). En route to England, the train in which he was travelling derailed, killing eighteen men and wounding another seventy-seven (Connor, *Postscript* 275). Gordon, the senior officer on hand, commanded the rescue effort.

Instead of giving Gordon a much-needed respite from the war, Robey's performance offended him. "The great George hardly made me smile," Gordon later recalled. "The whole business seemed almost sacrilegious when I thought of the scenes from which I had come" (Connor, *Postscript* 276). The music hall was a place of light, colour, laughter, and frivolity—too sharp and ironic a contrast with the darkness,

drabness, cacophony, and death of the trenches. Disgusted, Gordon left the theatre and retreated to his hotel room, where for two days he lay in bed, refusing visitors and “feeling quite rotten, no appetite, sleepless, temperature, and all the rest” (Connor, *Postscript* 276). No doubt he suffered from post-traumatic stress—“a case of nerves” in the parlance of the time.

A similar incident occurs in Charles Yale Harrison’s *Generals Die in Bed* (1930), a semi-autobiographical novel about the author’s experiences as a Canadian infantryman during the last two years of the war. Harrison’s unnamed narrator leaves the front after a brutal trench raid in which he bayonets—“murders” in his view—a young German soldier. In London, he attends a music hall performance and reacts to it much like Gordon did: “I feel that people should not be sitting laughing at jokes about plum and apple jam when boys are dying out in France. They sit here in stiff shirts, their faces and jowls are smooth with daily shaving and dainty cosmetics, their bellies are full, and out there we are being eaten by lice, we are sitting trembling in shivering dugouts” (161). Visibly agitated, the narrator overhears the “stiff shirts” whispering to one another, dismissing him as “shell-shocked” (161).

Both Gordon and Harrison understood the violence of the trenches and the human cost of war, and they recognized the inability of civilians and entertainers to comprehend it from the safety of home. Both men were traumatized by their experiences and felt alienated, albeit temporarily, from the society they had volunteered to protect. It is remarkable that Connor (I will use the pen-name from now on) and Harrison published war novels that are polar opposites in terms of ideology, diction, and political outlook. Connor’s *The Sky Pilot in No Man’s Land* (1919), the second of his three First World

War novels, treats war as a temporary aberration on the path of human progress. To die for one's country is "splendid" (256); the wounded who await medical attention are described as "[j]ubilant, exultant in spite of their pain" (329); and the Somme, with its million corpses, is "only a temporary setback," allowing its survivors to maintain "resolute cheerfulness" (334). Conversely, in *Generals Die in Bed* soldiers are "mutinous" (218); the wounded are "groaning and howling" (260); and soldiers commit "bloody murder" (268) in futile battles. Connor was a muscular Christian and Canadian imperialist, Harrison an atheist and Trotskyite. Connor's novels reflect romantic jingoism, Harrison's bitter realism, yet each author's outlook was reinforced by his war experience.

The dichotomy between Connor and Harrison is the most striking example of the contradictions in Canadian war fiction of the twentieth century. Romance and realism clash constantly, often in the work of the same author. For example, in Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* (1904), the only significant Canadian novel concerning the South African War of 1899-1902, Duncan's social realism, inspired by W.D. Howells and Henry James, conflicts with protagonist Lorne Murchison's romantic view of war as a catalyst of imperial progress. In Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* (1941), a realistic depiction of the 1917 Halifax Explosion is central to an otherwise romantic tale about generational conflict and national progress. A more complex mingling of romance and realism appears in Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977), a work of postmodern metafiction that subverts not only the romantic tropes of progress and heroism but also the realist principles of objectivity and truth.

The prevalence of romance and realism, to the virtual exclusion of modernism, distinguishes Canadian war fiction from that of several other countries. In her study of predominantly European and American war narratives, Evelyn Cobley identifies “diametrically opposed tendencies” between “documentary realism and experimental modernism” (10) in the literature of the First World War. She deems Henri Barbusse’s seminal anti-war novel *Le Feu* (1916) and David Jones’s experimental fictional-poetic hybrid *In Parenthesis* (1937) to be formal opposites, and shows how each interprets the meaning and ideology of war through different representational strategies. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell shows realism and modernism to be in conflict with romance (a genre Cobley overlooks) in British war narratives and poems; he bases his discussion of the post-war shift to modernism on Frye’s theory of modes in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), highlighting the ironic mode as predominant in modern war literature.

Cobley’s and Fussell’s theories have limited application to Canadian war fiction, few of which can be termed modernist. Although Duncan, a successful journalist and independent traveller, was an early example of the New Woman in Canadian literature, *The Imperialist* is anchored in Victorian conceptions of form and society. Harrison’s terse, visceral prose is comparable to Hemingway’s, but *Generals Die in Bed* is a linear, realist narrative, not an experimental or formally complex one. Colin McDougall’s novel of the Second World War, *Execution* (1958), is closer to a modernist novel, as is MacLennan’s *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1959), but neither is as formally adventurous as many international war novels of the time or such modernist Canadian works as Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook* (1959).

In Canadian war fiction, there is no work comparable to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) with its post-Freudian exploration of war veteran Septimus Warren Smith's tortured psyche. Instead, 1925 is the year in which Connor published his third romantic war novel *Treading the Winepress*, in which his delusions of progress remain intact. Canadian war fiction has no work as monumental as Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924-28), none as formally innovative as Jones's *In Parenthesis*, none as brutally witty as Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961), none as complex as Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973).

This is not to say that Canadian war fiction lacks masterpieces: *The Imperialist* (not a "war novel" but war-related) is probably the best Canadian novel published before the 1920s; *Generals Die in Bed* is more politically biting than the work to which it is most often compared, Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929); *Execution* stands among the finest novels of the Second World War, in spite of being less well-known than *Catch 22* or Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny* (1951); *The Wars* and its successor, *Famous Last Words* (1981), are landmarks of postmodern fiction and Canadian literature. Shorter works like Harrison's "Story for Mr. Hemingway" (1935) and Findley's "Stones" (1988) condense novel-sized themes into briefer structures.

Other works are important for epitomizing the mood of particular eras and representing crucial aspects of Canadian war experience. Connor's novels, dated as they now are, reached millions of readers in their day, reflecting and influencing the patriotic spirit of a conservative majority. L.M. Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* (1920) is a less cloying example of the patriotic novel, showing how women both upheld and resisted the romantic mythology of war. MacLennan, the first Canadian author since John Richardson

to have both a career-long interest in war and lasting influence on Canadian literature, shows the link between war and the rise of Canadian nationalism in the wake of the two world wars. Edward McCourt's *Music at the Close* (1947) creates a realistic portrait of Second World War experience in Western Canada, and William Allister's *A Handful of Rice* (1961) is an unjustly neglected novel about Canadian prisoners-of-war in Japan.

These works, and others covered more briefly in this dissertation, form a tradition of Canadian war fiction in the twentieth century, a tradition that is largely overlooked in Canadian criticism. Only one major study, Dagmar Novak's *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel* (2000), has brought works from more than one war into a single framework. Novak's work is groundbreaking, but by introducing readers to a vast array of forgotten and second-rate novels she eschews critical depth in favour of bibliographic comprehensiveness. Critically speaking, there is little to be gained by summarizing the plots—one could say “the one plot”—of dozens of patriotic romances published between the mid-teens and mid-twenties, when the novels of Ralph Connor epitomize them all. The same is true of McDougall's *Execution*, the masterpiece among thirty or more hard-boiled novels published by veterans of the Second World War. Admirably, Novak brings Findley's *The Wars* in line with the works that precede it, yet she overlooks *Famous Last Words*, a formally different yet equally important war novel.

Occupants of Memory is neither a response to Novak nor an attempt at one-upmanship. It conceives of the tradition of Canadian war fiction differently, as something century-long, less specific to any particular war than to war in general. It shares John Bourne's, Peter Liddle's, and Ian Whitehead's historical claim that the two world wars were not separate events, but two halves of a single “Great War” that lasted from 1914 to

1945.³ It is difficult, for example, to decide whether the First or Second World War is more crucial to MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945) when both are important. Similarly, *The Watch That Ends the Night* bridges the two world wars, the Spanish Civil War, and the Korean War, making critical categorization under a single war inappropriate.

"Occupants of Memory" widens the historical lens even farther to consider the South African War as a crucial forerunner to the First World War and to show how post-Second World War novels reflect the anxieties of the Cold War. Findley's reflections on a "dehumanized world" (Aitken 88) in the 1980s share much in common with Harrison's socialist-inspired outrage in the 1930s, and there are echoes in MacLennan's war novels of the forties and fifties of the post-war optimism and spirit of nation building that enliven Duncan's work a half-century earlier. To focus analysis on fiction inspired by a single war, as such articles as Eric Thompson's "Canadian Fiction of the Great War" and Jonathan Vance's "The Soldier as Novelist: Literature, History, and the Great War" (both published in *Canadian Literature*) do, is to miss the advantages of a longer study in drawing connections between fiction based on different wars.

To argue that a body of literature is a tradition, rather than a series of coincidentally connected works, is to presume that authors read, influence, inspire, and contradict one another. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot argues that "the whole of the literature of [an author's] own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order," and "no artist... has his complete meaning alone" (2696). Establishing mutual awareness among Canadian writers of war fiction presents a critical problem because of the paucity of biographical and comparative studies of these writers, yet there are numerous connections to be found nonetheless. Connor and Duncan

were born a year apart (in 1860 and 1861, respectively); both were imperialists of Scottish-Presbyterian background, and both were personally acquainted with Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier and various editors of the Toronto *Globe* newspaper.⁴ Although Connor and Duncan may never have met (Duncan spent most of her life in India), both wrote fiction that reflected similar outlooks on nationhood and morality. Connor and Montgomery were also circumstantially connected: they shared a publisher, McClelland and Stewart, at the time they published their war novels were Canada's two most popular authors in a small literary scene.

A closer relationship existed between Hugh MacLennan and Colin McDougall, both employees of McGill University in the 1950s. MacLennan read and commented on a working draft of *Execution*, causing McDougall to dub it the "H.M." manuscript in honour of his mentor.⁵ Thirteen years after *Execution*'s publication, MacLennan continued to praise it as a novel that "has poignantly, marvellously, and succinctly concentrated the whole dilemma of justice in an organized society" (Cameron, I: 146).

Further evidence that authors did not find their "complete meaning alone" is to be found in the works themselves. In *Generals Die in Bed*, a middle-aged infantryman, Anderson, spouts Christian dogma to the irritation of his younger comrades. "Shut up, sky-pilot," (7) one of them spits, using a term that appears in the titles of two Connor novels, including *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*. In *Music at the Close*, McCourt mentions Connor (as Gordon) among "leaders who had died on behalf of mankind" (220). Although Findley's fiction never mentions Harrison, several scenes in *The Wars*, including one where Robert Ross "murders" an innocent German soldier during a

botched raid, may allude to *Generals Die in Bed*, and both authors shared literary influences.

Canadian war fiction reflects the influence of European and American works. Duncan cites Henry James and W.D. Howells (to whom she was distantly related) as inspirations, and the spectre of Kipling overhangs an impromptu political address given by the South African veteran Alfred Hesketh in *The Imperialist* (190). Harrison drew the title of *Generals Die in Bed* from Siegfried Sassoon's poem "Base Details," in the last line of which a feckless military officer predicts that he will "toddle safely home and die—in bed." In *The Wars*, Findley quotes Sassoon (102) and mentions Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen, Virginia Woolf, and other British modernists. In *Famous Last Words*, he uses Ezra Pound's poetic cycle *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1921) as the basis for his protagonist of the same name. McDougall used American and European authors as his models. His conceptual notes for *Execution* indicate a desire to make it the artistic equivalent of William Faulkner's best work and Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*, and he read authors as diverse as Flaubert, Kafka, Tolstoy, and Evelyn Waugh in an effort to reach their standards.⁶

There is less evidence of Connor and Montgomery being influenced by European contemporaries, because their war novels of the 1920s are out-of-step with high modernism. To read Connor's trumpeting of war as a "Great Adventure" (22) in *Treading the Winepress*, published in 1925, is to realize that he is an author for whom "Channel Firing," "Anthem for Doomed Youth," and *The Waste Land* meant nothing. Similarly, neither Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* nor her journals of the war and post-war periods show any awareness of the war novels and essays of Vera Brittain, Rebecca West, or

Virginia Woolf. Even MacLennan, a writer with an expansive knowledge of literature past and present, had little taste for modernism's formal experimentations, preferring the realism of Tolstoy and other nineteenth-century masters.⁷

Although Canadian war fiction has rarely influenced that of other countries, a few notable instances have occurred—oddly, among the more obscure works. *Generals Die in Bed* provoked a tongue-in-cheek rebuttal from Ernest Hemingway in “A Natural History of Dead,” part of *Death in the Afternoon* (1932).⁸ Peregrine Acland's anti-war novel *All Else is Folly* (1929) features an effusive preface by Ford Madox Ford: “it will be little less than a scandal if the book is not read enormously widely.” The book was quickly forgotten. *Execution* won the praises of Saul Bellow and Vera Brittain, who wrote letters to McDougall expressing their admiration for his work.⁹ A few Canadian war novels were the basis for major motion pictures, including *Two Solitudes* (film 1978), Humphrey Cobb's *Paths of Glory* (1935, film 1957), and Lionel Shapiro's *The Sixth of June* (1955, film 1956).¹⁰ In the latter two cases, the reputations of the films have overshadowed those of the novels, thanks to Kirk Douglas's starring role in *Paths of Glory* (directed by Stanley Kubrick) and Robert Taylor's role in *D-Day: The Sixth of June*.

Canadian war fiction is an overlooked genre and most of its authors are forgotten by readers, publishers, and literary historians. Of the eighty-three war novels published between 1915 and 1969 and listed by Novak in the Appendix to *Dubious Glory*, only nine are currently in print.¹¹ The rest, including Connor's three war novels and Allister's *A Handful of Rice*, are available only in hard-to-find first editions; a few are in deleted paperback editions in Malcolm Ross's version of the New Canadian Library.¹² The only currently available Canadian edition of *Rilla of Ingleside* is a paperback for children. Two

other historically significant works, MacLennan's *So All Their Praises* (1932) and *A Man Should Rejoice* (1937), were never published.

A few key works have maintained greater stature, including *The Imperialist*, *Barometer Rising*, *Two Solitudes*, and *Execution*, all currently in print and with some critical history behind them (little of it recently, however). *Rilla of Ingleside* is part of the ever-popular Anne of Green Gables series and occasionally appears in the work of Montgomery scholars. *The Imperialist* is Duncan's best-known novel and is the only work in the purview of this dissertation to exist in a critical edition (by Tecumseh Press, 1996). Findley's war fiction is the most recognized and widely-read today, to the degree that *The Wars* and *Famous Last Words* overshadow every work of Canadian war fiction that precedes them.¹³

Although critical recovery of lost works is not the sole intention of "Occupants of Memory," it is one of them. It analyzes obscure works like Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* and "Story for Mr. Hemingway" and MacLennan's *So All Their Praises* and *A Man Should Rejoice*, placing them in a critical continuum with MacLennan's better-known works and Findley's famous ones. The dissertation presents a selective literary history based on important works from a century-long tradition of war fiction. The decisions of what to include and exclude were guided by a number of factors: aesthetic appeal (based on critical consensus whenever possible), historical importance (with support from Berton, Buitenhuis, Keshen, Vance, and other historians), and critical and theoretical interest (works that reveal important things about Canadian literature, nationhood, and shared memory). Although a work might or might not fulfill the aesthetic criteria, the last two factors are essential.

Aesthetics is not the best way for a critic to choose his subjects, because by focusing on works that one considers subjectively appealing—"good reads"—one risks overlooking less-appealing yet important works. Sometimes, though, aesthetic decisions are unavoidable, as when one confronts thirty-odd novels written by Canadian veterans (many of them inexperienced writers) about the Second World War and finds that they all have similar plots, focus on a major battle or wartime event, and use terse, journalistic prose reminiscent of Hemingway. To discuss them all is pointless, and so it becomes notable that McDougall's *Execution* is aesthetically outstanding—a view supported by such readers as Bellow, MacLennan, and Warren Cariou—at the same time as it typifies the form and tone of the other works.

In other cases, aesthetics has little bearing on why a work should be analyzed. Although Connor's novels, with their sentimental diction, stock characters, and close relation to jingoist propaganda, are the definition of "bad" writing, to dismiss them on those grounds is to ignore the way they epitomize patriotic ideals about war and conceptions of national identity at the time they were published—not to mention their monumental influence on thousands of readers in the 1920s. As with Second World War novels, Connor's novels stand among a host of similar works—about thirty—published between 1915 and the mid-1920s, and Connor's former prominence makes him the best representative of a patriotic discourse that has been critically neglected until now. A perusal of any key study or catalogue of war literature—Fussell, for example, or the many war books in Penguin's Modern Classics series—might lead one to assume that anti-war writers like Barbusse, Owen, and Sassoon were the predominant influences of their time, but they were not—at least not in Canada.

Analyzing works based on their historical importance brings literary criticism close to historiography that is based on fictional (hence potentially problematic to a historian) sources. There is a lack of literary criticism about Canadian war fiction, compared to the many historical studies that use war fiction as a primary source. Currently, to learn the background of Canadian war literature, one turns to historians like Berton, Keshen, and Vance more than to critics like Frye, Hutcheon or Keith. Studies of individual works like *Barometer Rising* or *The Wars* are common, but rare are those that draw connections between MacLennan's and Findley's body of work. Historians illuminate the biographies of authors and the historical contexts of their work, yet a greater engagement with war fiction by literary scholars would balance the current emphasis on "war" over "literature." This dissertation is one such contribution.

An exclusively historical approach to Canadian war fiction can be problematic, as Copley argues in *Representing War*. She highlights the historical underpinnings of most seminal studies of war fiction—Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Stanley Cooperman's *World War I and the American Novel* (1967), Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes Twilight* (1965), and others—and questions their assumptions about war literature's "historically verifiable" descriptions (14). Basing her study on poststructural theory, Copley finds that descriptive war narratives contain no "guarantee of factual accuracy" and are "hence open to distortion or ideological manipulation" (*Representing* 33). At the same time, she invokes Hayden White's principle that "historiography uses narrative and rhetorical strategies which are not much different from the devices of fiction" (*Representing* 15), showing that the generic distinctions between military history and war novels and stories are tentative, not absolute.

Despite Cobley's warning, there are many aspects of Canadian war experience that are more fully explored in novels and stories than in conventional history. In *Generals Die in Bed*, for example, Harrison depicts Canadian infantrymen looting the French town of Arras and shooting unarmed German soldiers with murderous zeal as the Germans try to surrender. In *Execution*, Canadian troops in Italy slaughter a pair of hapless Italian prisoners and later execute one of their comrades for a crime of which he is innocent. In *A Handful of Rice*, Canadian prisoners-of-war are cheated out of their rations by one of their own officers, who commits treason by exploiting his men on behalf of corrupt Japanese officers. Seldom do historians venture into such controversial territory, and, as a result, patriotic clichés—"our nation was born at Vimy Ridge" (Hill, qtd. in Canada, *House*)—tend to go unchallenged in the Canadian discourse about war. It takes audacity to write, as Harrison did, that "the attack on Vimy... had all the fire and spontaneity of a mass uprising. When we charged up the hill we leaped upon the Germans and bayoneted them not as impersonal enemies but as tyrants and oppressors who had tortured and humiliated us all winter long" ("Story" 731). Seldom do historians depict events so bluntly and passionately.

The creative freedom enjoyed by fiction writers gives them a buffer against accusations of slander and verbal treason. In *The Wars*, Findley depicts a Canadian infantry officer being raped by his comrades and later shooting a crazed commanding officer. The fact that Findley makes no claims to historical verifiability gives his novel this creative leeway. Did such things occur in war? Not precisely perhaps, but equally horrible things certainly did, and Canadian soldiers were not morally immune to them. Fiction can cut to the emotional truth of war in ways that historiography, which relies on

sources that are often censored or sanctioned by military and government authorities, cannot.

Some writers of war fiction are meticulous in their research and documentation, employing methodologies not far different from those of historians. MacLennan's depiction of the Halifax Explosion in *Barometer Rising* is as accurate as that of any conventional history of the event, based partly on his own observations of it and partly on research.¹⁴ McDougall composed *Execution* with an obsessive attention to factual details about Canadian involvement in the Italian campaign of World War II.¹⁵ Thought to be fabricated by the novel's early reviewers, his depiction of the execution of Private Jones by his own army was given further credence by the publication of Andrew Clark's *A Keen Soldier: The Execution of Second World War Private Harold Pringle* (2002). To dismiss such renderings of events in novels as "untrue" and hence inferior to those of conventional history is to have too great a faith in the idea that historians are immune to distorting truth.

Sometimes authors do not so much interpret events as interpolate them. One example is Findley's *Famous Last Words*, which takes such historical personages as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Charles Lindbergh, and Joachim von Ribbentrop, and mingles them with fictional characters drawn from modernist literature and Findley's imagination. Conversations that never occurred are placed in the mouths of real people, and real events—the Windsors' visit to Hitler's Germany, for example—are integrated into a plot that re-imagines history in a fictional context. *Famous Last Words* is unique in Canadian war fiction, a sweeping espionage thriller that is cosmopolitan in setting and innovative in form. MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night* was a previous attempt

to free the war novel from the constraints of nativism and linearity, but Findley's literary tour-de-force is the first Canadian war novel to move in step with, rather than behind, literary developments in the rest of the world.

"Occupants of Memory" takes some of its theoretical cues from the discourse of social (or collective) memory, a theory with roots in the philosophy of Henri Bergson and the sociology of Maurice Halbwachs.¹⁶ It has proven useful in a number of previous studies, including Vance's *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (1997) and Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995). The discourse describes the mutual influence of individual and group memory and the "dialectical relationship between experience and narrative" (Antze and Lambek xviii). Thus it illuminates the ways in which authors translate personal experiences and public mythologies of war into fictional narratives, often with an acute sensitivity to the public impact of their work. Harrison, for example, dedicates *Generals Die in Bed* "to the bewildered youths—British, Australian, Canadian and German—who were killed in that wood a few miles beyond Amiens," showing an awareness of his potential to reflect shared experience and speak for a larger community of soldiers in his novel.

Social memory operates on the principle that communities create common narratives out of separate yet similar experiences. As Vance shows, these narratives are "mythic" in nature, comprised of "a complex mixture of fact, wishful thinking, half-truth, and outright invention" (*Death* 3). Events and experiences are not so much true as *believed* to be true by large numbers of people, so that they become enshrined in the cultural history of a particular time and place. Some myths are temporary, like the one

mentioned in *Rilla of Ingleside* that falsely blamed German saboteurs for “burning our Parliament Buildings” (158).¹⁷ Others are more tenacious, including the militia myth that dominated Canadian military policy in the first half of the twentieth century. This myth harboured the presumption that men raised in the backwoods and fields of Canada made better soldiers than salaried professionals in a permanent army.¹⁸ It is implicit in Lorne Murchison’s militarist views in *The Imperialist* and the home-spun savviness of soldiers in Connor’s novels. Findley debunks it in *The Wars* when, for instance, Robert Ross gets a Colt revolver from his father but has no idea how to use it, botching the euthanizing of an injured horse aboard a troop ship.

Social, or collective, memory can be problematic when it is used to create false generalizations about community or national experience. To base an argument, as George Mosse does, on “the Myth of the War Experience” (9) without qualification is to presume that all nations and all soldiers have one common experience of war, when they do not. There is no single “myth,” no universal “experience” that applies to any wartime generation in its entirety. There are many myths, many experiences. For that reason, this dissertation uses the term “shared memory,” rather than collective memory, to emphasize how a given war experience may be common to a particular social group—women in Prince Edward Island in *Rilla of Ingleside*, for example—without assuming that the experience is universal to all members of a nation, gender, or culture.

Canadian war experiences were different from those of other countries because they were moulded by different social, geographic, and logistical factors. Young Canadians who enlisted in 1914, for example, did so to fight a war at least three thousand miles from home at the behest of Canadian imperialist politicians who wished to curry

favour with Britain. Canada was never seriously threatened by Germany, and the recruits knew it; ideology, not necessity, provoked their enlistment. Compare the motivations of Belgian and French soldiers, who enlisted to protect homelands threatened by Germany. This difference is reflected in war fiction, when, for instance, Jem Blythe in *Rilla of Ingleside* talks of the war as “a family row” in which “we’ll see some fun” (20), or when Harrison’s disgruntled infantrymen sing with “mock pathos”:

Take me over the sea, where Heinie he can’t get at me;
Oh my, I’m too young to die,
I want to go home. (5)

These sentiments connote the Canadians’ detachment from the war’s origins and long-term implications. There is no such detachment for the French soldiers in Barbusse’s *Le Feu*, who cannot dream of “fun” or going “home” as they pass through their own decimated villages and try in vain to recognize “some semblance of locality” in them (139).

Canada’s distance from the front in every twentieth-century war created a distinctive relationship between soldiers and civilians, a relationship war fiction reflects. Canada, unlike most nations, never experienced a major attack from invading forces; there is no Blitz, Pearl Harbour, Stalingrad, Hiroshima, or Holocaust in its history. As a result, war fiction typically constructs an idea of Canada as a safe haven or “home front” in which domestic life carries on relatively normally, in ironic contrast to the battlefield. In *The Imperialist*, for example, the pomp and circumstance of Victoria Day show how

far removed Canada is from war's realities. In *Generals Die in Bed* soldiers on the Western Front ridicule civilian naiveté and castigate news and propaganda in domestic newspapers. In *Execution*, soldiers in Italy dream of returning to prosperous lives in a pastoral Canada, an ideal that isolates them ever farther from the domestic world.

Although *Barometer Rising* is the only novel in which disaster and violence come to roost in Canada, by the end the catastrophe of the Halifax Explosion gives way to an idealized vision of a peaceful Canada, bonded by national brotherhood and free of war.

Discourses of nationalism and anti-nationalism are part of another theoretical basis for "Occupants of Memory." The dissertation explores how war novels and stories reflect and contribute to ideas of Canada as a developing nation, with war as a primary catalyst of both conflict and reconciliation. Imperialism dominates the first two decades of the twentieth century, with Duncan's, Connor's, and Montgomery's work reflecting a conception of Canada founded on British cultural principles but growing ever-more politically independent. Carl Berger's premise that "[i]mperialism was one form of Canadian nationalism" (*Sense of Power* 259) holds true in early twentieth-century war fiction, as authors depict the galvanizing influence of war on Canada's attempts to establish itself in the realm of international affairs. MacLennan's work departs from imperialism to construct an ideal of nationhood founded on nativist principles and national unity, separate from the outdated values of British colonialism. In MacLennan's war novels, Canada assumes a mythic status as Neil McCrae's mind sweeps across the Canadian landscape, a metaphoric reflection of Benedict Anderson's theory of the nation as an "imagined community."

A more sceptical view of Canada appears in the anti-war fiction of Harrison and McDougall, where soldiers reject notions of war as an agent of progressive national development. *Generals Die in Bed* and *Execution* disrupt the conception of nationhood set out by MacLennan and others by showing the futility of war as opposed to its progressive influence on society. In Harrison, socialism influences an anti-nationalist stance against the idealism of warring nations, for whom hapless soldiers die without justification or purpose. McDougall takes a different approach, using biblical allusions to construct an apocalyptic vision of human community and morality, in which the nation is a tantalizing but elusive delusion for soldiers who can never return home. Although Findley focuses his attention less on the nation than on the community, "Stones" continues McDougall's exploration of how soldiers traumatized by war become psychologically and morally divorced from the domestic world.

This dissertation is organized along both chronological and thematic lines to show how the tradition of war fiction develops through the twentieth century. Each chapter focuses on key authors—one to three in each chapter—and their principal works about war, in order to show how each epitomizes an important aspect of the tradition. Other minor authors and works form a context for discussion, as does a basic historical overview at the beginning of each chapter that allows each novel or story to be understood as the product of its time. This approach necessitates more historical and biographical data than a work of literary criticism might ordinarily have, but readers without a grounding in history or previous knowledge of the more obscure authors (Harrison, McDougall, Allister) should be able to read the dissertation as a self-contained work. At the end of each chapter, explanatory notes make suggestions for further reading,

elaborate on points of context or history, and highlight works of secondary importance to the main text.

Chapter 1, “War and Imperialism,” focuses on works about the South African War of 1899–1902. Because the war is so rarely mentioned in Canadian works of the period, the chapter focuses almost exclusively on Duncan’s *The Imperialist*, in which Canadian involvement in the Battle of Paardeberg fuels the imperialist sentiments of the protagonist, Lorne Murchison. The novel shows how war helped to reinforce a link between imperialism and Canadian nationalism, and it establishes a patriotic tone and attitude to civic militarism that lasted well beyond the First World War in Canadian literature.

Chapter 2, “Patriotic War Fiction of the First World War,” concentrates on the novels of Connor and Montgomery. Connor’s three war novels—*The Major*, *The Sky Pilot in No Man’s Land*, and *Treading the Winepress*—and Montgomery’s *Rilla of Ingleside* epitomize the patriotic idealism of a society still oblivious to the long-term effects of technological warfare. More than simply naïve, however, these novels illuminate cultural tensions in wartime Canada. Connor’s novels provide some of the earliest depictions of modern warfare in Canadian literature in a period before the modernists redefined the terms of such depictions, while *Rilla of Ingleside* concentrates on feminine and regional identity, highlighting female agency as an important aspect of war experience.

Chapter 3, “The Anti-War Movement,” focuses on the period between the two world wars when Canadian fiction joined the European and American outcry against patriotic idealism. Harrison is the counterpart to such European anti-war novelists as Ford

and Remarque. *Generals Die in Bed* and “Story for Mr. Hemingway” show Canada’s involvement in the First World War from a terrifying perspective: that of the private soldier under fire, forced to brutalize his German opponents, plagued by rats and lice behind the lines, misunderstood and ridiculed by civilians while on leave. Harrison’s work challenges patriotic and imperialist attitudes toward war by focusing on the plight of the soldier-as-proletariat.

Chapter 4, “Hugh MacLennan: War and Nationalism,” is the first of two chapters that focus on a single author as a major voice in war fiction over an extended period. MacLennan was the first Canadian author to focus on war in an effort to create a consistent national vision, one that acknowledges both individual suffering and the larger implications of war on society. In an age when few major Canadian writers wrote war novels—his contemporaries Morley Callaghan, F.P. Grove, and Sinclair Ross all avoided the subject—MacLennan brought war into the Canadian literary mainstream. The chapter analyzes MacLennan’s major war-related novels, *Barometer Rising*, *Two Solitudes*, and *The Watch That Ends the Night* as a domestic war trilogy, and also considers two unpublished novels, *So All Their Praises* and *A Man Should Rejoice*, as early works that anticipate the later novels.

Chapter 5, “Novels of the Second World War,” discusses one of the most critically neglected periods of war fiction. From the end of the Second World War through the 1960s many ex-soldiers published novels about their experiences, usually before fading into obscurity. The chapter focuses on McDougall’s *Execution* as the one masterpiece of this period and gives secondary prominence to McCourt’s *Music at the Close* and Allister’s *A Handful of Rice* as well-written, overlooked novels about critical

aspects of war experience—the prairies in war time in McCourt’s novel, and Canadians in a Japanese POW camp in Allister’s.

Chapter 6, “Timothy Findley: The Rise of Contemporary War Fiction,” analyzes the work of one of the few major Canadian authors, after MacLennan, to sustain a long-term exploration of war. The main focus is on *The Wars*, *Famous Last Words*, and “Stones,” all of which use metafictional devices—archives, personal narrative, time shifts—to show how memory and history become mediated through second-hand recollections and documents. Findley was one of the first Canadian fiction writers to write about war without having first-hand experience of it, and his lack of personal experience gives him a perspective that earlier writers, haunted by personal memories, rarely have.

Any number of authors and texts from the vast body of Canadian war fiction might have been included in this dissertation that were not. Some of the exclusions are based on similarities to works that are discussed, others from an intention not to veer off on too many war-related subjects that do not constitute war itself. To include, for instance, a chapter on Canadian fiction about the Holocaust would be to skim briefly through a vast subject and body of works that require a different critical and historical framework. The same is true of works about other forms of wartime persecution, including Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, about Canada’s internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War. There is already much criticism about *Obasan* that shows how it operates both within and without the context of war fiction.

The dissertation also avoids very recent works—Jane Urquhart’s *The Stone Carvers* (2001) and Francis Itani’s *Deafening* (2003), to name two well-known ones—

because there have been so many Canadian war novels published in the last decade, more than any previous decade, that keeping tabs on them quickly becomes an impossible task during the research process. Moreover, few recent works have superseded Findley's war fiction in prominence or innovation, or as quintessential representatives of contemporary Canadian war fiction.

It is my hope that other critics will expand, develop, and re-contextualize the terms of discussion set out in this dissertation to build a multifaceted body of criticism about Canadian war literature. There is much work left to be done, and this dissertation is meant as a beginning, not an end to the discourse.

Notes to Introduction

¹ Ralph Connor, *Postscript to Adventure*, p. 276. Connor identifies neither the show nor the theatre, but he names Robey, who starred in *The Bing Boys Are Here* at the Alhambra from April 1916 to February 1917.

² In *The First World War*, pp. 298-299, Keegan claims that between July and November of 1916, 600,000 Germans were killed or wounded on the Somme and that British casualties were 419,654 and French 194,451.

³ See the introduction to Bourne, Liddle, and Whitehead, eds., *The Great World War, 1914-45*, 2 vols. (2000).

⁴ See Duncan's letters, reproduced in the Tecumseh critical edition of *The Imperialist*, and Connor's references to Laurier and the *Globe* newspaper throughout *Postscript to Adventure*.

⁵ The draft is available as a typescript in Colin McDougall's papers, housed in the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of McGill University Libraries.

⁶ McDougall Papers, notebook and conceptual notes on various typed and handwritten pages.

⁷ For more on MacLennan's relation to, and opinion of, modernism, see Francis Zichy's essay "MacLennan and Modernism."

⁸ See the latter part of Chapter 3 for a full analysis of the Harrison-Hemingway connection.

⁹ Brittain's letter, dated 17 February 1959, and Bellow's, dated 5 January 1974, are preserved in the McDougall Papers at McGill.

¹⁰ *Two Solitudes* (1978) stars Stacey Keach and occasionally turns up on CBC-TV (where I came across it by chance in 2005). The other two films were major Hollywood releases that remain available on DVD.

¹¹ Currently in print, and on Novak's list, are Francis Marion Beynon's *Aleta Dey* (1919); *Rilla of Ingleside*; Robert Stead's *Grain* (1926); *Generals Die in Bed*; *Barometer Rising*; Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* (1944); Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945); Earle Birney's *Turvey* (1949); and *Execution*. Not on Novak's list but in print are *Two Solitudes* and George Godwin's *Why Stay We Here?* (1930, republished by Godwin Books in 2003).

¹² War novels in the “old” NCL include Philip Child’s *God’s Sparrows* (1937); *Earth and High Heaven* (republished by Cormorant Press, 2003); Edward Meade’s *Remember Me* (1946); Edward McCourt’s *Music at the Close* (1947) and *The Wooden Sword* (1956); Douglas LePan’s *The Deserter* (1964); and Fred Bodsworth’s *The Atonement of Ashley Morden* (1964).

¹³ During the completion of this dissertation, I made a habit of informally surveying people—both academics and non-academics—about which Canadian war novels they could name. *The Wars* was the only frequent response, often in the nature of: “it’s the only one I can think of.”

¹⁴ See, for example, Laura Mac Donald’s *Curse of the Narrows* (2005), a well-researched history of the explosion that corroborates MacLennan’s account.

¹⁵ McDougall kept copious notes on the novel’s background and development, now preserved in the McDougall Papers at McGill.

¹⁶ See Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896), Chapter III; and Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (1950).

¹⁷ The myth of German sabotage was widespread in 1916 until it was revealed that structural faults in the buildings caused the fire.

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the militia myth and its origins, see Granatstein's *Canada's Army*, Chapter One.

CHAPTER 1

War and Imperialism

Canada began the twentieth century under a cloud of war, as volunteer recruits joined the Royal Canadian Regiment and a number of private regiments to fight with Britain against Dutch Boers in the second South African War. It was Canada's first major war since Confederation, involving far more soldiers and resources than the Fenian Raids of 1866-71 and the Riel rebellions of 1869-70 and 1885. Between October 1899 when the war began and May 1902 when it ended, Canada sent 7,368 troops to South Africa, a monumental commitment long before anyone imagined a world war that would involve eighty times as many men.

The majority of Canadians supported the war and those who fought in it, especially after two companies of Canadian soldiers, failing to receive an order to retreat, stood their ground against several thousand Boers led by General Piet Cronje in the Battle of Paardeberg of February 1900. Eventually the Boers surrendered, making heroes of the Canadians and prompting Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to tout them as "probably the finest brigade in the whole army" (329). The *Toronto Globe* responded with a solemn tribute to the battle: an entire front page devoted to the photographs of thirty-five men who died at Paardeberg on February 27.¹

The war killed 270 Canadians, half of them in battle, the rest succumbing to disease, principally enteric fever caught from drinking tainted water; another 252 were

wounded.² It was a low death rate (3.6% of enlistments) even by pre-world war standards. Those who survived wrote letters home about recent innovations—trenches, barbed wire, Vickers machine guns, concentration camps—that were harbingers of war in the twentieth century.³ Most Canadians assumed, however, that war had become as bad as it could get, and the dominant legacy of the South Africa War relied on an old myth—that war is an exercise in manly prowess, deadly for some, glorious for most. A popular song of the time, H.H. Godfrey’s “When Johnny Canuck Comes Home,” typifies this attitude:

Across the foam our gallant sons have fought for Britain’s glory;
Their deeds shall live for many a day, in picture and in story
How at the call from Motherland they shouldered arms and rushed,
And swore to ne’er turn back again till Britain’s foes were crushed.

Singing Heigh! Singing Ho! Singing up with the Union Jack!
So, to Johnny Canuck’s health and luck and when he comes marching home,
All pride and pluck our Johnny Canuck comes gaily marching home.

The war echoed through Canadian politics and culture for a dozen years after it ended. As J.L. Granatstein shows, after Canada’s new Militia Act was passed in 1904, “public opinion in Canada became increasingly militaristic” (*Canada’s Army* 46). Memoirs by war correspondents and soldiers—many of them “inaccurate, biased, or garbled,” according to Carman Miller (“Research” 116)—reinforced notions of

Canadians as brave, upstanding, and infallible supporters of the British Empire. Russell C. Hubly's *G Company* (1901) typifies this outlook: "After this [war] don't say that loyalty is dead in Canada. I tell you that the Anglo-Boer War called forth the latent fire and crystallized the love which Canada bears to 'Old England.' If you doubt it, you are no Briton, and you have no part in Canada" (110). Less romantic accounts of the war, such as one by Agar Adamson which recalls Canadians looting the Boer town of Amersfoort where "houses were pulled to pieces simply to build huge fires" (Grescoe 53), were mostly kept out of public discourse.

The image of manly adventure survived into the First World War, when a new generation of boys thirsty for adventure flocked to recruiting offices, some of them displaying posters of soldiers charging across the South African veldt on horseback—a stark contrast to the sluggish trench life for which recruits in 1914 were destined.⁴ Only when Canadian soldiers began dying by the hundreds at Ypres in 1915 did the romantic legacy of the South African War begin to wane. As Miller notes, "[u]ntil overshadowed by the Great War, the South African War was for many Canadians the most significant public event of the twentieth century" ("Research" 116). The war on the veldt intensified Canada's debate over imperialism, driving political wedges among those who favoured loyalty to the British Empire, those who wanted stronger ties with the United States, and those who sought greater national and regional autonomy.

In the years prior to the South African War, imperialism found its strongest support in Ontario, where the Imperial Federation League touted Canada's potential as a new economic and cultural centre for the British Empire.⁵ Other proponents of imperialism included John Willison, editor of the *Toronto Globe*, who was among those

who urged a reluctant Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier to send Canada's first troop contingent to South Africa in 1899. Willison and other imperialists hailed the war as a chance for Canada to show its military prowess on the international stage. Part social Darwinism, part muscular Christianity, such attitudes characterized the naïve militarism of most imperialists. Carl Berger summarizes this mindset: "When the imperialists talked of war, their insistence upon toughness and hardness, conflict and testing, were exaggerated and deceptive, for their understanding of what was involved bore a closer resemblance to the deeds chronicled by Sir Walter Scott than the realities to come" (*Sense of Power* 236).

Not all Anglo-Canadians accepted the imperialist myth. Its most famous opponent was Goldwin Smith, the Oxford-educated editor of *The Week* and other Canadian periodicals. Initially a Canada First supporter, he later advocated trade reciprocity with the United States as the way forward for Canada, causing British imperialists to nickname him "Annexation."⁶ Smith vehemently opposed Canada's involvement in the South African War. In his treatise *In the Court of History: An Apology for Canadians Who Were Opposed to the South African War* (1902), he blames the war on militant imperialism and Jewish opportunism, exposing both his anti-imperialism and anti-Semitism while denouncing "the duty of the colonies to take part in Imperial wars" (7).

Also opposed to imperialism were cultural autonomists, including Quebec nationalists who sympathized with the Boers as victims of British expansionism. Henri Bourassa, a Liberal Member of Parliament from Quebec, resigned his seat in 1899 after Laurier and the majority of Liberals approved Canada's first South African contingent without consulting Parliament. He was re-elected to Parliament by acclamation in 1900,

but dissent over the South African War continued. In March of that year, francophone Montrealers rioted for three days as retaliation for pro-war celebrations by anglophone students at McGill University—a harbinger of the anti-conscription riots that would plague Quebec during both world wars. After the war, Bourassa's anti-imperialist stance was reinforced by *La ligue nationaliste*, the nationalist political party he inspired, and *Le Devoir*, the newspaper he established in 1910.

In light of widespread political discourse surrounding the South African War, it is remarkable how little literary fiction was inspired by it. Donna Coates claims that “the Boer War did not seem to capture the imagination of the nation’s writers” (“War” 1188), and she is right notwithstanding a few exceptions. Ralph Connor set his short story “Ould Michael” (in *The Pilot at Swan Creek and Other Stories*, 1905) during the South African War and Gilbert Parker devoted part of his novel *The Judgment House* (1913) to it, but these works are minor compared to Connor’s more characteristic *The Man From Glengarry* (1901) or Parker’s *The Seats of the Mighty* (1896). Two recent authors, Terry Leeder in the juvenile novel *Canadians in a Far Country* (1979) and Sidney Allinson in the self-published *Kruger’s Gold: A Novel of the Anglo-Boer War* (2001), depict the war retrospectively, but these, too, remain obscure. Most Canadians who wanted to read fiction about South Africa turned to Rudyard Kipling and G.A. Henty, and to later works by Stuart Cloete and Kit Denton. Canada lacks any war fiction set in South Africa comparable to Kipling’s story cycle *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904) or Denton’s novel *The Breaker* (1973).

The most significant exception to Coates’s generalization is Sara Jeannette Duncan, who makes the South African War the backdrop to her most important novel,

The Imperialist (1904), and refers to it briefly in two later novels, *Cousin Cinderella* (1908) and *Title Clear* (1922).⁷ *The Imperialist* shows the war's effects on the political climate of a small southern Ontario community, where the debate about imperialism dominates a political by-election in the months following the war. Although it is not a war novel, but a work of social realism in a domestic setting, *The Imperialist* shows how the war boosted Canada's self-confidence as a nation, fuelled the imperialist sentiment of Canada's Anglocentric elite, and inspired civic militarism in a typical small town. As the first twentieth-century novel to use war as a key subtext, it provides a seminal depiction of post-war consciousness, with patriotic themes that echo in the First World War novels of Ralph Connor and L.M. Montgomery.

Duncan's journalistic and political background influenced the social context of *The Imperialist*. Born in 1861 in Brantford, Ontario, on which the town of Elgin in the novel is based, Duncan was one of Canada's first female journalists, contributing to the *Washington Post*, the *Montreal Star*, the *Toronto Globe*, *The Week*, and other publications. Her journalism enabled her to forge friendships with Goldwin Smith, her boss at *The Week* "to whose kindly encouragement she was much indebted" (Fowler 113), and John Willison, whom she befriended while both were correspondents in the Parliamentary Press Gallery in Ottawa.⁸ She continued to correspond with both men long after she gave up journalism for fiction and moved to India, keeping apprised of the imperialist debate in Canada through Smith's and Willison's opposing views.⁹

Duncan's journalism reflects her own imperialist mindset. She pledged her "love and loyalty" to the British flag in her journalism of the 1880s and 90s, and some of her novels, including *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* (1893), reflect this enthusiasm in

the context of India. Always most concerned about Canada, she applauded the “imperial sentiment” behind Laurier’s adoption of a preferential trade tariff on British goods in 1897, claiming that the Liberals could be “proud to claim a part in the greatness it prefigures” (*Journalism* 62). Her words anticipate those of Laurier, who in a 1904 campaign speech claimed that “the twentieth century shall be the century of Canada and of Canadian development” and “Canada shall be the star towards which all men who love progress and freedom shall come” (*Canadian Speeches* 86).

Duncan was more than just a passing admirer of Laurier. She reviewed his earlier political speeches while writing *The Imperialist*, and Lorne Murchison’s political eloquence in the novel owes a great deal to Laurier’s skill as an orator. Lorne shares Laurier’s view of Canada as the seat of prosperity and hope in the twentieth century: “In the scrolls of the future it is already written that the centre of the Empire must shift—and where, if not to Canada?” (225). Before revising the serialized version of *The Imperialist* for book publication, Duncan read and praised Willison’s biography of Laurier and received a visit from Laurier himself.¹⁰ In 1904, she continued to claim that “my sentiments are Imperial” (*Imperialist* 309), although other letters from the same period suggest an ambivalence toward imperialism, as does *The Imperialist* itself, in which Lorne’s imperialist vision fails to prosper.

The Imperialist represented a small leap for Canadian literature when it first appeared in serial form in 1903, and its revised publication as a book in 1904 established it as Duncan’s most ambitious and lasting work. It was the first Canadian novel to approach the literary sophistication found in contemporary works by such writers as E.M. Forster, William Dean Howells, and Henry James. A personal acquaintance of all three of

these writers, Duncan adopted their techniques, using an ironic, Jamesonian narrator and social realism to temper romance. For Archibald MacMechan, one of the few critics to champion the book early on, *The Imperialist* managed to make art out of “plain, bourgeois, money-getting Ontario and the humdrum activities of a little town” (139).

More recent critics overlook the South African War’s significance to *The Imperialist*’s subtext. According to Clara Thomas, “Duncan records a town in southern Ontario in the last quarter of the nineteenth century” (“Social Mythologies” 357), despite textual clues situating the novel in or around 1902. Commenting on Duncan’s revisions between the serialized and book versions of *The Imperialist*, Thomas Tausky claims that the changes “have nothing to do with politics” and seem to have “no consistent pattern” (“Writing” 342), even though his notes to the 1996 Tecumseh edition show that Duncan increased the number of references to the South African War with each successive edition. In her study of Duncan’s work, *A Different Point of View*, Misao Dean devotes a chapter to the First World War’s influence on Duncan’s late plays and novels, although the South African War was arguably more significant to her work. Because other themes—small-town life, economic imperialism, political ambition, romance—compete with the war theme, critics tend to regard the South African War as incidental or unimportant to the novel’s structure. Closer examination, however, reveals that the war is essential to many of the characters’ views of their place in their community and Canada’s place in the world. Despite the apparent peacefulness of the fictional town of Elgin, the novel shows civic militarism’s impact on Canadian society, prefiguring similar themes in later fiction about the First World War.

The first evidence of civic militarism appears in the novel's opening chapter, as the narrator describes the pomp and circumstance of Victoria Day in Elgin:

Here it was a real holiday, that woke you with bells and cannon—who had forgotten the time the ancient piece of ordnance in the Square blew out all the windows in the Methodist church?—and went on with squibs and crackers till you didn't know where to step on the sidewalks, and ended up splendidly with rockets and fire-balloons and drunken Indians vociferous on their way to the lock-up. (3)

Elgin preserves its shared memory through an annual re-enactment of war. Victoria Day gives a chance for a normally peaceful and staid community to engage in cathartic rituals of mock violence. The “bells and cannon” reinforce the link between Christianity and militarism, while the unwieldy “ancient piece of ordnance” suggests contained violence with a note of menace. “Squibs and crackers” turn the townspeople into a mock infantry who advance through the town, followed by the “rockets and fire-balloons” of the pretend artillery. The “drunken Indians,” hauled off like prisoners of war, are both ritualized enemies and the real, disenfranchised survivors of Britain's conquest of North America. For the colonial descendents and United Empire Loyalists of the town, this display of civic militarism is a way of preserving and performing identity. No violence takes place, but it is reified into the social fabric of the town, lying dormant until the next war.

Most of the time Elgin harbours what Duncan in one of her newspaper articles calls a “latent loyalty” toward Britain (*Journalism* 57). In Elgin's parochial society “the interest of politics and the interest of religion” dominate social discourse and have “a

“complexion strictly local” (48). The British heritage of the town’s elite citizens is taken for granted—a fact of blood unremarkable except when it divides the haves from the have-nots. World affairs rarely interfere with this cocoon-like existence, and Elgin’s citizens remain oblivious to the outside world, their attachment to Britain merely sentimental, until Victoria Day’s ritualized militarism gives way to a real war:

Belief in England was in the blood, it would not yield to the temporary distortion of facts in the newspapers—at all events, it would not yield with a rush. Whether there was any chance of insidious sapping was precisely what the country was too indifferent to discover. Indifferent, apathetic, self-centred—until whenever, down the wind, across the Atlantic, came the faint far music of the call to arms. Then the old dog of war that has his kennel in every man rose and shook himself, and presently there would be a baying! The sense of kinship, lying too deep for the touch of ordinary circumstance, quickened to that; and in a moment “we” were fighting, “we” had lost or won. (49)

By implying that “every man” has an impulse for war, Duncan’s narrator undercuts the portrait of Elgin as a peaceful community. The appeal to blood heritage—normally dormant but easily awakened in wartime—shows the violence that is intrinsic to Elgin society and reflects social Darwinism typical of the time. War strengthens the bond between ordinarily “self-centred” people by drawing them together in a violent display of prowess.

This critique of civic militarism relates to the South African War. Duncan began writing the novel in the autumn of 1902, several months after the war ended on May 31, and there are several indications that the novel's action is contemporaneous with its composition. Alfred Hesketh, the novel's one South African veteran, wears civilian clothing when Lorne meets him in London, suggesting a post-war context for his introduction. The fictional meeting in England between the colonial delegation from Elgin and British diplomat Wallingham—based on Britain's Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain—to discuss preferential trade mirrors the Colonial Conference hosted by Chamberlain in the summer of 1902.¹¹ Some of the events preceding the fictional conference, including the Milburn's party on "a clear, cold January night" (42), presumably occur during the latter months of the war—in January 1902—though there is no indication during the party that Canada is on a war footing.

The war affects Elgin and Canadian society in subtle ways. Lorne evokes Paardeberg in his final campaign speech before the election. Elsewhere he, Alfred Hesketh, John Murchison, and Horace Williams discuss trade and military issues pertinent to the war's aftermath. These characters are less concerned with the realities of combat, death, and hardship than with the war's mythical status—its signification of blood sacrifice and potential for economic growth. None of Elgin's citizens appears to have died or been wounded in the war, and so there is no mourning or traumatic fallout for the town. Instead, Elginites indulge in sentimental allusions—"It was then not long since the maple leaf had been stained brighter than ever, not without honour" (81)—and debates about how to secure supply and armaments contracts in future wars. For Elgin,

war serves two purposes: to reinforce its place in the imagined community of the British Empire, and to provide potential sources of profit.

Lorne is the character most attuned to these purposes. During his campaign speech at the Elgin opera house he evokes Canada's South African War legacy as an appeal to his audience's patriotic spirit:

"Let us hold," he said simply, "to the Empire. Let us keep this patrimony that has been ours for three hundred years. Let us not forget the flag. We believe ourselves, at this moment, in no danger of forgetting it. The day after Paardeburg [sic], that still winter day, did not our hearts rise within us to see it shaken out with its message everywhere, shaken out against the snow? How it spoke to us, and lifted us, the silent flag in the new fallen snow! Theirs—and ours.... That was but a little while ago, and there is not a man here who will not bear me out in saying that we were never more loyal, in word and deed, than we are now." (227)

Like the earlier pine to "the maple leaf... stained brighter than ever," Lorne's words have nothing to do with war as such. Rather, his words are an eloquent dilution of reality, using war as a signifier of imperial unity and his own ambition. He appropriates the achievements of Canadian soldiers he has never met, most of them from a working class he rarely encounters. War's unsavoury realities—soldiers who run while others stand, civilian homes decimated on the veldt, women and children dying in British concentration camps—never enter the safe haven of Elgin. Lorne knows nothing of war, yet it forms the essence of the collective "we" with whom he identifies. Like the cannon

shooting across the market square on Victoria Day, war for Lorne is an affectation, a ritual enactment of shared memory and social mythology.

This mythology contains a racial bias. Like many in Duncan's era, including most imperialists and perhaps Duncan herself, Lorne is a social Darwinian who sees Anglo-Saxon racial heritage as superior to all others. Anticipating his trip to England as part of Cruikshank's delegation, he reflects on the reasons for Canada's enduring loyalty to the empire:

I've been reading up the history of our political relations with England. It's astonishing what we've stuck to her through, but you can't help seeing why—it's for the moral advantage. Way down at the bottom, that's what it is. We have the sense to want all we can get of that sort of thing. They've developed the finest human product there is, the cleanest, the most disinterested, and we want to keep up the relationship—it's important. (90)

For Lorne, morality is a function of genetic supremacy. England reigns supreme because, like Octavius Milburn's Elgin boiler, cornering the market because of its efficiency, England's "human product" beats out the competition. Lorne adheres to pseudo-scientific principles of human progress whereby blood heritage determines the likelihood of survival. He sees war as the social equivalent of the struggle between species. The South African War exemplifies the bloodletting through which England's "human product" asserts its dominance. The staining of the maple leaf with blood is the sacrifice through which Canada ennobles itself and proves its mettle among Anglo-Saxon nations. His

attitude typifies that of imperialists during the South African War, the poet Charles Mair, for example, who in an 1899 letter to Denison speaks of the war in terms akin to an evolutionary struggle in which Britain fights “in order to redeem her from the gangrene of wealth and luxury... and prepare and harden her for the still larger struggle looming in the future.”¹²

In his campaign speech, Lorne denigrates the United States because he sees its expansionist and multicultural ideals as anathema to Anglo-Saxon purity. Brimming with opportunism, self-interest, and wealth, America has lost its way on the austere path toward “rugged discipline” and “a nobler ideal” (229). Lorne denounces America’s economic incursions into Canada, likening it to a military invasion: “the armies of the south have already crossed the border. American enterprise, American capital, is taking rapid possession of our mines and our water-power, our oil areas and our timber limits” (228). Particularly galling for him is America’s opening of its borders to non-British immigrants:

“And this Republic,” he went on hotly, “this Republic that menaces our national life with cultural extinction, what past has she that is comparable [to Canada]?

The daughter who left the old stock to be the light woman among nations, welcoming all comers, mingling her pure blood, polluting her lofty ideals until it is hard indeed to recognize the features and the aims of her honorable youth.”

(229)

For Lorne, once a nation dilutes its Anglo-Saxon gene pool it loses its identity, becomes “hard to recognize,” and compromises its place on the scale of social evolution. He envisions a future in which the “lost” children of an Anglo-Saxon hegemony come back into the fold: “The seers of political economy tell us that if the stars continue to be propitious, it is certain that a day will come which will usher in a union of the Anglo-Saxon nations of the world” (230). In a later decade, fascists would use similar words to espouse ideals of brotherhood among nations, based on assumptions about the natural bond between members of a dominant race. Although Lorne is comparatively benign, his words emphasize the links among imperialism, blood heritage, and a quest for world dominance. War is the inevitable outcome of such a philosophy.

Throughout the novel, structural irony distances the narrator’s views from Lorne’s, leaving little reason to suppose that he is a mouthpiece for Duncan’s own outlook. By the time he begins his climactic campaign speech, it is already clear that his ideal of imperial unity, like his election chances, is headed for failure. The narrator implies as much when she states that Lorne’s imperialist electoral platform “was suffering from a certain flatness on the further side” (219). Even though his speech captivates his audience and earns him hearty applause, votes are already beginning to veer away from the Liberal Party. His imperial fervour, attractive as it is for his listeners, has no place in the practical economics of a go-ahead town, where concern for the marketplace trumps concern for abstract ideals. Farquharson, Lorne’s political mentor and forerunner, realizes that Lorne’s idealism, for all its sentimental appeal, “lack[s] actuality, business” (219). As a campaign platform, “it was useful only to its enemies”

and Lorne would be better to “stick to old Reform principles” (219). By ignoring this advice, Lorne instigates his own political downfall.

In *Sara Jeannette Duncan: Novelist of Empire*, Tausky claims: “The alert reader of *The Imperialist* does not need to wait for the final page of the novel in order to gain the impression that Sara favours imperialism” (161). He backs up his claim with the assumption, “the line dividing the proponents from the opponents of imperialism also divides the imaginative from the unimaginative” (162). One problem with Tausky’s argument is that one of the most imaginative characters of all, Advena Murchison, a dreamer and an intellectual, has no discernable political outlook at all, nor does one of the *least* imaginative characters, her lover Hugh Finlay. Lorne’s imperialism is fueled by imagination, but it is a reckless form of imagination, which leaves him blind to the practical and political realities around him. The only way to be sure that Duncan “favours imperialism” in the novel is to assume that Lorne is a mouthpiece for Duncan’s own opinions, yet time and again Lorne shows himself to be immature, foolish, even fanatical. All the while Duncan’s narrator stands aloof, watching from above, commenting ironically as Lorne sabotages his political future. The only impression an “alert reader” should get from *The Imperialist* is that Duncan is ambivalent toward imperialism.

Duncan undercuts the militaristic implications of imperialism through Hesketh, an Englishman who “served out in South Africa—volunteered” (136). In his campaign speech, Lorne touts the honour of the South African legacy, yet Hesketh, the only South African veteran he meets in the novel, is feckless, arrogant, and devoid of soldierly qualities. He is out of place in Canada, especially in rural surroundings, making him the antithesis of the ideal citizen-soldier. He typifies, not the rugged product of Anglo-Saxon

heritage, but Britain's adherence to obsolete principles of social class and birthright. He shows his priggishness by ruining Lorne's rural campaign rally with condescending references to Kipling, Canadian colonialism, and the British monarchy in front of the local farmers. His loyalty is not to Lorne or imperialism, but to Dora Milburn, a pretentious socialite and daughter of the anti-imperialist Octavius Milburn. Shallow and opportunistic, he is the antithesis of Britain's "moral advantage," exposing Lorne's flawed generalization about Anglo-Saxon superiority.

The Imperialist shows Duncan's ambivalence toward imperialism after the South African War. Lorne's humiliating defeat is a defeat for imperialism itself, and although the narrator aligns him—and Canada—with "the thread of destiny" (266) in the final lines, the phrase is ironic, an indication of a thread that is soon to break. Duncan's interest in the imperial question continued in her later work, but by the time her novel *The Burnt Offering* appeared in 1909, imperialism was for her clearly on the wane. The political upheaval at the centre of *The Burnt Offering* shows the impracticability of the colonial project in India, and by the novel's end even the colonial administrators are forced to look forward to a revival of an independent Indian homeland. *The Imperialist* suggests the same for Canada: Lorne's imperial project does not work, and the way forward for Canada is a nationalist vision founded on cultural autonomy, not slavish adherence to a warring empire.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ Toronto *Saturday Globe*, 5 March 1900: edition front page.

² These figures are Carman Miller's in *Painting the Map Red*, p. 429. In *Canada's Army*, p. 45, J.L. Granatstein gives different numbers: 89 killed in action, 135 killed by disease, 252 wounded, out of a total volunteer force of 8,372.

³ See the South African chapter in Audrey and Paul Grescoe's *The Book of War Letters*.

⁴ See, for example, the poster entitled "Artillery Heroes at the Front Say 'Get Into a Man's Uniform'" in Choko's *Canadian War Posters*.

⁵ Founded in 1884, the Imperial Federation League was a descendant of the Canada First Movement, and the two shared many members, including author, soldier and magistrate George Taylor Denison, Queen's University Principal George Monro Grant, and Upper Canada College Principal George Robert Parkin. For more on these movements, see Carl Berger's *The Sense of Power*.

⁶ See the entry on Smith in the *Canadian Encyclopedia: 2000 Edition*, p. 2182.

⁷ In *Cousin Cinderella*, Graham Trent is a South African War hero, although the novel exclusively concerns his and his sister's later life in London. In *Title Clear*, the South African War and the First World War are reference points for the modern world's social anxieties and political transformations.

⁸ For more on Duncan's connections to Smith and Willison, see Marion Fowler, *Redney: The Life of Sara Jeannette Duncan*, Chapter 3.

⁹ Duncan's correspondence with Smith after 1890 has not survived, although they corresponded at least until 1896 (see Fowler 310 n 30). Duncan and Willison corresponded about *The Imperialist* and the issue of imperialism between 1902 and 1904; some of these letters appear in the Tecumseh critical edition of *The Imperialist*.

¹⁰ See two adjacent letters to Willison in the Tecumseh edition of *The Imperialist* (308-09).

¹¹ For a brief account of the 1902 Colonial Conference and its results, see C.P. Stacey's *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, Vol. 1, Chapter 3.

¹² Mair, letter to Denison, 1902. Denison Papers, National Archives of Canada.

CHAPTER 2

Patriotic Fiction of the First World War

It is now generally accepted that the First World War was a cataclysm of unparalleled proportions, one that, as John Keegan writes, “ended the lives of ten million human beings, tortured the emotional lives of millions more ... and left ... a legacy of political rancour and racial hatred so intense that no explanation of the causes of the Second World War can stand without reference to those roots” (*First World War* 3). 60,661 of the dead were Canadian soldiers,¹ one-tenth of the total number who fought—small numbers compared to many countries, but remarkable for a country that before the war had a population of about 7.2 million.² Scarcely any Canadians were left unscathed by the First World War. Those who did not fight had sons, brothers, and husbands who did; many worked in munitions factories, war administration offices, or for patriotic fundraising organizations. In 1919, a year after the war ended, another 50,000 Canadians died of Spanish Influenza, brought to Canada by returning soldiers.

Any Canadian with the least knowledge of history is familiar with images of wretched soldiers sunk in muddy trenches, despair or boredom on the faces of the ones still living, blankness on the faces of the dead. Such images have become so commonplace that it is difficult to characterize the war as having been anything but a futile exercise in violence and folly. Even Canada’s most famous patriotic poem, John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields,” admits that “larks, still bravely singing” are “[s]carce

heard amid the guns below” (4-5), evoking war’s cacophony and isolation. To claim nowadays that the war was a “Great Adventure” (22), as Ralph Connor did in his novel *Treading the Winepress* (1925), is to invite skepticism if not ridicule.

Many Canadians who lived through the war, however, did not see war and adventure as incompatible—even though death rained on their lives daily. The number of novelists, memoirists, journalists, and diarists of the period who use words like “adventure” and “honour,” write of “glorious battles,” or advocate “fighting the good fight” is too great to be dismissed as mere propaganda (although some writers were paid to write such things). In his memoir *The Great War As I Saw It* (1922), F.G. Scott, a poet and army chaplain who witnessed some of the bloodiest fighting on the Western Front before being wounded, described “that splendid comradeship which spread out to all the divisions of the Canadian Corps, and which binds those who went to the great adventure in a brotherhood stronger than has ever been known” (2). McCrae, who treated maimed and asphyxiated soldiers at Ypres in 1915 before writing “In Flanders Fields,” included the lines in the poem’s final stanza, “To you from failing hand we throw / The torch; be yours to hold it high” (11-12). Some of the most effusive words about the First World War were written by people who knew the worst of its horrors, and no one ordered them to write this way.

That such people refused to be good modernists has led many critics and historians to dismiss them as disingenuous. Fussell, for example, calls McCrae’s poem “a propaganda argument—words like *vicious* and *stupid* would not seem to go too far—against a negotiated peace” (*Great War* 250). Anthologies of war literature regularly downplay works that employ “high diction” (as Fussell terms it), preferring the stark,

terse imagery of works by the likes of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Practically all contemporary war novels eschew high diction, or place it ironically in the mouths of jingoist clergymen and incompetent politicians. To speak of war in conventionally heroic terms has become anathema to truth, tantamount to propaganda, yet it was not always this way.

By dismissing high diction while championing anti-war literature, critics create a false dichotomy between authors who express “incorrect” and “correct” attitudes toward the First World War. This dichotomy is a convenient way for critics and historians to canonize writers that support a contemporary conception of war as unremittingly horrific, while sidestepping writers who saw redeeming qualities in war that did not jibe with an anti-war perspective. The result is a lopsided view of First World War literature as terse, bloody, dissenting, experimental, and modernist, when many—in fact most—works published during and after the war were not.

Before 1929, nearly all Canadian war novels used high diction to convey a sense of purpose and patriotism in fighting the First World War. These novels—I term them “patriotic” without suggesting that other novels are “unpatriotic”—appeared in the dozens between 1915 and the late twenties. Most of them, by such authors as Beverley Arthur Baxter, S.N. Dancey, Basil King, Bertrand Sinclair, are long since forgotten owing to their interchangeable plots and stock characters—morally upstanding soldiers and patriotically employed women who die nobly or marry happily by the end.³ A few novels of the period stand out—Francis Marion Beynon’s *Aleta Dey* (1919), a pacifist novel that eschews the most common patriotic tropes, and Robert Stead’s *Grain* (1926), a realist novel that depicts the patriotism of prairie wheat farmers during the

war—but the majority of them are hackneyed attempts to present romantic adventure tales about the war.

The two most important authors from this period—for different reasons—are Ralph Connor and L.M. Montgomery. Connor was the quintessential romantic patriot, and his war novels epitomize the fast-paced, didactic style that so many other authors emulated, few with his vividness of description that included realistic scenes of trench warfare. Although his novels are not great literature, they are crucial examples of a style of writing that dominated Canadian war fiction for fifteen years, during and after the First World War. The work of the anti-war writers that followed in the 1930s period was a response to the type of novels that Connor wrote and millions of North Americans read. To ignore his work is to ignore an important part of the tradition of Canadian war fiction.

L.M. Montgomery produced what is arguably the best Canadian patriotic war novel, *Rilla of Ingleside* (1920), which uses high diction and follows many romantic conventions, but includes atypical scenes in which characters debate the meaning of the war and question its value as a catalyst for progress. The novel provides one of Canadian literature's best depictions of women's experience on the home front during the First World War, showing how women actively engaged in the war at home and challenged societal preconceptions about women's roles in society. Offering insight into the wartime experiences of an important Canadian writer who was obsessed with and traumatized by war, *Rilla of Ingleside* is the centrepiece of Montgomery's ominous views of war and its impact on Canadian society.

A war veteran, political statesman, and Presbyterian Minister, Connor was one of the most popular and prolific Canadian authors of all time. Born in 1860, his worldview was largely the product of late-Victorian sensibilities and Presbyterian religious faith. He was an exemplar of muscular Christianity and the social gospel movement, championing patriotism and progress as the moral prerogatives of a healthy society. Although he believed that good guns make good neighbours, he considered himself a pacifist, peace being the ultimate destiny of humankind. The First World War failed to shake his resolve, and the ideology that informed his writing before the war remained intact long after it. Only in the final pages of his memoir, *Postscript to Adventure* (1939), does Connor appear disillusioned as he witnesses Hitler's rise and Europe's descent into the Second World War.

Connor was already a famous novelist before the First World War. Together, his first three novels—*Black Rock* (1898), *The Sky Pilot* (1899), and *The Man From Glengarry* (1901)—sold five million copies, enough for his publisher to order each new title by the boxcar load.⁴ These novels established his reputation for producing vivid potboilers that combined social gospel with adventure tales of settlement and nation-building on the Canadian frontier. He published a further six novels, a story collection, and several non-fiction books before his first novel about the First World War.

Connor had no literary pretensions, admitting that he “had not the slightest ambition to be a writer” and “made little effort after polished literary style” (*Postscript* 150-51). Despite his modest literary aims, his popularity was unprecedented for a Canadian writer, and only Montgomery and Stephen Leacock rivaled it. He counted such dignitaries as Sam Hughes, Wilfrid Laurier, and Theodore Roosevelt among his fans,

who invited him as a confidante into their offices and drawing rooms. His work expounds a utopian vision of the future, built by Christian morality, ruled by democracy, and sustained by agricultural and industrial progress. As Clara Thomas notes, Connor's books "answered his readers' dreams of freedom, progress, and a new, vigorous society" ("Foreword" x). He was the stylistic inheritor of James Fenimore Cooper and Walter Scott, the contemporary of Zane Grey and Jack London, the forerunner of Louis L'Amour and Tom Clancy. His war novels set the idealistic standards against which all later Canadian writers of war fiction positioned themselves—increasingly in opposition as the legacy of the First World War became more bitter.

Shortly after the war broke out, Connor went overseas as a Chaplain with Winnipeg's 79th Cameron Highlanders. After serving in France and Belgium with his regiment, he was promoted to Chaplain-in-Chief with the Canadian Forces Overseas. He witnessed front-line combat at Ypres and on the Somme, saw the terrible effects of war's new weaponry on young men's bodies in a myriad of military hospitals, and commanded rescue efforts following a deadly troop train derailment near the French coast. These experiences informed his war novels, especially *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, in which an army chaplain, Barry Dunbar, goes to war and faces experiences similar to Connor's, including a train wreck. Bad as it gets, Dunbar, like Connor, remains faithful to the patriotism and morality that led him to enlist.

Connor's three war novels—*The Major* (1917), *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* (1919), and *Treading the Winepress* (1925)—loosely comprise a trilogy, each giving a different regional and military perspective to the war. *The Major*, set in Ontario and the prairie provinces, begins as a conventional romance about settling the west, until

Archduke Franz Ferdinand's murder in Sarajevo disrupts the action and the novel shifts to an account of a rural community preparing for war. *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* begins in Alberta and follows the classic trajectory of a lone soldier's journey into war, anticipating the plot lines—though not the disillusionment—of later novels by Peregrine Acland, Charles Yale Harrison, and Philip Child. *Treading the Winepress* depicts the adventures of a gung-ho troop of naval volunteers as they defend the North American coast against U-Boats and saboteurs. All three war novels present similar visions of Canadian identity. In Connor's world to be Canadian means to be a British subject, a rugged lover of the outdoors, and a liberal Christian. Much of the dialogue mingles imperialism with social gospel. The male protagonists are all plucky and brave, the female protagonists chaste and loyal. In *The Major*, the action centres on the Irish Gwynne family, in *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* the British Dunbars, in *Treading the Winepress* the Scottish Mackinroys. There are no Irish Republicans, Scottish secessionists, or anti-monarchists among them. All willingly merge under the imperial banner, trusting in King and country without complaint.

The war disrupts the characters' peaceful lives, giving them a new sense of moral purpose. All are proud imperialists who would (and often do) die willingly, defending the Empire and their Canadian homeland. In *The Major*, the main character Larry Gwynne touts "the ultra loyal spirit of the Canadian people toward the Empire" (301). In *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* Barry Dunbar says, "when Britain is at war my country is at war, and when my country is at war I ought to be there" (82). In *Treading the Winepress* Miriam Lindsay claims, "we are all one people, one Empire, [and subjects of] one King" (190). Throughout Connor's novels such comments ring out like slogans at a banquet,

bending the characters to the author's patriotic vision. In all three war novels, imperialist fervour is more than just a political or economic principle: it is a moral imperative.

Connor often uses the terms "nation" and "race" interchangeably. Despite his deep faith, his attitudes to society reflect the social Darwinism of his era, although it does not preclude a measure of tolerance for outsiders. Unlike Lorne Murchison's disdain for "mingled blood" in *The Imperialist*, Connor's characters welcome non-British immigrants into their world, provided they assimilate and do not jeopardize the majority. Tony Mackinroy, the male protagonist of *Treading the Winepress*, is half-Scots, half-Italian, which is acceptable to his community because of his "physical mould [which he] inherited from ancestors bred among Scotland's hills" (9). In *The Major*, Heinrich Kellerman, a Polish-German Jew, wins the admiration of the community by enlisting and joining a military parade, marching to "heart-thrilling sounds... which have ever led Scotland's sons down the path of blood and death to imperishable glory" (337). Kellerman's acquaintances rejoice to see that "the little Jew" has shrugged off his reputation as "a pot-hunter" (257) to become acceptable to his community by assimilating into Scottish culture. This strange mixture of condescension and tolerance is typical of Connor's views of society, where remaining culturally distinct, as most German characters do, is to invite suspicion.

Despite the racism of such attitudes, Connor's protagonists are more likely to resist outright xenophobia than condone it. When a minor character, Lloyd Rushbrooke, dismisses Kellerman as "a greasy little Sheeney," others jump to the victim's defense, admonishing Rushbrooke for his intolerance (343). Similarly, when Jack Romaine, a British South African veteran, shows his hatred for Germans, a friend tells him to "avoid

prejudice” and accept the fact of Canada as a “melting pot idea” (177). This is not multiculturalism in its nascent form, so much as Connor trying to balance ethnic nationalism with Christian tolerance.

In his study of ethnic nationalism, *Blood and Belonging*, Michael Ignatieff shows how ethnic nationalists protect the credibility of their appeal to blood heritage by displaying sentimental goodwill: “If nationalism legitimizes an appeal to blood loyalty and, in turn, blood sacrifice, it can do so persuasively only if it seems to appeal to people’s better natures, and not to their worst instincts” (9). Thus, for Connor’s characters, to allow open prejudice to flourish would be anathema to a vision of national progress in which Christian charity, peace, and well-being for all are meant to reign.

Underneath the benevolent surface is a more militant version of Christianity, whereby characters view war against Germany in terms of a sacred crusade in the defense of Christian values. In *The Sky Pilot in No Man’s Land*, newly-appointed chaplain Barry Dunbar addresses Canadian troops as they prepare to sail for Europe. His sermon’s main message is that the men are soldiers of God, following in the footsteps of St. Paul toward a sacred battle:

From the first word he lifted his audience to the high plane of sacrament and sacrifice. They were called upon to offer upon the altar of the world’s freedom all that they held dear in life.... It was the ancient sacrifice that the noblest of the race had always been called upon to make. In giving themselves to this cause they were giving themselves to their country. They were offering themselves to God.

(110)

The chance to leave the mundane world of prairie farms and enter a world of adventure and glory is an irresistible opportunity for young men to walk in the shoes of the biblical heroes. Dunbar's sermon rouses the jingoist impulses of his youthful listeners: "Upon the whole congregation lay a new and solemn sense of duty, a new and uplifting sense of privilege in making the sacrifice of all that they counted precious in their holy cause" (111). Here the high diction makes it clear that the war is not only about re-establishing peace and territorial boundaries in Europe: it is a crusade on behalf of moral ideals in which God is the ultimate authority.

For Connor, "duty" is the notion that translates ideals into action, the creed that gets men into uniform and keeps them there. Duty remains dormant in peacetime, then sparks to life spontaneously in time of war, rooted in national pride and in one's conscience. It is an instinct, pulling young men into the war whatever the consequences and superceding all other loyalties, including family. In *The Major*, the pacifism instilled in Larry by his mother, a Quaker, gives way to a stronger impulse to enlist after the war breaks out: "I am not a soldier, but, thank God, I see my duty, and I am going to have a go at it" (363). Similarly, for Tony in *Treading the Winepress*, his hatred for war cannot supercede his compulsion to enlist: "My judgment and my conscience tell me it is my duty" (221). Duty is also the essence of a nation's honour. In *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, when a British naval officer expresses amazement at Canada's loyalty to Britain, Barry is surprised that such loyalty could be in doubt: "To him, as to all Canadians, it had only been a perfectly reasonable and natural thing that when the Empire was threatened, they should spring to the fight. There was nothing heroic in that. They were doing their simple duty" (142). Duty gives a dimension of civic responsibility to the crusader's ethos.

Many of the young crusaders in Connor's fiction are bound to die in the trenches. Death, like duty, is idealized and treated as something for others not to mourn but to praise and glorify. In *The Major*, upon hearing the news that his friend Jack Romaine has died during a bayonet charge, Larry exclaims, "My God!... What a great death!" (368). In *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* Corporal Thom's death on the battlefield is "splendid" and "perfectly glorious" to his friend Barry (256). At the end of the novel, when Barry himself dies, it is "beautiful" to his friends, a sign that "God is good" and a message for others to "carry on" (349). Symbolically, the ghost of Rupert Brooke hovers over such scenes, as the bugle resounds "over the rich Dead" ("The Dead" 1), and the ghost of McCrae inspires others to "take up our quarrel with the foe."

The glorification of death in Connor's novels feeds a desire for immortality beyond carnage. Commitment to duty is a soldier's pass to eternal privilege in the beyond. To readers it is meant to offer consolation, a plausible assurance that the violence of their generation is not meaningless, that personal loss begets moral dignity and a promising future lies ahead. Without a constant affirmation of these ideals, the brutality and stupidity of war begin to seep into public consciousness; along with them comes disillusionment. Connor's novels buffer this disillusionment with constant assurances that the war is purposeful, victory is assured, and the enemy—the epitome of immorality and brutality—will be vanquished.

In Connor's work, Germany represents all that is corrupt and evil in modern society. Terms like "menace," "monstrous," and "bloodthirsty" describe Germany in the novels. In *Sky Pilot* a friend of Barry's describes German soldiers as "baby-killing, woman-raping devils" (198). The narrator of *Treading the Winepress* describes German

cruisers conducting “baby-killing expeditions” along the English coast (286). Veering into pettiness, he describes German tacticians, without irony, as “square-headed men ... mad with pride and lust of power” (124). Most disturbing is Larry’s outburst in *The Major*, in which he unleashes a quasi-genocidal tirade against Germany: “I have come to see that there is no possibility of peace or sanity for the world till that race of mad militarists is destroyed. I am still a pacifist, but, thank God, no longer a fool” (*Major* 370). By speaking of Germans in racial terms, he condemns not only German soldiers, but German society itself. In light of such vicious cultural prejudice, his claims to be a pacifist ring hollow, as do his pretensions to Christian brotherhood.

German-Canadian civilians, who made up Canada’s third-largest cultural group during the First World War, are also the targets of anti-German prejudice in Connor’s work. German-American characters are similarly treated. Ernest Switzer and Professor Schaefer in *The Major* and Ruddy Cottman, Ernest Cottman, and Professor Hemstein in *Treading the Winepress* are interchangeable stereotypes of crazed, militant Germans, inherently treacherous and violent. When the war breaks out, they reveal a stereotypical zeal for German power and superiority, switching instantly from peaceful immigrants to frothing agents of the German military machine. In *The Major*, Professor Schaefer and his friend Meyer, both German-American visitors to Canada, turn from affable socialites into raving militarists after receiving a telegram announcing Austria’s ultimatum to Serbia:

Professor Schaefer glanced at the telegram. “My God!” he exclaimed, springing to his feet. “It is come, it is come at last!”...

Meyer read it. "God in heaven!" he cried. "It is here!" In intense excitement he poured forth a torrent of interrogations in German, receiving animated replies from Professor Schaefer. Then grasping the professor's hand in both of his, he shook it with wild enthusiasm.

"At last!" he cried. "At last! Thank God, our day has come!" (302)

The "day" they refer to is the day of Germany's rise to military and hegemonic domination of the world, a dream Schaefer and Meyer have kept secret, hidden behind praise for North American democracy. Another character in *The Major*, Switzer, co-founder of a successful mining operation in Wolf Willow, Saskatchewan, turns saboteur as he tries to blow up the mine in the name of Germany (353).

Connor's anti-Germanism ought to have diminished by 1925, long after most of the paranoia about German wartime saboteurs had proven to be unfounded. But in *Treading the Winepress*, dastardly Germans, much like those in the earlier novels, again threaten Canada. Ruddy Cottman is an antagonistic German, indistinguishable in character from Switzer in *The Major*. Another two-faced German-American, Professor Hemstein, joins a team of saboteurs who try to blow up Tony Mackinroy's yacht before Tony and his friends outwit them. The scene portrays the British characters as canny and brave, the Germans as sly and stupid.

Like many in his day, Connor bought into propagandist myths about Germans that riddled newspapers and official reports of the time. He believed the exaggerated reports of German atrocities against Belgian civilians because he makes them a key reason for his characters' commitment to the war. *The Major*, especially, credits a real-life

document, Lord Bryce's Committee to Investigate Alleged German Outrages, tabled in December 1914, as indisputably accurate: "The tales of Belgian atrocities... confirmed by the Bryce Commission and by many private letters, kindled in Canadian hearts a passion of furious longing to wipe from the face of the earth a system that produced such horrors" (366). The problem is that the Bryce Commission Report—full of stories of Germans gang-raping women, cutting off women's breasts, and bayoneting babies—was almost entirely a work of fiction:

The Bryce Report ... as is now generally acknowledged, was largely a tissue of invention, unsubstantiated observations by unnamed witnesses, and second-hand eyewitness reports, depending far more on imagination than any other factor. The witnesses were not put on oath, nor were they cross-examined. There was no attempt at scholarly investigation and evaluation of this evidence.

(Buitenhuis, *Great War of Words* 27)

In Connor's work, the Bryce commission and the false newspaper stories it inspired become authoritative reports of German activity. Although Connor may not have realized the inaccuracy of his sources, his novels unwittingly perpetuated propagandist myths and their appeal to patriotism is countered by their distortions of fact. By demonizing German immigrants, the novels perpetuate an impression of guilt-by-association with the atrocities committed by their countrymen.

German-Canadians never posed a serious threat to national security during the First World War. After the War Measures Act passed in 1914, Canada victimized

Germans more than Germans victimized Canada. Naturalized Germans were refused the right to cross borders or to bear arms, and they had to report regularly to special offices established to deal with enemy aliens. Breaking any of these regulations resulted in imprisonment in one of several forced-labour camps set up across Canada. Before the war's end the government revoked the civil rights of German-Canadians—including Mennonites, Hutterites, and other German pacifist groups—depriving them of the right to vote. The public participated in the abuse. In communities with large German populations, including Berlin, Ontario (later Kitchener), Germans were ostracized and beaten and their property vandalized. Across Canada people with German-sounding names were sometimes forced to change them, even if they had no direct German heritage.

Although Connor cannot be blamed for the poor treatment of Germans in wartime Canada, his novels reflect and perpetuate anti-German prejudice. Scenes featuring Switzer, Schaefer, Cottman and other German characters, like those in which British characters rave against German culture in general, are meant to win the reader's sympathy for the Allies while turning them against Britain's opponents. In such scenes the novels cease to be literary evocations of human nature, becoming propaganda tracts against the cultural enemies of British Canada. Although Connor claims in *Postscript to Adventure* that he never harbored animosity toward Germans during the war, his war novels present a different picture—one of sustained and unjustified prejudice toward Germans.

Despite its jingoist leanings, *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* retains literary significance because it presents one of the earliest and most vivid accounts of modern

warfare in Canadian fiction. Scenes in which Connor draws from his own experiences in the trenches cut through the novel's dogmatic framework, lending it a visceral potency that is missing from *The Major* and *Treading the Winepress*, neither of which leaves the home front for long. In trench scenes in *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, Connor's characters react like human beings caught in the chaos of war. The closer the scenes mirror Connor's own war experiences, the more powerful they are. In one, Barry Dunbar helps out at an overcrowded dressing station as news of a nearby battle trickles in:

With the wounded came rumours, more or less fantastic, of disaster. Something terrible had befallen the whole Canadian line. It was difficult to get at the truth. As with all rumours, they contradicted each other and left the mind in a chaos of perplexity. The battalion had run into wire, where the machine guns had found it, the battalion was practically wiped out, it had found cover in a trench and was still holding on, the O.C. was wounded, the O.C. was killed, and with him every company commander. (Sky Pilot 332)

Such scenes are effective because of Connor's willingness to forego high diction and describe the war in clear, evocative prose. The scene does not denigrate Canadian soldiers or doubt their heroism, yet it shows that war is not merely an exercise in manly adventure. The rumours bouncing in and out of the dressing station destabilize Barry's perceptions, leaving him "perplexed" and unsure about what is going on. For once, victory is in doubt and the reader understands that there is nothing inherently glorious or noble about modern combat. Even though Connor's romantic sensibility dictates that the

Canadians will eventually return from the brink of disaster—with an alleged victory on the Somme—this passage provides a glimpse into a darker, less romantic potential, showing his capacity to temper jingoism with realism. Although such moments are all-too-brief, they mark his place as one of the seminal figures in Canadian war fiction.

Women's fiction about the First World War is a lost tradition in Canadian literature. Although eleven or more women published war fiction between 1915 and 1930, very few of their works survived beyond a single printing. Today such authors as Jean Blewett, Carolyn Cox, Evah McKowan, and Grace Blackburn have fallen into obscurity.⁵ Recent reprintings of Francis Marion Beynon's pacifist novel *Aleta Dey* (1919) makes it somewhat easier to come by, and J.G. Sime's short story "Munitions" appears in anthologies of Canadian short fiction and criticism by Gerald Lynch and Ann Martin.⁶ Although Nellie McClung's wartime treatise *In Times Like These* (1915) remains widely available (as do several of her novels), both her semi-fictional war novel *The Next of Kin* (1917) and her co-authored memoir (with Private Simmons) *Three Times and Out* (1918) are among her hardest-to-find works.⁷

Recent studies of war fiction by Donna Coates and Dagmar Novak have gone some way to recovering lost works by women, but without available editions their efforts do little to enhance readership. As with much early Canadian war fiction, in which patriotic fervour often trounces literary depth, the question of whether a given work is *worth* reprinting for reasons other than historical interest is often a valid one. As with men's war novels of the period, women's war fiction is often burdened with trite

sentiments about doing one's bit and fighting German baby-killers. Lines like "One little hand has been severed at the wrist. Oh! Oh!... God bless Great Britain, I – I didn't know she fought for this," from Blewett's *Heart Stories* (28) are unlikely to convince anyone that it is a lost Canadian classic. On the other hand, works by Beynon and McClung temper propaganda with perceptive observations about the consequences of war and deserve greater recognition. Sime's "Munitions," in which female weapons plant workers toil amid "noise and grime and wet" (75), eschews romanticism altogether and is a rare example of realism in pre-1920s Canadian war fiction.

Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* (1920) is the one novel that has survived posterity, mainly because it is part of the enduring *Anne of Green Gables* series. Ostensibly a Bildungsroman about the wartime coming-of-age of Anne and Gilbert Blythe's youngest daughter Rilla (a diminutive of Marilla, Anne's childhood guardian), the novel moves beyond the singular subject to encompass a whole range of women's experiences in the fictional Prince Edward Island community of Glen St. Mary. Unlike most war novels where women are either passive witnesses to masculine activities or victims of them, *Rilla of Ingleside* portrays the First World War from an exclusively domestic and mainly feminine perspective. It epitomizes the mythology of the home front, a community removed from the theatres of combat where the war effort thrives by other means. Although it is not the first novel to provide this perspective—Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) set a notable British precedent—it is the Canadian forerunner of such recent works as Daphne Marlatt's *Taken* (1996), Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* (2001), and Francis Itani's *Deafening* (2003).

Although Elizabeth Rollings Epperly mistakenly refers to *Rilla of Ingleside* as “Canada’s only contemporary fictionalized woman’s account of the First World War” (*Fragrance* 112), the assumption is understandable given the obscurity of most Canadian works similar to it. Critical attention to *Rilla of Ingleside* has increased in recent years, thanks to the growing realization that Montgomery was more than a writer of children’s novels. Recent critical books by Epperly, Irene Gammel, Aida Hudson, Susan-Ann Cooper, and others have helped to illuminate Montgomery’s literary importance, while essays on *Rilla of Ingleside* by Owen Dudley Edwards, Amy Tector, and others have brought it in line with Montgomery’s other work.

Critics continue to argue about the literary value of *Rilla of Ingleside*, as they have since its publication eighty-five years ago. For many the novel is a sub-literary romance typical of a dozen other novels of the period, for others it is a unique and authentic account of the war. On one side of the debate Vance argues that the novel “proceeds to provide a directory of the stock characters that peopled Canada’s memory of the war” (*Death* 175), and Fee and Cawker call it “a chauvinistic tract for Canadian support of Great Britain in World War One” (76). On the other side, Epperly claims it is “invaluable as a social record [and] a wonderful study of psychology” (*Fragrance* 114), and Tector claims that it “gives readers the sense of dislocation and terror that the war evoked, without alienating them from the story” (75).

Reactions from Montgomery’s contemporaries were similarly diverse. Her American publisher, Stokes and Company, found *Rilla of Ingleside* “too gloomy” and asked her to “tone down some of the shadows,” a request she refused (*Journals* II: 404). Conversely, an early *New York Times* review found it to be “a captivating, sunny story”

(“Latest Works of Fiction”). Montgomery’s fans, who made the early Anne books perennial bestsellers, were lukewarm toward *Rilla of Ingleside*, perhaps not knowing what to make of its dark undertones. In April 1922 its sales figures were below those of the earlier books, though by March 1924 it had sold a decent (if not spectacular) 12,000 copies in Canada—3,500 more than *Emily of New Moon*. A Vancouver librarian told Montgomery in a letter that *Rilla of Ingleside* “will live ... when most of the ephemeral literature of the time will be forgotten [because it] visualize[s] the soul of the Canadian people in the war”; another reader, an Australian pacifist, wrote to say it was “a ‘beastly book’ because it ‘glorifies war’” (*Journals* III: 29; 387). Montgomery’s response to the latter comment—“I wrote *Rilla* not to ‘glorify war’ but to glorify the courage and patriotism and self-sacrifice it evoked” (III: 387)—begs the question in an age when war and patriotism were inextricably entwined, leaving her ideological motivations ambiguous.

Why are reader responses so polarized about a novel that, on its surface, is a straightforward tale about a young girl growing up in wartime? The answer lies in the complex dialectic underlying *Rilla of Ingleside*’s structure. The novel *seems* like a conventional wartime romance—in many ways it is—but it also questions the validity of romantic ideals in the modern world. On the one hand, characters at home speak of “keeping the faith” while awaiting “Victory!”; on the other they read letters from Jem (an otherwise conventionally heroic soldier) about rat-infested trenches and “[d]ead men... lying on the horrible grey, slimy fields” (110). The result is a juxtaposition between romance and realism which tempers the novel’s jingoism without giving way to disillusionment. There is nothing inherently progressive about a generation of young men

dying, despite (as the novel argues) the inevitability of these deaths. *Rilla of Ingleside*'s overall message is reiterated by variations on the phrase "our old world has come to an end" (46). Its optimistic ending does not mask the fact that the world it portrays has shifted permanently from pastoral innocence to ironic experience. Unlike Connor's war novels and despite its patriotism, *Rilla of Ingleside* does not portray war as a heroic bloodletting on the path to a utopian future.

Montgomery's journals reveal much about the worldview she espoused in *Rilla of Ingleside* and its predecessor, *Rainbow Valley* (1919). Throughout the war she was plagued by "strained emotions" and a "tortured consciousness" (*Journals* II: 166). She followed the war news obsessively in the *Toronto Globe* and other papers, writing lengthy commentaries on many of the war's major events (though, strangely, not the Battle of Vimy Ridge where her half-brother Carl lost a leg). She suffered from a series of disturbing—in her view prophetic—dreams about the war. Convinced she foresaw such events as the German assault on Verdun in 1916 and the Kaiser offensive of spring 1918, she began believing in predestination: "After the strange series of dreams I have had since the war began I have become a fatalist. I believe that all is planned out in the councils of Eternity" (II: 212). Montgomery remained a resolute patriot, campaigning for the Red Cross, giving speeches to the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, and voting for Robert Borden's conservative government and its conscription platform.

Adding to Montgomery's "strained emotions" were the stillborn birth of her second son on August 13, 1914, the near-fatal illness of her first son Chester, and a bitter dispute with her American publisher, Lewis Page, over royalties and publishing rights for her work. Her husband Ewan MacDonald began showing signs of the nervous breakdown

that would make married life increasingly difficult after the war. Despite these emotional obstacles she managed to write two more installments in the Anne series, *Anne of the Island* (1915) and *Anne's House of Dreams* (1917), neither of which betrays the strain she was under, apart from images of death and loss common to all of the Anne books.

Inevitably, trauma and personal loss affected her work. Upon the completion of *Rainbow Valley*, the fifth Anne novel, in December 1918, she confided in her journal that, although it “averages up pretty well of its kind,” she was “tired of the kind” and had “outgrown it” (II: 278). *Rainbow Valley* set the tone for *Rilla of Ingleside* and was a prequel to it. Set in Glen St. Mary a decade before the war, *Rainbow Valley* is a swan song to childhood, marriage, and pre-war society. It foreshadows the impending catastrophe while introducing the characters who will be drawn into it. They include Anne and Gilbert Blythe's six children (Jem, Walter, Shirley, Nan, Di, and Rilla), their housekeeper Susan Baker, and neighbours Mary Vance, Norman Douglas, and the Meredith family.

Rainbow Valley reflects the fatalism of Montgomery's dreams. Anne's eldest son Jem dreams with childish enthusiasm of being a soldier, oblivious to the realities of rat-infested trenches looming in his future. Walter, a budding poet, imagines himself following an ominous piper “round and round the world” (225), prefiguring his journey to the Western Front in *Rilla of Ingleside* and his trench poem “The Piper.” The rise of German militarism is also evoked briefly as Ellen West reads a book about Kaiser Wilhelm and describes him as one who “is going to set the world on fire” (91). Toward the end of the novel the narrator intones an ominous vision of the future, making it clear that the pastoral world is doomed:

The shadow of the Great Conflict had not yet made felt any forerunner of its chill. The lads who were to fight, and perhaps fall, on the fields of France and Flanders, Gallipoli and Palestine, were still roguish schoolboys with a fair life in prospect before them: the girls whose hearts were to be wrung were yet fair little maidens a-star with hopes and dreams. (224)

Shortly after Montgomery completed *Rainbow Valley*, fate dealt her another blow when her closest friend Frederica Campbell died from Spanish Flu; she was one of 50,000 Canadian victims of a virus carried from Europe by returning soldiers. The war had come home—had not ended in a sense—and pressures from fans and publishers to resurrect the pastoral world in yet another Anne novel began to grate on her. On March 7, 1919, she wrote in her journal,

I began work on my tenth novel [*Rilla*] today. It is to be another “Anne” story—and I fervently hope the last—dealing with her sons and daughters during the years of war. That will end Anne—and properly. For she belongs to the green, untroubled pastures and still waters of the world before the war. (II: 309)

When she finished *Rilla of Ingleside* on August 24, 1920, she swore “a dark and deadly vow” that she was “done with *Anne* forever” (II: 390) and immediately began planning the trilogy of Emily books that would take her work in a new direction.

Determined to make the obsolescence of Anne's world apparent to her readers, Montgomery paints Anne, now a middle-aged mother of six, into the background of *Rilla of Ingleside*.⁸ The formerly rambunctious redhead becomes what readers of the early novels least expected: an Angel in the House. The only strong emotion she displays is grief at the loss of her sons, making her into a stereotypical figure of mourning. Rarely does she participate actively in the war effort, unlike the women around her. Few of her youthful traits rub off on her daughter Rilla, a vacant socialite at the novel's outset, who turns into a dedicated and stoic contributor to the war effort (it is hard to imagine the savvy and intellectual Anne of the earlier novels in either role). Mid-way through the novel, in one of her few lengthy statements, Anne reiterates her author's verdict about her anachronistic status:

"It seems hundreds of years since those Green Gable days," sighed Mrs. Blythe.

"They belonged to another world altogether. Life has been cut in two by the chasm of the war.... I wonder if those of us who have lived half our lives in the old world will ever feel wholly at home in the new." (160)

Her musings answer themselves: the world has forever changed, human progress is in question, and the unity of life has broken apart. Anne, once a representative of rural pluck, has lost her relevance in the post-war era. Although it would stretch credulity to call *Rilla of Ingleside* a modernist novel, its evocation of fragmented post-war society anticipates the existential dilemma of modern war fiction in the 1920s.

The fulfillment of the destiny set out at the end of *Rainbow Valley* begins in the first chapter of *Rilla of Ingleside* with news of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. Few of the characters realize its significance at first, and for a time their pastoral existence continues:

Outside, the Ingleside lawn was full of golden pools of sunshine and plots of alluring shadows. Rilla Blythe was swinging in the hammock under the big Scotch pine, Gertrude Oliver sat at its roots beside her, and Walter was stretched at full length on the grass, lost in a romance of chivalry wherein old heroes and beauties of dead and gone centuries lived vividly again for him. (11)

The scene is a tableau anticipating the ironic reversal these characters' lives will take within the next year. Rilla will be kept restless by the war baby she temporarily adopts; Gertrude, like Montgomery, will be haunted by terrifying dreams of the war; Walter will serve and eventually die in the trenches. The "romance of chivalry" Walter dreams about, a sublimated version of war, will be replaced by a terrifying, real war, rupturing his innocent engagement with the past.

In Connor's war novels there is no doubt that the war will benefit humankind and no doubt that it will end with an Allied victory. Characters in *Rilla of Ingleside* are less sure about the war's outcome. In Connor's novels no one questions the existence of God or His continuing influence on the world. In *Rilla of Ingleside*, Christian belief is tested constantly. Few of Montgomery's characters blindly accept conventional patriotism and

morality; they all want the Allies to win, but doubt and debate occupy them in the meantime.

Susan, the Blythe's housekeeper, and Gertrude Oliver, a local schoolteacher in her late twenties, debate most vehemently about the war. Susan is the community's most ardent jingoist. Always convinced the war will be "over by Christmas" or "over by summer," she raises the Union Jack every time the war news favours the Allies. Aligned with the xenophobic Norman Douglas against "foreigners," she is a voice of social conservatism and civic militarism. Countering these ideologies is Gertrude, who counts the war's human costs and agonizes over the possibility of a German victory. For Susan the war paves the way to a glorious future; for Gertrude it triggers an existential crisis. In one scene Gilbert Blythe, reflecting on the events of 1914, wonders aloud what next year will bring—"Victory!" is Susan's immediate response, in reply to which Gertrude scoffs, "Do you really believe we'll win the war, Susan?" (96). Undaunted, Susan backs her militarism with Christian faith: "we must just trust in God and make big guns" (97). For Gertrude, war is a purely materialist undertaking without any divine purpose: "Sometimes I think the big guns are better to trust in than God" (97).

In a later exchange, Susan's and Gertrude's attitudes conflict again, as news of a "big Allied victory" in the autumn of 1915 seeps back to Ingleside. Susan raises the flag: "Likely the Big Push has begun at last... and we will soon see the finish of the Huns. Our boys will be home by Christmas now. Hurrah!" (147). Suspecting her patriotic zeal is alienating others, she recants her initial enthusiasm: "Susan was ashamed of herself for hurrahing the minute she had done it, and apologized meekly for such an outburst of juvenility. 'But indeed [...] this good news has gone to my head after this awful summer

of Russian slumps and Gallipoli setbacks” (147). Tired of Susan’s outbursts, Gertrude lashes out bitterly: “Good news!... I wonder if the women whose men have been killed for it will call it good news. Just because our own men are not on that part of the front we are rejoicing as if the victory had cost no lives” (147). Susan’s and Gertrude’s exchanges are a dialectic interplay between romance and realism, highlighting the inadequacy of pat ideologies in the face of the wartime crisis.

An even darker rebuttal to Susan’s outlook comes from Cousin Sophia Crawford, who sees the war in terms of a millennial crisis meant to punish European civilization for decadence and a failure to adhere to Christian principles: “England and France must be punished for their deadly sins until they repent in sackcloth and ashes” (147). Her view of their German opponents eschews patriotism in favour of a dark, Presbyterian fatalism: “the Huns... are instruments in the hand of the Almighty, to purge the garner” (147). In Sophia’s outlook there is no “us” and “them,” no winning side, just armies acting out the moral folly of a corrupt world.

The conflict between romance and realism in the novel also shows itself in the relationships between the male characters, particularly in how Walter and Jem Blythe react to the war. In the summer of 1914, as war looms, Jem spouts imperialist rhetoric about Canada’s obligation toward England: “We’re the cubs—we’ve got to pitch in tooth and claw if it comes to a family row.... What an adventure it would be!” (20). Contrasting Jem’s enthusiasm is Walter’s skepticism: “War was a hellish, horrible, hideous thing—too horrible and hideous to happen in the twentieth century between civilized nations. The mere thought of it was hideous, and made Walter unhappy in its threat to the beauty of life” (20). Although both brothers enlist—Jem with predictable

enthusiasm—Walter does so belatedly and reluctantly, with a sense of duty but little fanfare. Jem's enthusiasm wanes as he experiences the misery of the trenches: his letters home show the strain he is under. When he returns home after the war, despite his "bronzed face," he wears a "a faded lieutenant's uniform," has "a barely perceptible limp," and "grey hairs in the ruddy curls that clustered around his forehead" (261). The transformation in Jem's appearance exposes the naiveté of his earlier notions of war-as-adventure. Romance has given way to realism.

Walter Blythe is to some degree a typological figure reminiscent of the romantic war narratives he admires. Although he upholds the soldier-martyr convention by dying heroically in the trenches, his initial reluctance to enlist, owing to fear, undermines traditional notions of masculinity. For a soldier he is unusually effeminate—more comfortable in women's company than that of men and better able to wield a pen than swing an axe. Although he is heroic, he is the antithesis of Connor's muscular Christian. His main contribution to the war effort comes, not from the men he kills, but from the poem he writes—"The Piper," a poem similar to McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," deemed to be "a classic from its first printing" and "the one great poem of the war" (174). Walter's death immortalizes him as a romantic figure, but, like McCrae on whom he is modeled, his legacy owes more to his artistic than his military prowess.

Because Rilla Blythe, fourteen at the novel's outset, comes of age during the war, she goes through the novel's greatest transformation. She begins as an immature socialite reminiscent of *The Imperialist's* Dora Milburn: "I'm quite willing to be a dunce if I can be a pretty, popular, delightful one. I can't be clever. I have no talent at all, and you can't imagine how comfortable it is. No body expects me to do anything so I'm never pestered

to do it. And I can't be a housewifely, cookly creature, either" (15). She refuses to conform to feminine stereotypes and remains non-committal about social and political issues. The war galvanizes her unformed personality; gradually its anxieties inspire her patriotism, turning her into a socially and politically aware adult. She experiences loss for the first time as Jem, Walter, and her beau Ken Ford go off to war while becoming socially committed by organizing a local chapter of the Junior Red Cross Society. Most transformative of all is her temporary adoption of Jims, a war baby left alone by his mother's death and his father's wartime absence. At fifteen Rilla takes on the responsibilities of motherhood, begrudgingly at first, then with growing affection toward Jims, nicknamed "Little Kitchener" by Susan (an ardent admirer, like Montgomery, of the British Secretary of State for War). Rilla represents female responsibility but also feminine purity. In one scene, as she cradles Jims in her lap, she reminds Ken of the Madonna, evoking Christian piety and the preservation of traditional values threatened by the war.

After the war, Jims reunites with his father and Ken returns to kindle his romance with Rilla. By the end of the novel Rilla has cast off her wartime responsibilities and is ready to move into the traditional role of wife and mother. This anticlimactic ending disturbs some critics who see Rilla being forced back into a subservient social position after the war ends. In her lisped "yeth" (for "yes") to Ken Ford's proposal she reverts to the speech impediment she found humiliating in her youth, suggesting a regression to immaturity in her relationship with Ken. In another sense, however, the ending reflects social realities for many women who resumed domestic roles as men returned from war.

The ending reflects Montgomery's social conservatism, her need to counteract the threat of the First World War with the possibility of a return to a safer, more traditional world. Although such a return is impossible, as the journals state unequivocally, Montgomery's fiction acts as a form of wishful thinking, an imaginative haven against chaos. The happy end for Rilla and Ken, like the placid relationship between Gilbert and Anne Blythe, contrasts with Montgomery's troubled marriage to Ewan Macdonald. More poignantly, the survival of Jims—"Little Kitchener"—substitutes for the death of Montgomery's baby and the real-life Kitchener.⁹ The romanticism from which *Rilla of Ingleside* never entirely breaks offers Montgomery—and, presumably, many of her contemporary readers—an imaginative space for recovery from trauma.

Although Rilla's story provides the backbone of the plot, the novel's main interest lies in its portrayal of women as active contributors to war on the home front. Women are not passive observers of a war waged by men, as they are in Connor's novels, but direct participants in its outcome. Through charity work, recruiting drives, new-found voting rights, and direct participation in the lively political debates surrounding the war, women are the active supporters of war on the home front and the keepers of national identity. Unlike McClung and Woolf, who see war as the product of masculine impulses,¹⁰ Montgomery implies that women, too, are directly engaged in propagating war. Walter Blythe reluctantly enlists thanks largely to the promptings he receives from local white feather campaigners, the white feather symbolizing cowardice and genetic weakness. On the other side of the debate are women like Gertrude and Sophia, voices of dissent against jingoism. These various roles show the diversity of women's experience of war and complicate any attempt to reduce war to a series of gendered impulses.

Patriotic novels like *Rilla of Ingleside* are often criticized for perpetuating wartime propaganda. Stories of German soldiers raping Belgian nuns, killing babies, and abusing Allied prisoners crop up in *Rilla of Ingleside*, as they do regularly in war fiction of the period. As in Connor's case, anti-German fabrications in newspapers and the Bryce Report fooled many in wartime who were not excessively gullible under normal circumstances. Canadian civilians were vulnerable to manipulation because their distance three thousand miles from the front meant that they never saw the war at first hand. Women were especially sheltered. Unless they enlisted as nurses, aid workers, or lived directly in the line of fire in Europe, women's knowledge of combat was mediated through second-hand accounts—in newspapers, recruitment posters, radio broadcasts, censored letters, and propaganda films. Journalists, politicians, and recruiters—mostly male—were their eyes and ears in wartime, and many returning soldiers were too traumatized to talk about their experiences (or felt it their duty as men to protect women and children from horrific realities). Montgomery, who followed reports in the *Globe* or watched propaganda films like *Hearts of the World*, was no more privy to information about the war than most of the public. Not surprisingly, *Rilla of Ingleside* reiterates a number of pernicious myths about the war, probably without any deliberate willingness to deceive readers.

In one respect, *Rilla of Ingleside* resists common stereotypes. The subplot featuring the hapless and semi-committed pacifist, Josiah “Whiskers-on-the-Moon” Pryor, is a parody of attitudes toward pacifism and Germans in wartime Canada. Cantankerous, reclusive, and foolish Pryor may be, but from the outset it is clear that Pryor poses no threat to the community of Glen St. Mary. Although he is not German or

pro-German, his anti-war sentiments are immediately aligned with “Prussianism” by members of the community. He becomes the scapegoat for an increasingly volatile form of jingoism, exposing “the violence beneath Glen St. Mary’s placid surface” (Tector 78). When German U-boats sink the *Lusitania* in 1915, local boys vandalize his house. When the parliament buildings in Ottawa burn in 1916—initially thought to be the work of German saboteurs—Susan spreads false rumours about Pryor’s connection to a local barn burning. In church, when Pryor gives a “pacifist appeal of the rankest sort” (181), Norman Douglas attacks him, calling him a “pig-headed varmint” and “Hunnish scum” (181-82). Finally, when Pryor suffers a stroke shortly after the armistice, Susan coldly implies that the stroke is punishment for his anti-war stance. The novel does not defend Pryor’s pacifism, but neither does it show pacifism to be an insidious evil. The community’s reaction to it, on the other hand, is fanatical and vicious, undercutting once again the jingoist extremes of characters like Susan. Unlike in Connor’s novels, there is no real “German menace” in Glen St. Mary—just the dark undercurrents of a paranoid community prepared to ostracize one of its members.

More than any of the previous Anne books, *Rilla of Ingleside* incorporates autobiographical impulses into its structure. Some of Rilla’s diary entries are quoted verbatim from Montgomery’s own journals between 1914 and 1918, and the journals also mirror Gertrude’s questions (by way of Tennyson) about the war: “Is the agony in which the world is shuddering the birth-pang of some wondrous new era? Or is it merely a futile ‘struggle of ants / In the gleam of a million million of suns?’” (*Journals* II: 160; *Rilla* 172). Rilla, Susan, Gertrude, and Sophia reflect different aspects of Montgomery’s response to the war. Rilla reflects her maternal and activist principles; Susan mirrors her

patriotism; Gertrude echoes her grief and fatalism; Sophia encapsulates her faith.

Together the four women form a psychological portrait of Montgomery's wartime experiences—a portrait full of juxtapositions, contradictions, and anxieties—making *Rilla of Ingleside* a sophisticated portrait of female experience during the First World War.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ Morton, "World War I," p. 2551.

² In *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, Vol. 1, p. 5, Stacey gives a detailed account of Canadian census statistics in the years leading up to the First World War.

³ Novels by the authors listed include Baxter's *The Blower of Bubbles* and *The Parts Men Play* (both 1920); Dancey's *The Faith of a Belgian: A Romance of the Great War* (1916); King's *The High Heart* (1917), *The Lifted Veil* (1917), *The City of Comrades* (1918), *The Thread of Flame* (1920), and *The Happy Isles* (1923); and Sinclair's *Burned Bridges* (1919), *Poor Man's Rock* (1920), *The Hidden Places* (1922), and *The Inverted Pyramid* (1924).

⁴ David Staines recounts this anecdote in *Beyond the Provinces* (8).

⁵ Works by the women listed include Jean Blewett's *Heart Stories* (1919), Carolyn Cox's *Stand By* (1925), Evah McKowan's *Janet of Kootenay* (1919), Beverley Arthur Baxter's *The Blower of Bubbles* (1920) and *The Parts Men Play* (1920), Grace Blackburn's *The Man Child* (1930). For analysis see Donna Coates's lengthy essay "Myrmidons to Insubordinates" and Dagmar Novak's book *Dubious Glory*.

⁶ See Lynch's chapter on Sime in *The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Story Cycles* and Martin's essay on Sime and F.R. Livesay in *Canadian Literature* 181 (Summer 2004). For "Munitions" itself, see the 1992 Tecumseh reprint of *Sister Woman* or Muriel Whitaker's recent anthology, *Great Canadian War Stories*.

⁷ An online version of *Three Times and Out* with a reliable text can be found at Project Gutenberg, (www.gutenberg.org).

⁸ That Anne's relegation is not simply a case of literary ageism in a juvenile novel is apparent in the fact that other adult women, including Anne's sixtyish housekeeper Susan Baker, remain prominent.

⁹ Kitchener died on June 5, 1916 after a ship carrying him on a diplomatic mission to Russia was torpedoed.

¹⁰ See McClung, *In Times Like These*, Chapter 2, and Woolf's *Three Guineas*.

CHAPTER 3

The Anti-War Movement

After the November 11, 1918 armistice ended the First World War, high diction continued to dominate accounts of the war, betokening optimism toward Canada's future. On armistice day, an anonymous poem on the front page of the Toronto *Globe* declared: "Celestial bugles bid man's battles cease / And seraph voices, wafted from afar / Fill heaven with music, and the Earth with Peace." The next day's edition featured the headline, "Germany Vanquished and in Throes of Revolution ... Drastic Terms of Armistice Imposed on Humbled Huns" (1). Canadians breathed a sigh of relief, oblivious to how fragile peace would prove to be. At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the Allied nations forged the Treaty of Versailles, forcing Germany to pay financial reparations to its former enemies that crippled its economy.¹ Two years later, these sanctions helped to inspire the National Socialist German Workers Party under its new chairman, Adolf Hitler, to begin a furious backlash against the Allied conglomerate. Most Canadians were oblivious to the political volcano that was brewing in Europe, until it erupted into the Second World War two decades later.

Canadian veterans, numbering close to 600,000, did their utmost to re-adapt to civilian life in the 1920s. Many were successful, including Lester B. Pearson, a former stretcher-bearer who began a career in politics that would culminate in his winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 and becoming Canada's Prime Minister in 1963. Two former

soldiers and war artists, A.Y. Jackson and F.H. Varley, co-founded the Group of Seven to revolutionize Canadian painting in the 1920s. Connor retired into a peaceful life as an elder statesman and Canada's most popular author.

Other veterans were not so fortunate, and many returned to the precarious civilian life that had prompted them to enlist in the first place. Veterans were among the 30,000 workers who struck and rioted during the Winnipeg General Strike of May 15 to June 25, 1919,² and when Canada sank into the Great Depression a decade later, veterans joined the soup kitchen and day labour lines. Government-sanctioned make-work projects and land grant programs provided dubious comfort for veterans who struggled to survive in menial jobs or farm unarable land.³ At a time when post-traumatic stress was equated with unmanliness and "effeminacy," many veterans endured horrors of the mind for which there was no treatment. Canada had its share of Septimus Warren Smiths, the psychologically-tortured veteran in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, but in the 1920s few in Canada heard their stories. Scarce and ignored were accounts of the war like those of Harold Peat, whose 1923 memoir *The Inexcusable Lie* lashed out against public schools for spreading "warism" (34) among the young, and for ignoring horrors such as those he witnessed at Passchendaele in 1917:

Rats, loathsome insects, hateful horrors of the grave, crawled over men not yet dead; gnawed at helpless bodies, beings who sometimes moaned for water, who sometimes cried for succor, or, cursed. There was no help, for no stretcher could be brought across that acreage of death. (167-68)

Such accounts of the war changed nothing and had no impact on official memory. For the architects of Canadian nationalism, the war became “Canada’s War of Independence,” and Vimy Ridge, captured by the Canadians in April 1917, replaced Paardeberg as the focal point of Canadian pride. Overlooked was the irony of Vimy: that it was “a minor victory virtually ignored by the British” (Berton, *Marching* 180) during the otherwise unsuccessful Battle of Arras, in which a quarter of a million human beings lost their lives. On July 3, 1921, Prime Minister Arthur Meighen stood on Vimy’s ruined ground and proclaimed that those who died there had “sheathed in their hearts the sword of devotion, and now from oft-stricken fields they hold aloft its cross of sacrifice, mutely beckoning those who would share their immortality” (110). Walter Allward, the Toronto sculptor commissioned to design the Vimy Ridge Memorial, was a man of greater insight, creating a monument symbolic of sadness and mourning.

On the tenth anniversary of the armistice, Meighen’s successor, William Lyon Mackenzie King, re-christened Parliament’s Victoria Tower as the Peace Tower, and placed the Book of Remembrance for fallen soldiers inside it. A verse from John S. Arkwright’s hymn, “O Valiant Hearts,” recited by King at that ceremony, shows the persistence of high diction long after the war:

O valiant hearts who to your glory came
Through dust of conflict and through battle flame;
Tranquil you lie, your knightly virtue proved,
Your memory hallowed in the land you loved.⁴

In 1928, a literary backlash against false idealism emerged as traumatized veterans began to publish cathartic accounts of their war experiences. The biggest wave of dissent came from Britain, where Edmund Blunden published *Undertones of War*, Ford Madox Ford completed his fictional tetralogy *Parade's End*, and Siegfried Sassoon published *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*. Canadian writers soon caught on, including Charles Yale Harrison whose novel *Generals Die in Bed* was serialized in a number of American and German periodicals between 1928 and 1930. These works initiated what became known as the war book boom (properly, the *anti-war* book boom), a movement that hit its peak in 1929 with the publication of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (a bestseller in English as *All Quiet on the Western Front*), and Peregrine Acland's *All Else is Folly*, the first Canadian anti-war novel to appear in book form.⁵ Sharing a proclivity for terse, visceral prose, the anti-war books blurred generic boundaries between fiction and memoir; all were skeptical of military authority, social progress, and any "official" account of the war.

Another 1929 publication, Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That*, caused controversy by portraying Canadian soldiers as chronic abusers of German prisoners-of-war. Claiming that Canadians sought to avenge a comrade crucified by German bayonets—a myth widely accepted as factual during the war—Graves writes that "Canadians... would not only avoid taking risks to rescue enemy wounded, but go out of their way to finish them off" (112). Later he adds, "[t]he troops with the worst reputation for acts of violence against prisoners were the Canadians" (154) and gives an account of a Canadian soldier placing Mills bombs in prisoners' pockets, murdering them to avoid the bother of escorting them to the stockade.

One *Globe and Mail* reviewer called Graves's book "an unspeakably vile slander" and accused its author of "wallowing [in] filth" (T.S.L. 20). Another reviewer, the Victoria Cross recipient Cy Peck, called Graves "unstable and degenerate" (7). Such comments typify the negative criticism many anti-war books received because of their anti-authoritarian stance. To their detractors they became war literature's "lavatory school" (Eksteins 288) because of scenes like the one in *Generals Die in Bed* where a drunk recruit "staggers to the centre of the room and retches into the slop-can" (5). Will R. Bird, a Canadian veteran whose memoirs share many characteristics of anti-war books, complains that books by the likes of Graves and Harrison are "putrid with so-called realism" and that "[t]hey portray the soldier as a coarse-minded, profane creature" (*Ghosts* 5).

Perhaps the best (and funniest) critique of the anti-war books comes from Stephen Leacock whose essay "War and Humour" parodies them:

As the first roar of grape shot zoomed past us, my stomach suddenly sank. I walked to the edge of the mound and vomited. My stomach turned. I was sick. I threw up. "Did you vomit?" asked Lord Kitchener. I said I had. "Well, I'm going to," he said. He went and vomited. He was sick. "Did you vomit, Kitchener," said Roberts. "Yes." "Well, move aside and let me." (*My Remarkable Uncle* 101)

Leacock typified a pre-war generation that refused to relinquish its ideals of progress and good society. Like all skilled satirists, he believed in the potential for human society to advance itself by tempering its extremes and righting its wrongs. He recalled a world

where social and political ills could be redressed with a few well-aimed jabs of the pen, and in this sense *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) remains a classic portrayal of a world the First World War obliterated. Mariposa is a place where prosperity and progress flourish, where no one limps from shrapnel wounds or fears that their German neighbours are planning to torpedo the Mariposa Belle. Leacock's art flourished in this more innocent, stable world, a fact made painfully apparent by his attempt to satirize the war in *The Hohenzollerns in America* (1919), which aside from one serious story, "The Boy Who Came Back," is an embarrassing mixture of Kaiser-baiting and sentimentality.⁶ Like many of his generation, Leacock was out-of-touch with the brutal realities of the Western Front, and his parody of anti-war fiction betrays an anxiety about younger writers who refused to temper their bitterness with good humour.

Born into a Jewish family in Philadelphia on June 16, 1898, Charles Yale Harrison spent his formative years in Montreal. As a boy he left school following an argument with a teacher over alleged anti-Semitism in *The Merchant of Venice*. He began writing in his teens while working as an office assistant at *The Montreal Star*. Initially he was too young to enlist in the Canadian Army; in January 1917, aged eighteen, however, he volunteered for the 244th Battalion in Montreal. He went overseas as an infantryman to train in England. After the 244th was absorbed into the 23rd reserve battalion, he transferred to the 14th Battalion, Royal Montreal Regiment, and landed in France near the end of 1917.

Harrison's late arrival at the front kept him from participating in the Battles of the Somme and Vimy Ridge, contrary to claims in some biographical material. He did, however, spend time near Vimy when his unit fought near Arras in resistance to the *Kaiserschlacht*, or Kaiser offensive, mounted by the German army against Allied defenses in the spring of 1918. The climax of his war experience was the first day of the Battle of Amiens on August 8. Dubbed "the Black Day of the German Army" by the German commander von Ludendorff, the Allied armies smashed through the German lines toward an astounding eight-mile advance, breaking the territorial stalemate that had lasted nearly four years. The battle marked the beginning of the hundred-day Allied push that culminated in the armistice of November 11, 1918. Harrison was wounded in the foot on August 8 and spent the remainder of the war recuperating. He later returned to Montreal.

Harrison was deeply traumatized by his time on the Western Front, leading to depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and writer's block later in life.⁷ He established himself in civilian life and avoided writing about his war experiences for a decade. He managed a movie theatre in Montreal before moving to New York City, where he worked as a journalist, copy-editor, and public relations representative. Involved with socialist politics and such communist periodicals as *New Masses*, though not a Communist Party member, he entered the political fray with a series of articles and his first brief book, *Next Please: The Story of Greco and Carillo* (1927), a socialist critique of a famous murder trial.

Harrison courted controversy throughout his life. In 1928, the same year *Generals Die in Bed* first appeared in serialization, he made headlines by being imprisoned for

three days by Honduran presidential guards while on his way to Nicaragua to interview the anti-American dissident General Augusto Sandino. In the late thirties he attempted to sue James Thurber for the story “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,” which he claimed plagiarized his own novel *Meet Me on the Barricades* (1937). His articles and letters, many of which reflect his anti-Stalin, pro-Trotsky leanings, brought him into conflict with a number of intellectuals, unionists, and political figures. He published a biography of the social reform lawyer Clarence Darrow and was a ghost writer for the autobiography of another lawyer, Louis Waldman. An activist for public welfare on radio, on film, in lectures, and in print, Harrison counted John Dos Passos and ee cummings among his friends.

War is a recurring theme in most of his novels, although he rarely spoke of it publicly. Aside from the centrality of war in *Generals Die in Bed*, it is a secondary theme in the novels *A Child is Born* (1931), *There Are Victories* (1933), and *Meet Me on the Barricades* (1937). In 1935 he published a war story, a brief sequel to *Generals Die in Bed*, entitled “Story for Mr. Hemingway” (1935). *A Child is Born* revisits the war from the perspective of a working-class neighborhood in New York City; *There Are Victories* follows a war bride through the anxieties of loss; *Meet Me on the Barricades*, an experimental work modeled on Joyce’s *Ulysses*, confronts the Spanish Civil War through a musician’s stream-of-consciousness meanderings. Harrison’s second-best and final novel, *Nobody’s Fool* (1948), the only one not war-related, is a common-man satire not unlike Mordecai Richler’s early work, marking a drastic shift from the nightmarish scenario of the war novels. Much of his later work failed to match the power of his first novel, leading to poor sales and critical indifference. Next to *Generals Die in Bed*, the

work of greatest relevance to the Canadian anti-war tradition is the most obscure, “Story for Mr. Hemingway.”

Few novels in Canadian literature match the visceral intensity of *Generals Die in Bed*. Drawn from Harrison’s experience with the Royal Montreal Regiment, the novel is an indictment of war’s barbarism and the abuses of Allied military authority. Although its plot is straightforward, resembling many other war novels, its vivid imagery and cutting irony are unmatched by any previous Canadian war novel. Harrison was a writer first, a polemicist second, and his literary skill places *Generals Die in Bed*—uniquely among Canadian war novels of the period—in the same league as works of the same period by Hemingway, Remarque, and Richard Aldington. Harrison’s obscurity today has less to do with *Generals Die in Bed*—a first-rate war novel—than with his failure to follow it up with a work of comparable magnitude.

The novel follows a group of Canadian soldiers, all in their late teens except for one forty-year-old, to the front lines. The sole perspective is that of an unnamed narrator, eighteen when he enlists, who develops a gruff camaraderie with his platoon mates, including the awkward Brown, the sickly Fry, the trustworthy Broadbent, and the religious Anderson, who at age forty is the oldest member of his unit. Terrified and hapless at first, the men become battle-hardened and increasingly cynical toward their abusive commanders and the purposes for fighting. Rats and lice plague them, snipers target them, and successive battles kill them one by one. When the narrator goes on leave to London, he finds himself alienated from a society brainwashed by propaganda and oblivious to the war’s realities. After his return to France, the war becomes increasingly futile and deadly. By the end the narrator is the only survivor among his friends, and

when he is wounded at the Battle of Amiens, the novel ends abruptly with him being “carried up the gangplank” (269) on a stretcher.

Generals Die in Bed was a much maligned and misunderstood book, owing to its visceral prose, blatant socialism, and anti-authoritarianism. Although critics notice all of these qualities, they often miss its ironic subtleties. Many assume that the narrator is Harrison, as if the book were a memoir instead of a novel. Jeffrey Keshen, for example, refers to *Generals Die in Bed* as “a post-war memoir” (*Propaganda* 174). This confusion of genre has occasionally led to Harrison being branded a traitor, a liar, and a cynic for his irreverent portrayal of Canadian soldiers at war. Beneath the novel’s bluster, however, is the deeply moralistic voice of a satirist. Like another oft-misunderstood satirist, George Orwell, Harrison interprets contemporary events through a claustrophobic, dystopian narrative model in order to challenge the euphemisms with which society masks nightmares of its own creation. *Generals Die in Bed* does not denigrate Canada’s participation in the war; neither does it cater to sanctimonious myths about the infallibility of Canadian soldiers.

Despite its serialization, *Generals Die in Bed* was slow to attract a formal publisher until the success of Remarque’s and Graves’s books caused a publishing company that had previously rejected the manuscript to seek out Harrison. A publishing representative found him working on the copy desk of the *Bronx Home News*, oblivious to the attention others were paying his novel.⁸ The first complete edition of *Generals Die in Bed* appeared in Britain on May 13, 1930, followed closely by an American edition. Release in Canada was delayed briefly while the Minister of National Revenue addressed

accusations that the novel “contains slander on Canadian soldiers” (“Books and Authors” 68).

Harrison was well-versed in the war literature of his time and incorporated some of his influences into his own work. As previously stated, the title of *Generals Die in Bed* derives from Sassoon’s “Base Details,” in which an effete British officer claims: “And when the war is done and youth stone dead, / I’d toddle safely home and die—in bed” (9-10). In a key passage a private finds an attractive pair of army boots in the mud, only to discover a decayed foot inside—a scene nearly identical to one in Henri Barbusse’s seminal anti-war novel, *Le Feu* (1916). James Doyle describes Harrison’s prose as “modeled on the stylistics [of] Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway” (87), and critics frequently compare Harrison’s terse style to *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

In his introduction to a 1974 reissue of *Generals Die in Bed*, Robert Nielsen takes the Harrison-Remarque comparison a step farther by suggesting that the serialized version of *Generals Die in Bed* may have influenced Remarque while he was writing *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Portions of *Generals Die in Bed*, translated into German, appeared in the Berlin periodicals *Die Welt am Abend* and *Die Neue Bücherschau* as early as 1928, and it is plausible that Remarque could have read them. Nielsen cites a number of similarities between the two books, including bloody yet intimate encounters between Allied and German soldiers, and the vehement anti-authoritarianism of both novels. In the absence of conclusive evidence, however, Nielsen’s claim remains speculative. It is just as likely that Harrison was influenced by Remarque (whose novel was a bestseller before Harrison completed his) or that both were influenced by earlier works of comparable outlook and intensity by Barbusse, Blunden, or Ford Madox Ford.

Moreover a number of features distinguish *All Quiet on the Western Front* from *Generals Die in Bed*, most notably the fact that Remarque's protagonist, Paul Bäumer, celebrates the survival of *esprit-de-corps* among his compatriots, while Harrison's narrator ridicules the notion. Bäumer gets to go home on leave, to be temporarily reunited with his family; Harrison's narrator remains alienated from home and never mentions his family. Similar as Remarque's and Harrison's war experiences might have been, they were similar to those of thousands of other soldiers who endured the boredom, carnage, and frustrations of the trenches.

One valid point of comparison between *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Generals Die in Bed* is the way that both novels reject the moral dichotomy between "friend" and "foe." *Generals Die in Bed* highlights this approach in an opening dedication to "the bewildered youths—British, Australian, Canadian and German—who were killed in that wood a few miles beyond Amiens on August 8th, 1918." The term "bewildered" is significant because it is anathema to traditional ideas of gallantry and steadfastness that are hallmarks of patriotic myths. To be bewildered is to be overwhelmed by one's circumstances and victimized by them, an idea that contrasts notions of Canadians as the shock troops of the Allied army. Capping Harrison's challenge to patriotic myth is his inclusion of German soldiers in his list of casualties. This acknowledgment rejects notions of Germans as "the Hun"—the faceless, baby-killing enemies of Connor's novels—and makes their deaths part of the war's tragedy. By making common soldiers from both sides of the conflict part of the same dedication, Harrison implies a unity between the proletarian values of low-ranking soldiers and the military and political regimes that exploit them. The distinction between "us" and

“them,” Harrison suggests, is defined not by nation (or “race” as Connor would say) but by class.

A common misconception about *Generals Die in Bed* is that it is cynical or nihilistic. In an oft quoted passage, the narrator claims, “[w]e know what soldiering means. It means saving your own skin and getting a bellyful as often as possible... that and nothing else. *Camaraderie—esprit de corps*—good fellowship—these are words for journalists to use, not for us. Here in the line they do not exist” (91). Not to be overlooked, however, is the humanity of a character who *claims* to be cynical, yet acts compassionately and selflessly. After killing a German soldier in combat, the brutality of which leaves him racked with guilt, he sees that two other German prisoners are treated fairly when he delivers them to the stockade. When a green French-Canadian recruit, Renaud, enters the trenches, the narrator takes him under his wing like a protective brother. When Broadbent is mortally wounded, he cradles him in his lap, vowing not to leave him alone. To say the narrator (and by extension Harrison) is cynical is to ignore the numerous ways in which the novel reflects the survival of humanity amid war’s chaos.

Nevertheless, it is a violent and unforgiving world these recruits inhabit. For all the novel’s compassion there are moments of terrifying brutality. Snipers, a threat to any front-line soldier who peeks above the parapet, are singled out for ritualized slaughter by the Canadians: “The wounded sniper crawls on his knees towards us.... Broadbent runs his bayonet into the kneeling one’s throat.... Some of us kick at the prostrate body as we pass it” (187). Later the narrator shakes off a screaming Fry, mutilated by shellfire, in

order to save himself. If the men's dignity lapses, it must be attributed more to the desensitizing effects of war than to intrinsic cruelty.

In one of the most brutal scenes, the narrator bayonets a German soldier named Karl in the chest during a trench raid. His bayonet gets stuck between Karl's ribs, causing him to shriek in agony and the narrator to panic:

I put my foot up against his body and try to kick him off. He shrieks into my face.

He will not come off....

My tugging and pulling works the blade in his insides.

Again those horrible shrieks!

I place the butt of the rifle under my arm and turn away, trying to drag the blade out. It will not come. (112-13)

The narrator finally shoots the German at point blank range, breaking the bayonet and freeing the rifle.

The incident shatters what little resolve the narrator has preserved. When by coincidence he takes Karl's brother prisoner a short while later, the brother's hysterical reaction to his brother's death drives home the narrator's culpability in the war's murderous essence. Wracked with guilt, the narrator later recalls his encounter with Karl to Gladys, the prostitute he befriends while on leave in London: "I am a criminal. Did I ever tell you that I committed murder?... I came into a place where an enemy of mine was and I stabbed him and ran off" (169).

For the narrator, his terrible face-to-face encounter with Karl—learning his name and meeting his brother—means that Karl is not a faceless Hun, but a distinctive human being with an identity, family relationships, and a capacity to feel pain. In that shrieking face the narrator recognizes someone who is not much different from himself: a young, bewildered man drawn into the war machine. Like Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*, he refuses to justify his wartime actions according to conventions of military duty. “I have... committed a crime” (105), Smith claims, expressing, like Harrison’s narrator, the guilt of a generation of ordinary men forced to kill other men.

Gladys’s response to the narrator’s confession shows her inability to understand his experiences. Told of the “murder,” she is shocked until she learns that the victim was a German soldier. She then dismisses the narrator’s confession with a smile: “You silly boy. I thought you had really murdered someone” (169). Indoctrinated against Germans, she has adopted the social mythologies wrought by propaganda and the patriotic songs she hears in the British music hall. To her Karl is not a human being, but a representative of “them” that “we” are fighting. Gladys considers the narrator’s killing of Karl acceptable because, typical of propaganda’s message, she sees British and Canadian soldiers as morally righteous crusaders against an intrinsic evil. She misconstrues the narrator’s experience as the ramblings of a “silly boy.” His feeling of alienation is exacerbated by the trite war songs—“Oh, What a Lovely War!”—he hears in a London music hall. When he reacts angrily to the audience’s laughter, they dismiss him as a shell shock victim, enraging and alienating him further from the domestic world.

An even more disturbing confrontation occurs when the narrator visits Westminster Abbey and meets an Anglican curate—an ironic evocation of Ralph

Connor's "fighting parson." Brimming with armchair bravado, the parson spouts patronizing sentiments: "the best thing about the war, to my way of thinking, is that it has brought out the most heroic qualities in the common people, positively noble qualities" (171-72). To the narrator the parson's words are absurd in light of the carnage he has seen—men dying horrifically and pointlessly. The parson's attitude stems from propaganda and a religious outlook innocent of the realities of war. He inhabits an obsolete, romantic world, the narrator an ironic one. Whatever moral guidance or solace the narrator might have found by visiting the abbey dissipates under the parson's proselytizing, whose obstinacy parallels another religious character, Anderson. A product of Victorian and Christian outlooks, Anderson's values mean nothing to the younger recruits, who rebuke him—"Shut up, sky-pilot" (7)—in a poignant allusion to Connor's idealism.

The anti-authoritarianism of *Generals Die in Bed* is absolute and uncompromising, encompassing both religious and military authority. High-ranking military officers are universally incompetent or deceptive in Harrison's world, conforming to a stereotype prevalent in all anti-war books. Incompetent as some officers undoubtedly were, Harrison leaves no room to acknowledge those who were not. Military officers are universally dishonest, sadistic, or oppressive. Brigadiers lie in order to manipulate soldiers, military police harass them when they are on rest, and unit officers lack tactical competence. Even a colonel the men admire because he has "risen from the ranks" (247) ends up deceiving his men at the Battle of Amiens.

The ultimate power abuser is Captain Clark, the megalomaniacal commander who leads the Canadians into battle. Described as "an Imperial, and Englishman, [who] glories

in his authority” (16), he tortures his men verbally and physically, treating them like pack animals on the march and as expendable in the face of battle. He is “tall and blonde and takes an insufferable pride in his uniform” (37), highlighting his Aryan appearance and fastidiousness. In spite of his British background, he resembles the stiff, militant Teutonic stereotype to which few of the German soldiers—except one cantankerous officer—conform. The instigator of near-mutiny by his men, Clark and others like him provoke the narrator’s bitterest and clearest statement about the war: “We have learned who our enemies are—the lice, some of our officers and Death. Of the first two we speak continually, the last we rarely refer to” (43-44).

Clark conforms to negative stereotypes of military incompetence, lacking any personality traits aside from calculated meanness. He echoes the ludicrous officers in Owen’s and Sassoon’s war poems and the sadistic Himmelstoss in Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts Neues*. He represents the bourgeois element in society, the middle-authority figure who does the bidding of the effete brigadier-aristocrat while exploiting the powerlessness of the alienated worker-soldier. Unlike Himmelstoss, who gets a sound beating by his men as revenge for abuses, he never gets the drubbing his men long to deliver. Brown, a beleaguered private who vows to “plug the son-of-a-bitch between the shoulder blades” (38), dies from a sniper’s bullet before he can carry out his threat. Clark’s survival implies that authority, for all its abuses, is invincible to the worker-soldier, reflecting what James Doyle describes in Canadian socialist narratives as “the virtually irremediable evil of capitalistic society, and the bleak prospects of a successful revolutionary struggle” (88).

Unlike other socialist-influenced novels of the 1930s—Morley Callaghan's *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935) or Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage* (1939)—the revolutionary spirit in *Generals Die in Bed* never translates from words into progressive action. The men's only outbursts against the system that exploits them are disorganized and chaotic, showing how rank-and-file soldiers cannot escape their fate. Their only significant act of disobedience occurs when they spontaneously loot the French city of Arras in April 1918, an act that is more childish than revolutionary. The Arras scene becomes, not an opportunity for socialist revolution, but a parody of it. As the hangovers fade, military authority reasserts itself and weary soldiers fall back into line.

The looting of Arras is remarkable for its allegation, contrary to any official documentation, that Canadian soldiers committed acts of barbarism during the war. The incident begins as men convene in Arras after a long and arduous march:

As I stand talking to Broadbent a man in the company ahead of us idly kicks a cobblestone loose from its bed. He picks it up and crashes it through a wide gleaming shop-window. The crash and the sound of the splintering, falling glass stills the hum of conversation. The soldier steps through the window and comes out with a basket full of cigarettes. He tosses packages to his comrades.
(225)

Soon vandalism escalates into anarchy:

Officers run here and there trying to pacify the men.

As far as I can see, men are hurling stones through windows and clambering in for supplies.

The street is a mass of scurrying soldiers.

Discipline has disappeared. (225)

The men continue their rampage by breaking into homes, shooting their revolvers at random objects, ransacking a church, and setting fire to the town. It is one of the least flattering depictions of Canadian soldiers ever written, emphasizing Harrison's rejection of official history and conventional heroism.

Critics and historians are divided as to whether or not this looting took place. Doyle accepts Harrison's depiction, claiming that it is "an effectively dramatized episode based on a real incident" (87). Vance, on the other hand, describes it as "completely fabricated" ("Soldier as Novelist" 32). Similarly divided are veterans who visited Arras in April 1918, about the same time as Harrison was there, or heard of others visiting, and recorded it in their memoirs. Will R. Bird recalls being told by a soldier from the 8th Winnipeg Black Devils about the latter's involvement in "a wild spree in Arras after doing a turn in the line" in the spring of 1918 (*Ghosts* 92). In an unpublished war diary, the British soldier Robert Lindsay Mackay records that on April 1, 1918, while stationed in Arras, "[s]ome of the Tommies had had a good time. There has been a bit of looting of such wine cellars and estaminets as previous bombardments had left."⁹ Mackay's account is credible because he was an eyewitness who had nothing to gain by falsifying such an incident, because he did not intend to, nor ever did, publish his diary.

Other memoirists contradict such accounts, if only by omission. James Pedley, whose memoir *Only This* is as unflinchingly realistic as Bird's memoir and Harrison's novel, never mentions looting in Arras despite his being there in the spring of 1918. F.G. Scott, the famous padre who visited Arras around the same time, recalls "hoards of champagne and other wines in some of the cellars" (180) without any suggestion that soldiers looted them. He describes the "strange charm" and "quiet medievalism" of the city (180), painting Arras as a restful haven, not a place to release pent-up rage. While it is possible that Scott's didactic purposes caused him to suppress any looting he witnessed, his account of Arras is the antithesis of Harrison's and cannot be dismissed.

According to military records, the looting never occurred, although they corroborate the "Arras" chapter of *Generals Die in Bed* in other ways. The official war diaries of the Royal Montreal Regiment show that the battalion was stationed in or near Arras for all of April 1918.¹⁰ As Harrison reveals, his battalion was sent there "to act as shock troops to break the German offensive" (211). The battalion's movements—from Ronville Caves on the southeast outskirts of Arras, to Agny and Berneville to the southwest, to Wakefield Camp north of the city, and finally to Oppy-Gavrelle to the northeast—skirted the city several times and might have provided opportunities for looting. The battalion's frequent movement resemble those bitterly described by Harrison as troops shunted around in trucks, "like quarters of beef" (219). The diary, however, makes no mention of looting, which means either it did not occur or the typists failed to record it. Harrison might have fabricated or exaggerated the scene, but Bird's and Mackay's testimonies suggest that something happened in Arras to spark Harrison's imagination.

Another disputed scene occurs toward the end of *Generals Die in Bed* when Canadian soldiers at Amiens in August 1918 slaughter hundreds of unarmed German soldiers trying to surrender to them. The massacre is inspired by a speech given by an unnamed Brigadier-General the day before the attack in which he tells his men about the sinking of the British hospital ship *Llandovery Castle* by German U-boats. He advises them to “avenge the lives of our murdered comrades” and says that “if they [Germans] choose to suspend the accepted rules for conducting civilized warfare, by God, two can play at that game” (246). Soon after the speech, the men’s colonel, a man “risen from the ranks,” articulates the practical consequences of the brigadier’s words: “I’m not saying for you not to take prisoners. That’s against international rules. All that I’m saying is that if you take any we’ll have to feed ’em out of our rations” (247). The officers’ words incite their men to commit war atrocities, as the next scene shows:

Out of the thin smoke hazy, silhouetted figures emerge....

We bring our rifles to our hips, half on guard.

The figures run with funny jerky steps toward us, holding their hands high above their heads.

We open fire as we advance. The silhouettes begin to topple over. It is just like target practice....

There are hundreds of them. They are unarmed. They open their mouths wide as though they are shouting something of great importance. The rifle fire drowns out their words. Doubtless they are asking for mercy. We do not heed. We are avenging the sinking of the hospital ship. We continue to fire....

Their voices are shrill. They are mostly youngsters.

They throw themselves into the crater of a shell-hole. They cower there.

Some of our men walk up to the lip of the hole and shoot into the huddled mass of Germans. Clapsed hands are held up from out of the funnel-shaped grave. The hands shake eloquently asking for pity. There is none. Our men shoot into the crater. In a few seconds only a squirming mass is left. (254-56)

Such ruthlessness challenges the presumed benevolence and virtue of Canadian soldiers as official history, romantic fiction, and propaganda presented it during and after the war. Tales of merciless Germans stabbing babies, raping nurses, and crucifying Canadian soldiers were entrenched in the Canadian psyche and had dehumanized German soldiers to the point where “[e]verything attaching to such creatures was grotesque and inhuman” (Fussell, *Great War* 78). Harrison inverts this conventional dichotomy: instead of noble Canadians fighting the merciless Hun, the Canadians are aggressors against an unarmed opponent—“youngsters” helpless against the Canadians’ ruthlessness. The suggestion that, in this case, “we” not “they” are degenerate shocked many of Harrison’s readers, most of whom were comfortable in the assumption that Canadians would never commit atrocities, even under the most extreme pressures of battle.

As with the looting of Arras, there is evidence that Harrison did not fabricate the massacre at Amiens. On August 7, 1918, the Royal Montreal Regiment marched south of Amiens through the village of Boves, then east to Gentelles Wood under heavy shellfire to assume front-line positions. They attacked the following morning, taking the Germans “absolutely by surprise.” The novel reproduces at least two historical facts: Lieutenant

E.G.T. Penny was one of five platoon commanders killed in the attack, mirroring the death of the fictional Captain Penny. Harrison was wounded in the foot and invalided home, like his narrator at the conclusion of the novel.

The scene of the massacre is more difficult to interpret, but a revealing piece of evidence is the operational report signed by battalion commander Lieutenant-Colonel Dick Worrall, dated August 8. The report contains the following passage:

The next resistance was met from the northern portion of CZECH and CROATES [German-allied] Trenches, tanks were called to our assistance, but passed on after one trip down the trench and did not have the desired effect. Eventually, enfilade was brought to bear and a white flag was displayed [from the German side]. Some of our men rose and advanced towards them, only to be met with an increased fire from the trench. The fire fight commenced again, and almost immediately two white flags were hoisted. No notice was taken of this, and the garrison stepped out with raised hands—they were annihilated almost to a man.¹¹

This portion of the report appears to echo Harrison's depiction of the slaughter of enemy troops. Passive voice makes it difficult to confirm who does what, but in the last sentence Canadians apparently took "no notice" of two white flags hoisted by the Germans, and then "annihilated" an untold number of enemy troops as they "stepped out" to surrender. It mirrors Harrison's interpretation of the event, appearing to confirm that Canadians did massacre German troops at Amiens.

Harrison leaves out important details, however. In the operational report, the enemy displays a white flag and then violates the terms of surrender by continuing to fire on Canadians as they “advanced toward [the Germans].” By raising the white flag the Germans tricked the Canadians into exposing themselves to “increased fire,” a move bound to enrage the Canadians and distrust any further attempt by the Germans to surrender. When, later, “two white flags” appear, the Canadians could hardly have taken this second offer of surrender seriously lest the Germans pull the same trick as before. The Canadians gave the enemy an initial chance to surrender; that chance was betrayed, and the enemy was massacred when they finally appeared. Neither side was justified in its actions, but the Germans were perhaps not as innocent as Harrison portrays them. Their initially false surrender had been a fatal mistake, ensuring that the Canadians would give them no second chance.

It is questionable whether one should trust an official military diary more than a work of fiction born of personal experience, and the truth of what happened at Amiens on August 8 may be irrecoverable. All that survives are written accounts by soldiers who were at, or near, the scene of the alleged massacre and may or may not have directly witnessed it. Whether “official” or “fictional” narratives, each mediates in its own way between the actual events and any later interpretations of them. Distortions are inevitable and different perspectives—more or less credible—are all that survive.

One thing is certain: Harrison was not merely a liar or sensationalist. His interpretations of both the Arras looting and the Amiens massacre may be historically exaggerated or incorrect, but they are not malicious. By depicting Canadian soldiers engaging in activities that disgrace their otherwise good reputation, he does not slander

their legacy, but he does open it up to scrutiny. The point of *Generals Die in Bed* is to show war's capacity to dehumanize normally decent people, and to prove that the real enemy of all soldiers—be they Canadian, British, or German—is not each other, but war itself.

Not surprisingly, *Generals Die in Bed* created a stir in Canada when it was published. No one denied the fact that Canada's youth suffered during the war, but to portray it as unflinchingly as Harrison did offended public sensibilities. Although *All Quiet on the Western Front* and other anti-war books were as notoriously visceral as Harrison's, their European origins allowed Canadians, if inclined toward a more comfortable version of history, to dismiss them as unrepresentative of Canadian soldiers. Harrison presented more of a challenge. The fact that he was a Canadian veteran gave him credibility, however much his words stung. His graphic portrayals of rats eating human corpses, soldiers fouling themselves, and Canadians looting towns and slaughtering unarmed Germans were unique in Canadian literature, and readers had difficulty accepting them as anything but lies. Wartime propaganda and mail censorship left its mark on the Canadian public, and post-war speeches about "knightly virtue" reinforced the mythology. Harrison stripped war of its mythology and there were few Canadians in 1930 ready to thank him for it. Calls for the novel to be banned rang out, delaying its Canadian publication by several months and preventing it from becoming the bestseller it was in other countries.¹²

Most shocking of all was how *Generals Die in Bed* targeted the gatekeepers of Canada's war mythology. Anderson, an effigy of Ralph Connor, famous and admired by millions of Canadians, is labeled "Sky Pilot" and told to "shut up." General Sir Arthur

Currie, the commander of Canada's assault at Amiens in August 1918, is accused of inciting his men to commit atrocities (Harrison's Brigadier is not named, but his role at Amiens is identical to Currie's, an implication impossible to ignore). Currie's reputation was already beleaguered by 1930—he had recently sued an Ontario newspaper that accused him of incompetence for ordering a deadly attack on Mons in November 1918 as the armistice loomed—and *Generals Die in Bed* came as another assault on his legacy. For Currie, *Generals Die in Bed* was like salt in an open wound, causing him to dismiss it as “a mass of filth [and] lies” (Vance, *Death* 194). Others agreed with Currie, including some of Canada's military luminaries. Cy Peck, the same VC recipient who called Graves “degenerate,” dismissed Harrison as “a degenerate minded fool.” First Division commander and Royal Military College commandant Sir Archibald Macdonell dreamed of “shoving my fist into that s[on] of a b[itch] Harrison's tummy until his guts hang out his mouth” (Vance, *Death* 194).

Harrison defended *Generals Die in Bed* in a statement to the Canadian Press, printed in *Toronto Daily Star* in May 1930: “For me to sneer at the fighting qualities of the Canadian soldier would be to sneer at myself.... I want it distinctly understood that the Canadian expeditionary force was the best fighting unit in the field. Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, Ypres, the Somme, Cambrai and Mons speak for themselves” (8). He argued that his intention was to depict the war “as it really happened—not as some spinster ladies thought it should happen” and alerted readers to the moral intention underlying the narrative: “War is dirty, disgusting, and the sooner the world realizes that modern warfare is a demoralizing business, the better it will be for the world” (8). His

defense of *Generals Die in Bed* did little to quell the vehement criticism, and the novel's international success only exacerbated his reputation as a traitor in Canada.

Erased from the Canadian literary canon after its first edition, the novel has never been recognized by more than a handful of Canadian military enthusiasts and critics. Not until Colin McDougall's *Execution* (1958) did another Canadian novel so energetically challenge received opinions about war's alleged benefits to the Canadian collective psyche. By depicting the First World War as a mass slaughter of hapless, often ignorant young men—unmitigated by moral rationality or national purpose—*Generals Die in Bed* depicted a side of the war many Canadians were reluctant to acknowledge.

Generals Die in Bed is a troubling novel that will continue to provoke controversy. Ultimately its contradictions are irresolvable and its demarcation between fact and fiction difficult to pin down. Realism in fiction—despite all appearances—is a convention like any other. Thus no work of fiction should be expected to reflect reality with airtight objectivity. Harrison's novel portrays one author's view of the First World War, not the ultimate or definitive view of it. Doubtless there were legitimate heroes—some of them generals—in the war, even if Harrison is loath to acknowledge them. Keeping this distinction between fictional realism and objective reality in mind allows us to move beyond the debates that have long surrounded *Generals Die in Bed* and read it for what it is: a disturbing, touching, and—sad to say—timeless story about human suffering.

In 1932 Ernest Hemingway—one of Harrison’s main literary inspirations—published a fictional sketch entitled “A Natural History of the Dead” as part of *Death in the Afternoon*, reproduced a year later in the collection *Winner Take Nothing*. In mock-scientific language reminiscent of the Scottish naturalist-explorer Mungo Park, Hemingway’s sketch describes the “natural history” of dead animals and soldiers on European battlefields during the First World War. Drawing upon Hemingway’s experiences as an ambulance driver for the Italian army, the story’s violent imagery—rotting corpses, oozing maggots, and the like—has an ironic timbre reminiscent of *Generals Die in Bed*.

Toward the end of the story, Hemingway describes the death of two generals, one Italian and one German, in the Italian alps, and then targets Harrison explicitly:

They had beautiful burying grounds in the mountains, war in the mountains is the most beautiful of all war, and in one of them, at a place called Pocol, they buried a general who was shot through the head by a sniper. This is where those writers are mistaken who write books called *Generals Die in Bed*, because this general died in a trench dug in snow.... He was a damned fine general, and so was General von Behr who commanded the Bavarian Alpenkorps troops at the battle of Caporetto and was killed in his staff car by the Italian rearguard as he drove into Udine ahead of his troops, and the titles of all such books should be *Generals Usually Die in Bed*, if we are to have any sort of accuracy in such things. (*Winner* 147-48)

Although Hemingway's criticism of Harrison appears more jovial than bitter, "A Natural History of the Dead" provoked a response from Harrison in the form of a short story, "Story for Mr. Hemingway," published in a 1935 issue of *Modern Monthly Magazine*. Harrison wrote the story as nothing more than a counter-criticism of Hemingway; it ends up being something more important: a short sequel to *Generals Die in Bed* and Harrison's second-best piece of war fiction.

Related by an unnamed narrator much like the one in *Generals Die in Bed*, the story follows the misadventures of the fictional Lawrence Bishop, a Canadian private from Montreal who wins the Victoria Cross for bravery.¹³ Bishop single-handedly fends off a German attack, though Bishop's heroism is situated during the 1917 battle at Hill 70, an event Harrison never witnessed. Irony hits when Bishop, in London on leave, falls victim to a zeppelin raid that mortally wounds him but leaves him able to crawl back to his hotel room on the Strand. The narrator is summoned by hotel staff to give a statement to the press about his dead friend, and the story ends with the recognition that Bishop was a *private* who died in bed, the antithesis of Hemingway's generals who died in the battlefield.

"Story for Mr. Hemingway" is more than a literary curiosity. In one paragraph Harrison refutes typically grandiose accounts of the Battle of Vimy Ridge with a graphic depiction of the "real" motivations behind Canadians' successful capturing of the ridge.

I have read many accounts of the battle of Vimy Ridge, all of which extol the heroism and dash with which the Canadian Corps captured the hill after half the armies in Northern France had tried and failed, but nowhere do I remember

reading of the emotional state of the Canadian troops before the battle. Though it will pain the generals, it must be said that the attack on Vimy was more than a formal and mechanical assault; it had all the fire and spontaneity of a mass uprising. When we charged up the hill we leaped upon the Germans and bayoneted them not as impersonal enemies but as tyrants and oppressors who had tortured and humiliated us all winter long. The staff plans were incidental to our success. (731)

Although Harrison was not at Vimy Ridge, he might as easily have been describing the Battle of Amiens, which he did experience. His account of the battle denies that planning and calculated heroism won the day. Instead, it was the frustration and pent-up rage of the soldiers that sent them roaring toward the Germans, whose vantage point on the ridge had allowed them to torment the Canadians with shells and sniper fire for months. The story does not discredit the Canadians' achievement or the bravado that fueled their efforts; it does question, however, the conventional tropes of heroism that fueled nationalist myths about a well-sequenced attack brought off by patience and resolve. Vimy, implies Harrison, was as savage as any other battle.

Harrison was not truly a modernist (not until his Joycean novel *Meet Me on the Barricades*, at least), but his work epitomizes the First World War's influence on modern consciousness. Like his contemporaries Bertram Brooker, Morley Callaghan, and Wyndham Lewis, he was aware of the breakdown of Enlightenment values, the reversal of human progress in the modern era. These writers forced Canadians to confront the idea that the war had been merely a glitch in the advancement of society. Although Connor's

and Montgomery's patriotic romances reflected a desire for consolation and regeneration, they failed to reflect the suffering of those who fought the war. The post-war generation was not "lost," only confused and angry, and Harrison's war fiction is important for acknowledging these negative emotions, so often overlooked by the gatekeepers of official memory.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ For details of the war's political aftermath, see Margaret Macmillan's exhaustive study of the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Change the World* (New York: Random House, 2003).

² Connor, a mediator in the Winnipeg General Strike, fictionalizes it in his novel *To Him That Hath* (1921).

³ The best fictional depiction of this post war trauma is in Jack Hodgins's *Broken Ground* (1998), in which veterans in a remote area of British Columbia fight against natural and psychological obstacles as they try to rebuild their lives.

⁴ News coverage of the Peace Tower ceremony, and King's quotation of Arkwright's poem, can be found in the *Toronto Globe*, 12 November 1928: front page and page 12.

⁵ Acland's novel bridges the formal and thematic content of Connor's *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*—to which its plot, if not its sentiment, is nearly identical—and the bitter anti-authoritarianism of *Generals Die in Bed*, notwithstanding a resolved ending in which Acland's wounded hero, Alexander Falcon, returns home a disfigured but decorated war hero. Although it is not a great work of literature, *All Else is Folly* presents a number of seminal reflections about the nature of war, including Falcon's realization that he “was

decorated because I was afraid to run away” (182), and that “soldiers sacrificed themselves—not to a sublime cause, but to the blunders of their superiors” (235).

⁶ In “The Boy Who Came Back,” Leacock eschews satire to present a poignant account of a misunderstood veteran haunted by his memories of the war.

⁷ Harrison’s niece, the novelist Judith Rossner, told me about Harrison’s personal troubles in a series of telephone interviews and emails in 2002.

⁸ This information comes from notes in the personal files of Judith Rossner.

⁹ Robert Lindsay Mackay’s handwritten diaries were transcribed by his grandson, Bob Mackay, and posted on the family’s genealogical website: <http://lu.softxs.ch/mackay/RLM_Diary.html>. I contacted the younger Mackay by email to verify the diary’s authenticity and accuracy. My thanks to Mr. Mackay for his insights and permissions.

¹⁰ The War Diary of the 14th Canadian Battalion is preserved at Library and Archives Canada. Facsimiles of the pages can be retrieved online from the institution’s ArchivianaNet database. See: <http://www.collections.canada.ca>; follow the links to “War Diaries of the First World War,” then search keyword: “14th Battalion.”

¹¹ See the “Brief Report on L. of C. Operations,” War Diary of the 14th Battalion for August 1918, appendix 9. Worrall’s report is corroborated by a brief, but similar account of the massacre in a statement on the Amiens battle by Brigadier General G.S. Tuxford.

¹² Harrison’s obituary in the *New York Times*, 19 March 1954, recalls *Generals Die in Bed* as “an internationally bestselling anti-war novel,” demonstrating how the novel’s reputation survived in the United States long after its publication. In Canada, however, the novel was not a bestseller and was largely forgotten by 1954.

¹³ Bishop may be based on Lieutenant George McKean, a member of the Royal Montreal Regiment who won the Victoria Cross in April 1918 during the German offensive at the Gavrelle Sector near Arras (the same month as the alleged looting of the city) and whom Harrison may have known personally.

CHAPTER 4

Hugh MacLennan: War and Nationalism

In Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* (1941), the explosion of the French munitions ship *Mont Blanc* in Halifax on December 6, 1917 triggers "a sound beyond hearing" that encompasses "all movement and life about the ship" (229). The imagery symbolizes a sudden and violent shift in the Canadian *zeitgeist* as the late-Victorian world gives way to uncertainty and irony. Its meaning is also literal: survivors of the Halifax disaster did experience "a sound beyond hearing," recalling not a huge bang or boom but a "humming" or "buzzing sound" as the explosion's colossal sound wave overwhelmed the human ear.¹ Symbolically and literally, December 6, 1917 was the day that the war crossed the Atlantic ocean, bringing its destruction and disorientation to bear on the Canadian home front. What Vimy represented for the Canadian soldier—a violent rite of passage and a coming-of-age—the Halifax Explosion represented for the Canadian public. Raised during the war, Hugh MacLennan was the novelist of the new national consciousness that developed out of those events.

Critics argue whether MacLennan marks the birth of Canadian modernism or is a throwback to what Robert D. Chambers describes as "a Tolstoyan view [of history]... overlaid with a sense of inevitability" (61). There was no more violent announcement of the modern era's arrival in Canada than the Halifax explosion, yet MacLennan has been characterized as an inheritor of "that conception of 'classical' novel writing whose

heyday in England ended with the Georgians" (Woodcock, "HM" 14). His major novels address many of the same themes as do those of the European and American high modernists—war and post-war anxieties, loss of religious faith, clashes between radical and reactionary ideologies, yet formally his works are more allegorical and conventional than those of Faulkner, Joyce, or Woolf. For MacLennan, the world may have changed utterly since the First World War, but like his contemporaries Graham Greene, Alan Paton, and Evelyn Waugh, he maintained beliefs in God and progress, and a penchant for plot resolution that resembled anti-modernism more than modernism.

Francis Zichy insightfully describes MacLennan as a "modern" but not "modernist" writer.² Focusing on the Halifax Explosion, the Quebec conscription crisis (in *Two Solitudes*), and the Spanish Civil War (in *The Watch That Ends the Night*), MacLennan's novels concern events of quintessentially modern significance, minus the self-reflexivity and existential ambivalence of modernism. MacLennan's Canadian nationalism is too confident, too reflective of popular sentiment to invite associations to Eliot's waste land or Yeats's "rough beast." Unlike the high modernists, MacLennan saw war not as a sign of impending apocalypse, but as a catalyst of Canadian national progress.

MacLennan's characters are not the disaffected anti-heroes of Eliot or Joyce. *Barometer Rising*'s main protagonists, Neil Macrae and Geoffrey Wain, neatly represent "old" and "new" visions of society. They are typological figures in a didactic allegory, not shadows of Prufrock and Leopold Bloom. Similarly, in *Two Solitudes*, the characters fit allegorical roles: Father Beaubien's conservative Catholicism, Marius Tallard's radical separatism, and Paul Tallard's liberal biculturalism. In *The Watch That Ends the Night*,

MacLennan's most "modern" novel in form and theme, *Jerome Martell* is not so much a modernist anti-hero as a modern-day Everyman, a moral exemplar and martyr to civilization.

MacLennan's chief innovation lay not in form but in theme and setting. As one of the foremost voices of the new Canadian nationalism in the post-war era, he raised the bar of achievement for the Canadian novel. Unlike most Canadian novelists before him, MacLennan made Canadian cities, towns, and streets recognizable settings in his novels. His first five published novels, from *Barometer Rising* through *The Watch That Ends the Night*, set a precedent for Canadian novelists who wished to write provocatively and proudly about their country. Although in some ways his work has dated badly—dialogue is often stiff and stogy, love scenes are always silly instead of sexy, female characters are rarely convincing³—their impact on Canadian literature is undeniable. *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes* were commercially successful; *The Watch That Ends the Night* sold 250,000 copies in its German translation and MacLennan's work appeared in a total of twelve languages.⁴ Along with Morley Callaghan, he proved that the terms *Canadian* and *literature* were not mutually exclusive in the minds of readers. As war fiction in particular, MacLennan's novels are the most influential and important body of work produced in Canada before the 1970s.

MacLennan was a member of the first generation of Canadians to grow up in the shadow of the First World War, and the war years influenced everything he wrote. His three main war-related novels—*Barometer Rising*, *Two Solitudes* (1945), and *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1959)—form a loosely connected trilogy.⁵ Important forerunners to these works include the two unpublished novels MacLennan wrote in the 1930s, *So All*

Their Praises (1933) and *A Man Should Rejoice* (1937).⁶ As a group, the five novels document the impact of war on Canadian society from the second half of the First World War to the Cold War, circa 1952. Along the way they touch upon the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the Korean War. In addition, the unpublished works explore the clash of ideologies in the inter-war period, as capitalism, communism, and fascism vie for the loyalty of the world's disillusioned masses.

None of MacLennan's novels depicts battles or scenes on the front lines, aside from a brief fight between Nazis and communists in *A Man Should Rejoice*. His is the literature of the home front, yet his work differs from Sara Jeannette Duncan's and L.M. Montgomery's by showing a Canada fraught with domestic disasters and conflicts—parallels to the war in Europe. The Halifax disaster is the most spectacular of these domestic cataclysms, but disruptions continue with the conscription crisis in *Two Solitudes* and the rallies and riots in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. All three novels, along with the two unpublished works, are concerned with the ideological and generational struggles between different factions of society during and after the world wars. MacLennan's home front, unlike Duncan's or Montgomery's, is not a safe haven from war but a domestic battleground.

MacLennan's work avoids the political or religious partisanship typical of other novelists of his period—he was neither a communist like Charles Yale Harrison, nor a devout Catholic like Morley Callaghan, nor a Tory imperialist like Stephen Leacock. Yet neither was MacLennan atheist or a-political: he was a political and religious agnostic, willing to view all sides of an issue and conscious of the dangers of blind faith. He was critical of both leftist utopianism and rightist jingoism; he upheld the importance of

religion while criticizing Christian complacency in the face of despotism and materialism.⁷ As Woodcock argues, “one of the lessons which MacLennan, like so many others, learnt from the Thirties was that a writer cannot afford to become a member of even the smallest of orthodoxies” (*HM* 21). He was a red Tory who criticized the status quo and favoured social progress while recognizing the dangerous illusions inherent in Soviet-inspired radicalism.

MacLennan’s main ideological commitment was to Canadian national progress. His work brims with admiration for his native country, from the idyllic Nova Scotian scenes in *So All Their Praises* and *A Man Should Rejoice*, to the scenes of Montrealers cheering returning soldiers in *Two Solitudes*, to George Stewart’s ruminations on Canadian independence in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. His coffee table books of the 1960s—*Seven Rivers of Canada* (1961) and *The Colour of Canada* (1967)—are effusive celebrations of Canada’s natural splendour and economic abundance. Like Pierre Berton and other nationalist icons, MacLennan perpetuated the notion that the two world wars gave birth to modern Canada.

Paradoxically, in some of his essays MacLennan claims to abhor nationalism, lumping it in with other politically dangerous mindsets:

Nationalism, Fascism and Communism, as everybody should know by this time, are fundamentally neither political nor economic movements. They are, in their appeal to the masses and even to intellectuals, aberrations of the religious impulse. They are religious in their appeal because they provide materialistic-minded people with an easily recognizable master whom they can serve, an easily

recognizable purpose which seems to make sense out of the mystery of human existence. (*Cross-Country* 141)

Many of MacLennan's characters fall victim to this quasi-religious obsession: the communist factory workers in *A Man Should Rejoice*, the Quebec nationalist Marius Tallard in *Two Solitudes*, the revolutionary *femme fatale* Norah Blackwell in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. In each case, orthodox belief leads to violence, alienation, and injustice. Nationalism distorts reality, overrides compassion, and skews morality amid the pressures of inter-cultural and international conflict:

Nationalism takes infinitely more than it can ever give. In the name of the state the most monstrous crimes are not only justified, they are demanded. Merciful Americans, who would have been horrified if they saw their neighbour kick a dog, rejoiced when they heard on their radios that the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. (*Cross-Country* 142-43)

Canada remains immune to such nationalist excesses in both MacLennan's fiction and non-fiction. He defines Canadians as "mild-mannered" individuals who contribute to a "feminine psychology" and rarely go overboard in their beliefs (*Cross-Country* 4-5). Rarely is his sense of Canada's benevolence among nations disturbed by the fact that some Canadians also cheered after Hiroshima and their government oppressed its "enemy aliens" while sending soldiers to join others in committing "monstrous crimes"—during the bombing of Dresden, for instance. Despite centuries of Canadian adherence to the

imperialist mandate of European superpowers, in *Barometer Rising* Canadians are “innocent of the cause” of the First World War” (300) and in *Two Solitudes* Canada fights “a war it had never made” (234).

Although Canada was not directly responsible for any modern war, Canada supported such imperialist debacles as the South African War and the Treaty of Versailles (with its oppressive war reparations policy for Germany)—not to mention Mackenzie King’s complacency toward Hitler in the 1930s.⁸ MacLennan’s claim that Canada is “innocent of the cause” of major wars is a historical fallacy rooted in assumptions that Canada stands on a moral pedestal, free from culpability in the world’s ills. His vision of Canada as “the keystone to hold the world together” (*Barometer* 325) is biased by his uncritical belief in Canada’s moral purity. In short, the Canadian nationalism in his fiction exhibits the “religious impulse” he excoriates in his essays, exposing a convoluted aspect of his thought.

MacLennan was born in Glace Bay, Cape Breton Island on March 20, 1907. He was too young to fight in the First World War and well above the average age of enlistment in the second. He would hardly have enlisted: as Elspeth Cameron notes, MacLennan’s witnessing of the Halifax Explosion “made the sensitive boy a pacifist” (*Writer’s Life* 13). His career as a novelist allowed him to become an informed observer of an age of crisis, free of the debilitating personal trauma that ruined the careers of so many war novelists before him.

The MacLennan family’s move from Cape Breton Island to Halifax in 1915 placed the young MacLennan at the centre of Canada’s domestic war effort. The city teemed with soldiers on their way overseas or back home, mariners loading munitions

and other supplies onto ships, and members of countless medical, patriotic, and charitable organizations. Years later, recollections of the bustling city set the scene for *Barometer Rising*: “Halifax filled constantly with the shuffle and movement of men wearing the same kind of clothes and doing the same kinds of things” (82).

MacLennan’s father, Dr. Samuel MacLennan, spent a year overseas as a military surgeon at Shorncliff Hospital in Folkestone on the southern coast of Britain.⁹ Shortly after returning home in late 1916, “Dr. Sam” carried a lighted match into the cellar to investigate a gas leak, blowing both the family home and his local reputation to smithereens (Cameron, *Writer’s Life* 11). Barely a year later, the new MacLennan home on South Park Street below Citadel Hill was rocked by an explosion a million times greater when the French munitions ship *Mont Blanc* and the Belgian relief ship *Imo* collided and caught fire in the narrows between Bedford Basin and Halifax Harbour, causing 2,925 tons of high explosives in the *Mont Blanc*’s hold to detonate.¹⁰ Echoing the fictional representation of the disaster in *Barometer Rising*, MacLennan recorded his recollections of its impact in “Portrait of a City”:

One cold, clear December morning, while the boys were playing on the packed ashes about the school, and the first fight of the day was brewing, there was a roar past all hearing, and we saw the windows of the school burst inward and the trees toss, and a teacher stagger out the front door with blood streaming from her face. During the following hours as the sky darkened first with smoke, then with clouds, and finally with the snow of a driving blizzard, we saw the north end of the city in flames and the dead and the wounded streaming south in slovens, ash

and garbage carts, wagons, cars, baby carriages, trucks, ambulances, in anything that would roll. (*Cross-Country* 102)

Although the new MacLennan house was heavily damaged, it survived thanks to the protective mass of Citadel Hill, which deflected the massive shock wave generated by the explosion into adjacent neighbourhoods. Dr. Sam redeemed his reputation by performing surgeries in the operating theatre attached to the family home, providing the model for the heroic surgeon Angus Murray in *Barometer Rising*.

The explosion, which killed some 2,000 people, wounded as many as 9,000, and left 9,000 homeless,¹¹ was the largest man-made explosion of the pre-nuclear era. It levelled the entire north end of Halifax and could be heard as far away as Cape Breton Island. The disaster changed ten-year-old MacLennan from a naïve proponent of *Chums*-style militarist dogma into a critical witness to war's destructive power. Roddie Wain, the young boy in *Barometer Rising*, parallels the young MacLennan and is the most autobiographical character in his fiction. At the beginning of the novel, Roddie has an overblown appreciation of war:

He could repeat from memory the tonnage and gunnage of every vessel in the navy and was looking forward to six years from now when he would be old enough to enlist. She [Penelope Wain] had noticed that every one of his school scribblers had a picture of a soldier or a sailor on the cover, or a British bulldog standing on a White Ensign draped over the stern of a battleship while a Canadian

beaver crouched in the corner and sharpened its teeth. As she heard him talk, she marvelled at the skill of the propagandists. (192)

At first, the explosion bewilders Roddie, but soon he realizes that the destruction of his city is an indirect result of the militarism he once touted: “it was no sense of bereavement that caused his present emotion. Rather it was the abrupt and ruthless impingement of the unseen and incalculable into his own life, the realization that what had happened today was not an adventure but a catastrophe” (280).

For MacLennan, the Halifax Explosion marked the dividing line between the Victorian and modern era in Canada, and this idea of then-versus-now dominated MacLennan’s childhood memories:

The war Christmases I remember in Halifax were not jolly ones. In a way they were half-tragic, but there may be some significance in the fact that they are literally the only ones I can still remember. It was a war nobody down there understood. We were simply part of it, swept into it from the mid-Victorian age in which we were all living until 1914. (*Cross-Country* 26)

Well into his sixties, MacLennan continued to acknowledge his “enormously long childhood memory [that] begins at the end of 1914” (Cameron, *Conversations* I: 134). Thus the First World War was the starting point both of MacLennan’s awareness of the world and of his literary consciousness, and his novels document this awakening with a progressively deeper conviction about war’s transformative influence on Canada, from

colony to independent nation. Paul Goetsch calls the myth of Canada's coming-of-age during the First World War "questionable" while acknowledging MacLennan's ability to make such an idea "almost credible" ("Too Long" 104). For MacLennan, the birth of his perceptions, the birth of his nation, and the birth of the modern age of crisis were inextricably related.

MacLennan spent the late twenties and early thirties studying classical literature, first at Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship, then at Princeton where he earned his doctorate in 1935. At Princeton, he wrote his first novel, *So All Their Praises*, an apprentice work heavily influenced by Ernest Hemingway and Joseph Conrad. Completed in 1933, the novel attracted a publisher, Robert O. Ballou of New York, but was shelved after Ballou's firm folded during the Great Depression (John Steinbeck's early novels were similarly affected by Ballou's collapse).

So All Their Praises begins in October 1929, the same month as the infamous stock market crash, and ends shortly after Hitler's rise to the German chancellorship in 1933. Michael Carmichael, an aspiring poet, is British; Adolf Fabricus, a recent university graduate, is German (Michael nicknames him Yorick to avoid the inauspicious name "Adolf"). The two tramp around Germany in search of work, meeting a number of disgruntled war veterans along the way. All the characters live in an ideological fog in which communism offers a faint aspiration to social revolution, fascism a barbed promise of German economic reform, and capitalism a life of exploitation and corruption. Adolf recognizes the machinations of illegitimate power surging behind all of these failed ideologies: "he saw no hope in the world in his own time, but only suffering and ignorance, and people in power who believed in the excellence of ignorance for those

who were not in power” (57). His ruminations point to the novel’s central theme about Europe’s shift from a post- to a pre-war consciousness in the face of economic hardship and social inequality.

Seeking better prospects, Michael and Adolf travel to North America on the *Martin Swicker*, a ship run by a salty Nova Scotian war veteran and rum smuggler. During a stopover in Halifax, Michael and Adolf meet Sarah Macrae, a Nova Scotian with whom Adolf falls in love after competing with Michael for her affections. Adolf begins to see Canada as a place where he can escape the fiery atmosphere of Europe: “The Canadians had lost more men in the war than the United States, but as a people they were more callous, or at least less highly strung, than the Europeans, and the aftermath of the war in Canada was not comparable to what it had been in Europe” (133). Passages such as this one, although brief, anticipate MacLennan’s greater attention to Canadian post-war consciousness in his novels of the forties and fifties.

In need of jobs, Adolf and Michael become crewman on the *Martin Swicker*. Their rum-running duties take them on a sea adventure reminiscent of Conrad’s seafaring tales until they disembark in New York City, settling for a time before falling in with a treacherous gangster named Stenson. Although Martin and Adolf earn enough to live comfortably in New York, Stenson swindles them out of their savings, leaving the two men destitute. Michael descends into alcoholism and debauchery while Adolf sails back to Germany to reunite with his ailing father, a *Hofrat* in the Freiburg city administration.

During his return trip to Germany, Adolf is horrified to find that Nazism has saturated the political fabric of the country and his fellow countrymen have fallen in line

with Hitler's dubious ideology: "The boat train was full of the Germans he had seen on the ship. Most of them had not been Nazis before they had left for America, but the virulence of the American press had converted them. The patriotism in the boat train made Adolf feel hopeless" (199). He recognizes the impending cultural disaster awaiting Germany, aware of "Jews and Communists being tormented in concentration camps" (238)—probably the first mention of such atrocities in Canadian literature. Adolf Hitler parades down city streets, confirming for the younger Adolf that the "suffering and ignorance" he predicted at the novel's outset have come to pass. In one of the most evocative passages, he watches the Nazi procession roll past, likening the growl of Hitler's automobile to "a great roar, a material volume of sound that the dictator's car seemed to carry as an appendage, roar of men dying on the scythes wheels of an ancient Saxon's chariot" (238). Like *Barometer Rising's* "sound beyond hearing," Hitler's "great roar" signals the awakening of a new, destructive impulse in modern society; as the car passes by, "blankness" descends upon the scene, symbolizing the blank hope of Europe's masses.

The *Hofrat* applauds Hitler's economic policies for German renewal, ignoring the dire implications of Nazi xenophobia. Young Adolf sees the *Hofrat* and other men of his generation as "part of a great shadow" (197) imposing their influence on the present—using the power they acquire through wealth and social position to guide Germany into disaster. A conflict ensues between Adolf's progressive values and the *Hofrat's* arch-conservatism, anticipating similar generational conflicts in MacLennan's later work—between David and Bernard Culver in *A Man Should Rejoice*, Neil Macrae and Geoffrey

Wain in *Barometer Rising*, and Jerome Martell and Dr. Rodgers in *The Watch That Ends the Night*.

Following the *Hofrat*'s death, Adolf flees Germany to return to New York. There he encounters an embittered and drunken Michael, who symbolizes the failed promise of the New World for European immigrants in search of a better life during the depression. The two men part ways, Adolf to return to Sarah and a promising future in rural Nova Scotia, Michael to return to England to continue his quest for meaning.

The Nova Scotian scenes in *So All Their Praises*, though brief, anticipate the settings of MacLennan's later novels, especially *Barometer Rising* and *Each Man's Son*. Sarah Macrae reflects on her home province, recognizing its liminal position between the old and new worlds: "I sometimes feel that this continent does not civilize easily.... Canada, and in particular this little province, seems to be just half way between the Old Country and the States.... The people don't seem to have too much imagination, but they're awfully straight" (109). Like MacLennan's characterization of Canadians as "mild-mannered" and psychologically "feminine" in his essays, Sarah sees Canadians as innocent of the world's strife yet poised to come-of-age with the promise of a brighter future. *So All Their Praises* sets Canada apart from other nations by depicting it as a safe haven from a world of political upheaval and war. This outlook, possibly fuelled by MacLennan's homesickness during his Princeton years, is an early example of the development of his nationalist conscience.

MacLennan's second apprentice work, *A Man Should Rejoice*, is much longer than *So All Their Praises* and suffers from an over-abundance of discursive dialogue and passive description, balanced by too little action until the final few chapters. It covers

much of the same political ground as *So All Their Praises*—depression-era disillusionment, the dangers of rampant American materialism, the rise of Nazism in Europe—but places greater emphasis on the communist movement as a failed attempt to reinvent modern society.

The main character, David Culver, is an aspiring painter and son of a greedy Pittsburgh tycoon, Bernard Culver. After graduating from Princeton and travelling around Europe, David reluctantly accepts a supervisory position in his father's New York factory. Chafing against the ruthless capitalism of his father's empire, he begins associating with a local communist group led by his childhood friend, Nicholas Eisenhardt. The communists try to establish a factory union, but they are betrayed by Pigou, a lackey of the factory superintendent, who hires a gang of strike-breakers to infiltrate union meetings. After violence erupts, Nicholas is imprisoned and tortured by the police. A court falsely convicts Nicholas of inciting the riot, and David—disowned and betrayed by his father—is sentenced to a year at hard labour for perjury.

Released from prison, David and his wife Anne return to Europe, where they fall in with a socialist enclave in the small Austrian town of Lorbeerstein. Although David is able to resume his painting, Nazi troops invade Lorbeerstein in an effort to root out the socialists. Although the rebels manage to sabotage a bridge used by the Nazis, they lack the military strength to resist Nazi oppression for long. David is captured and put on a train bound for a concentration camp. He manages to escape, only to find out that Anne has been murdered. Wracked with guilt and tormented by the loss of his ideals, he retreats to rural Nova Scotia where he establishes himself as the reclusive painter depicted earlier, in the novel's prologue.

Like *So All Their Praises*, *A Man Should Rejoice* criticizes people who adopt radical ideology in the hopes of it leading to social reform or a modern utopia. Like MacLennan's essay "Help Thou Mine Unbelief," *A Man Should Rejoice* argues that all modern political systems are "twentieth-century substitutes for religion" (330). Both *So All Their Praises* and *A Man Should Rejoice* depict how capitalism begets greed and contributes to the exploitation and corruption of the working class. Communism, too, is always already corrupted by self-interest intrinsic to human behaviour. The worst ideology of all—fascism—is a blot on society born of the inability of the politically obstinate and socially powerful to see outside their own cultural microcosm, as the *Hofrat* fails to do in *So All Their Praises*. Both novels dramatize the shift from the post-First World War *zeitgeist* of the 1920s to the pre-Second World War climate of the 1930s. Both evoke "the next war" as an inevitability borne of the failure of ideological systems to provide a peaceful solution to human conflict.

MacLennan was not the only Canadian writer of his day to anticipate "the next war." Stephen Leacock gave the title "L'Envoi: The Next War" to a foreboding sketch at the end of his 1932 book *Dry September*, and A.M. Klein anticipated the Holocaust in his journalism of the 1930s.¹² While it is hardly surprising that any politically-aware writer would see the dark future looming in Europe, MacLennan and the others were notably ahead of their political counterparts, seeing no hope in Mackenzie King's and Neville Chamberlain's attempts to appease Hitler. In MacLennan's work, the Second World War looms as an inevitable outcome of the failure to temper the political extremes of communism and fascism.

Dissatisfied with his handling of the early novels' European and American settings, MacLennan switched from a cosmopolitan to nativist approach in his fiction of the forties, using regional Canadian settings as the basis for a deeper examination of wartime experience. Despite his shift to a Canadian perspective, he tried to avoid the parochialism of a rigidly "national" writer: "I realized that I must first learn how to write a novel, true to its Canadian background, which would be at the same time intelligible and interesting to foreign readers, for a Canadian novelist cannot earn a living if he sells in the Canadian market alone" (*Cross-Country* 26). The first result of this shift was *Barometer Rising*, the first of MacLennan's novels set entirely in Canada and the first to examine war from a Canadian vantage point.

Barometer Rising combines allusions to Homer's story of Odysseus with Aristotle's theories of narrative unity to focus action, heighten dramatic intensity, and deepen symbolism. As William H. New shows, the classical structure of *Barometer Rising* leads to allegorical dimensions of character and event, elevating them to a modern prose equivalent to the classical epic: "the two generations into which the central characters divide ... represent the young Canada and the controlling Great Britain; the explosion which figures as a prominent event in the story represents both the First World War and the political severance between Canada and Britain, which historically accompanied it" ("Storm" 75). One of the first Canadian novels both to name and to give a realistic portrayal of a Canadian city, Halifax, *Barometer Rising* broke new ground in Canadian literature by creating a distinctive national idiom for the exploration of place, identity, and war.

The setting of Halifax allowed MacLennan to heighten his descriptive powers by incorporating personal memories into his fiction. Halifax also provided him with the ideal locus in which to celebrate Canada's cultural diversity:

There is no city in Canada, there is none in North America, which so amazingly concentrates life, in all its aspects, in a space so small.... In the older part of Halifax, the slums are back to back with the homes of the best families. You may dine in a house filled with antiques, rich in books, with old paintings on the walls. But a walk of a few minutes will take you to a boarding-house for seamen where you will encounter characters who could have walked out of a Conrad novel.

(*Cross-Country* 100)

As David Staines notes, in *Barometer Rising* "the town is the main character" ("Mapping" 141). The novel portrays Halifax as a city intimately connected with war; in peacetime it is a sleepy backwater, while in wartime it bustles with activity and strategic importance: "This [Halifax] harbor is the reason for the town's existence; it is all that matters in Halifax, for the place periodically sleeps between great wars. There had been a good many years since Napoleon, but now it was awake again" (7). Like Elgin in *The Imperialist*, where civic militarism lies dormant until wartime, Halifax becomes "harnessed to the war" (9) and its Citadel overlooks the city as a "symbol and bastion of the British Empire" (11). This connection with the British Empire prevents Halifax from moving into the modern age; colonial tradition, not self-determination, guides its destiny:

Halifax, more than most towns, seemed governed by a fate she neither made nor understood, for it was her birthright to serve the English in time of war and to sleep neglected when there was peace. It was a bondage Halifax had no thought of escaping because it was the only life she had ever known ... for the town figured more largely in the calamities of the British Empire than in its prosperities, and never seemed to become truly North American. (51)

For Angus Murray, a military surgeon modeled on MacLennan's father, the persistence of empire affects more than just Halifax; it is the state in which the whole country exists—shackled by a “chain which bound Canada to England” and which “[h]ardly anyone... really understood” (81). This “chain” binding Canada to Britain has dire consequences for Canada's wartime generations: “twice within the past fifteen years it had pulled Canada into England's wars, and Canadians had offered their lives without question” (81). The persistence of imperialism prevents Canada's youth from progressing toward political and cultural fulfillment. Progress requires a reorganization of the traditions of class, race, and culture that dominated Canada in the Victorian age. Although Angus recognizes the tide of change, he is “intellectually gripped by the new and emotionally held by the old” (310) and thus unable to embrace the future with the requisite devotion and energy.

Neil Macrae, a young war veteran and modern Odysseus, personifies Canada's potential as an independent nation. The son of the late John Macrae (whose name intentionally recalls the author of “In Flanders Fields”), Neil is the inheritor of the heroic traditions of the stoic and dutiful soldier. That he remains anonymous in the opening

chapters is a symbolic reminder of the countless unknown soldiers dead on the battlefield. Chance intervenes, allowing Neil to be symbolically resurrected to return “to the world of the living” (71). Neil is the exemplar of hope for the future—a member of the young generation who will carry Canada toward independence and fulfillment. His realization of this destiny comes as an epiphany as he breaks free of war-torn Europe:

The life he had led in Europe and England these past two years had been worse than an emptiness. It was as though he had been able to feel the old continent tearing out its own entrails as the ancient civilizations had done before it. There was no help there. For almost the first time in his life, he fully realized what being a Canadian meant. It was a heritage he had no intention of losing. (119)

In a moment of transcendence he imagines his mind ranging over the entire expanse of the country:

The sun had rolled on beyond Nova Scotia into the west. Now it was setting over Montreal and sending the shadow of the mountain deep into the valleys of Sherbrooke Street and Peel; it was turning the frozen St. Lawrence crimson and lining it with the blue shadows of the trees and buildings along its banks, while all the time the deep water poured seaward under the ice, draining off the Great Lakes into the Atlantic. Now the prairies were endless plains of glittering, bluish snow over which the wind passed in a firm and continuous flux, packing the drifts down hard over the wheat seeds frozen into the alluvial earth. Now in the Rockies

the peaks were gleaming obelisks in the mid-afternoons. The railway line, that tenuous thread which bound Canada to both the great oceans and made her a nation, lay with one end in the darkness of Nova Scotia and the other in the flush of a British Columbian noon. (119-20)

Neil's vision exemplifies Benedict Anderson's principle of the nation as an "imagined community"—a passionate but essentially irrational conception forged by the collective will of a group of people. He imagines himself connected to countless other people whom he has never met but whom he imagines share an identical destiny to his. He epitomizes the optimism of the new nationalism in mid-twentieth-century Canada. Like Lorne Murchison in *The Imperialist*, Neil becomes obsessed with an overarching "Idea" of how Canada will become the world's beacon of a "gleaming" future. Unlike Lorne, however, Neil's utopianism is based on a principle of Canada's independence from Britain. As Hermann Boeschstein argues, "In Neil we see the new, independent Canada striding toward a better future" (36).

Neil recognizes that the war "was not all powerful. It was not going to do to Canada what it had done to Europe" (300). Canadian society is destined to remain free of long-term trauma: "There were thousands of dead Canadians and hundreds of thousands of living ones fighting over there now.... But no matter what the Canadians did over there, they were not living out the sociological results of their own lives when they crawled through the trenches of France" (300). His reunion with Penelope Wain and their young daughter symbolizes the procreative potential for Canadian society, as it redefines itself as "the central arch" of a "new order" (325).

Pitted against Neil is Geoffrey Wain, wealthy, obstinate, and conniving, who epitomizes the values of an older, imperialist generation that keeps Canada mired in the past. Men like Wain, clouded by smug self-interest, are blamed for the First World War: “The old men like Wain had been willing to have this war because they were bored with themselves, and now they fancied they were in control of a wonderful new age” (138-39). Treating the war as “the greatest power-bonanza in the history of mankind” (91), Wain epitomizes the attitude of the arrogant commanders who rule the trenches by sending young men toward pointless deaths. MacLennan’s portrayal of Wain takes its cue from the socialist dissent of such novelists as Charles Yale Harrison, but instead of interpreting Wain’s power-mongering in terms of bourgeois exploitation of soldier-workers, he focuses on how misguided power inhibits the development of the nation: until men such as Wain are removed from power, Canada remains mired in the past.

A shortcoming of *Barometer Rising*—both Neil and Wain suffer from it—is MacLennan’s insistence that the characters be slotted neatly into typological roles. Wain is less like a realistic human being than a greedy villain in a comic-book melodrama: “And so he comforted himself with the reflection that by the time the war ended, familiar conventions would be broken down entirely, and a new age would be at hand of power and vulgarity without limitation, in which the prizes would not be won by the qualified but by the cunning and unscrupulous” (189). No real-life power monger—no matter how despotic, incompetent, or self-centred—is likely to be so honest about, or even aware of, his motivations. Vulgar and unscrupulous bureaucrats are dangerous because they fail to accept that their actions are vulgar and unscrupulous; power corrupts because it is blind. Even Hitler and Stalin imagined in their delusions that their actions were beneficial to

their countries. Wain's searing self-honesty about his love of power and vulgarity is an example of MacLennan's tendency to over-write his characters to fit a pre-conceived moral hierarchy.

The novel's structure is geared to favour Neil's conception of Canada and disparage Wain's. The predestination that allows Neil to survive the Halifax Explosion is plausible only within an allegorical framework. In all historical accounts of the Halifax Explosion, the maddening randomness of death is one of the event's most notable characteristics. As Mac Donald writes: "A man standing next to his friend would live while his friend would die. Some people standing close to the ship walked away, while those high on a hill died on the spot. People quickly gave up trying to make sense of it" (73). *Barometer Rising* avoids any such randomness; it is a romantic allegory about the triumph of progress over backwardness, in which the explosion is the catalyst for change.

More importantly, the explosion also symbolizes the elimination of the boundary between battleground and home front during the First World War. When the *Mont Blanc* "opens up," Halifax is transformed from an outpost of empire into "a city caught in the fulcrum of a battle" (265). The social boundaries between soldier and civilian disappear as Haligonians become "like soldiers crawling out of shelters into the smoking, heaving earth after a bombardment has passed" (242). By the afternoon following the explosion the public commons has become "like a military camp" and martial law replaces the traditions of civil society (271). As Neil observes, "This was his own city; it had been in North America that this had happened. For more than a century and a half Halifax had existed without violence. Yesterday, within a few minutes, he had seen it cease to be a city" (295).

For MacLennan's generation the Halifax Explosion was a hard lesson in the realities of war. Before the explosion, Canadian territory had been a safe haven against the destruction of modern warfare. While Western Europe disintegrated under a storm of shells, Canada remained physically unblemished by the war, allowing most of its non-military inhabitants to go about life more or less normally. Soldiers' families worried about their loved ones in the trenches and many returned soldiers bore horrific wounds and scars, yet the worst anxieties were over events three-thousand miles away, not in Canada. The Halifax Explosion changed this perception by showing how war could invade the lives of civilians in Canada: the war was no longer "over there," it was here.

Published in 1945, *Two Solitudes*, the second instalment in MacLennan's war trilogy, focuses on Quebec in the First and Second World Wars. Hailed as a "Great Canadian Novel" upon its publication, the novel has dated badly and returns to MacLennan's propensity in the apprentice works for *telling* rather than *showing* how events unfold. Critics lament the fact that the novel's most interesting character, Athanase Tallard, dies half-way through and that the second half of the novel, set from 1919 to 1939, is over-long and unfocused. Woodcock, for example, argues that the second half is marred by "romantic vagueness" and "clumsy coyness" (*MacLennan* 78), claiming that *Two Solitudes* "stands with *The Precipice* and *The Return of the Sphinx* as the three MacLennan novels least notable for their breadth of human understanding and their formal cohesion" (*MacLennan* 69). MacLennan was himself ambivalent about the novel; of its huge commercial success he claimed, "Literary merit had no connection with this

sale; the book merely happened to put into words what hundreds of thousands of Canadians felt and knew" (*Scotchman* 266). *Two Solitudes* remains important, however, for being the only major English-Canadian novel to explore Quebec's complex relationship with English Canada during and after the First World War.

More than any other wartime event, the conscription crisis belies the myth that Canada became more politically cohesive and culturally unified during the First World War. More than any other time since Confederation, English and French Canadians were in conflict over the meaning of patriotic duty. The low rate of volunteerism in French Canada during the early years of the war had already induced some anglophone imperialists to regard the Quebecois as cowardly or traitorous, and that resentment came to a head during the Federal election of August 1917. Robert Borden's Union government ran on a platform supporting the proposed Military Service Act. Absentee voting by Canadian servicemen helped Borden sweep to victory over Laurier's Liberal Party, but in Quebec the Unionists won just three seats while Laurier's Liberals' won sixty-two. As C.P. Stacey shows, the crisis "left on the public life of Canada a deep mark, which would affect the external policies of the next generation" (*Conflict* I: 218).

MacLennan was the first English-language novelist to depict Quebec's rejection of conscription in detail. Many anglophones during the war regarded French Canada's dissent against conscription as collective treason; it was a simplistic indictment that ignored complex historical factors and dismissed the achievements of the Royal Vandoos, the all-French twenty-second volunteer regiment. For British imperialists it was inconceivable that Canadians—English, French, or otherwise—could regard Britain as anything besides a beneficent motherland linked with a glorious past. For millions of

French Canadians, however, Canada's participation in the First World War was evidence of Canada's adherence to outdated principles of empire. For politicians to expect young Quebecois to fight and possibly to die for these principles was, for many in Quebec, an insult.

Some in English Canada argued that if Quebec would not fight to support Britain, it should fight to support its historical brethren in France—a rationalization which misinterpreted Quebec's relationship with France. Many in Quebec resented France's abandonment of New France to the British during the Seven Years War, and maintained that the French Revolution had been a violation of Catholic principles. Quebec's relationship with France was different from that of English Canada to Britain, a fact lost on many British imperialists.

In *Two Solitudes*, Father Beaubien personifies the historical roots of the reaction to conscription; for him, the roots of the conscription crisis are both historical and religious:

How could French-Canadians—the only real Canadians—feel loyalty to a people who had conquered and humiliated them, and were Protestant anyway? France herself was no better; she had deserted her Canadians a century and a half ago, had left them in the snow and ice along the Saint Lawrence surrounded by their enemies, had later murdered her anointed king and then turned atheist. (8)

He sees conscription as the result of “the English provinces ... trying to force their conquest on Quebec a second time” (8).

Marius Tallard also rejects conscription, but for reasons less historical than racial. He envisions a future in which Quebec rids itself of “outsiders” and returns to an idealized past dominated by *pure laine* francophone culture. Addressing a nationalist rally, he rails against “foreign tyranny and interference” (53), painting anglophones, Jews, and immigrants with the same prejudicial brush. His assault of a soldier on a Montreal street confirms his hatred of military values, which he equates with the foreign incursion of British imperialism. Later, his anti-Semitism emerges as he rails at his fiancé Emilie for accepting a job at Greenberg, a Jewish-owned dress factory: “So you mean you’re working for the Jews?... I thought you called yourself a Catholic!” (255). He represents the ugly side of Quebec nationalism, the minority who see national independence and cultural autonomy as dependent on the exclusion of all who do not conform to elitist racial ideals. His idealism encompasses “a pure race, a pure language, larger families, no more connection with the English, no interference from foreigners, a greater clerical control over everything,” and he feels assured that “with these conditions Quebec will reach the millennium” (428).

Although MacLennan never goes so far as to paint Marius as a fascist, his racial idealism becomes more fervent as Hitler dominates Europe at the end of the 1930s. Marius’s half-brother Paul, who rejects these conditions in a climactic confrontation at the end of the novel, sees Marius for what he is: a racist whose ideology clouds any hope of achieving the cultural regeneration of French culture. At the same time, Paul is able to sympathize with Marius as the product of the times, preaching a nationalist ideology fuelled by alienated youths: “if they shut you out everywhere, what do they expect to get but voodoo?” (341). Marius’s bitterness stems from the same impetus that allowed

Nazism to become entrenched in Germany: “What has happened in Germany is only what happens to any single man when he lets what matters spill out.... Gradually you begin to think of the whole world as ‘they,’ and then you felt madness rise, and you want to say to hell with them” (341).

Marius epitomizes the disillusionment of his generation. He is as much a victim of society as he is a blight upon it. In the world of the twenties and thirties, the values that win out time and again are those of Huntly McQueen, the greedy capitalist who turns the idyllic rural parish of Saint-Marc into an industrial centre, imposing his urban-bred conception of progress onto the traditional small town. As a reactionary defence against McQueen’s conquest of agrarian society, Marius adopts an insular and backward ideal of nationhood.

Caught in the middle between loyalty to Canada and support for Quebec is Athanese Tallard, the Member of Parliament who for all his support of federal policies is ambivalent about the war and conscription:

Canadian troops under a British Commander-in-Chief [Haig] were dying like flies in the mud before Passchendaele. Athanese felt a real resentment against the British, as though they had let him down personally. He had compromised his position with his own people in an effort to make French-Canada agree to conscription, and then the British made a mess like Passchendaele. No wonder the French-Canadian press roared against conscription when they saw thousands of casualties listed as the price of a few acres of mud. (24-25)

Although Athanese favours compromise and can see various sides of an issue, his religious agnosticism and support for Canadian nationalism bring him into conflict with the conservative Catholic values of Father Beaubien. With his death comes the death of the moderate principles MacLennan equates with a healthy society, paving the way for the ascension of the greedy industrialist, Huntly McQueen.

Despite the cultural and ideological tensions running through *Two Solitudes*, the novel advocates a belief that national unity is essential to the progress of both French and English Canada. For all the resentments generated over the conscription crisis, the end of the First World War signals the drawing-together of the Canadian nation. As the troops return home six months after the end of the war, both French and English join together in familial understanding:

The crowd cheered them [the troops]. When the French passed, the English crowd cheered them. Sometimes French and English in the crowd caught each other's glances and admitted a respect. The parade passed, a local celebration, not noticed elsewhere because the grief and pride of small nations is unimportant to others, strictly a family gathering. (234)

This Canadian family gains impetus from its self-consciousness as a small population, dwarfed by the monolithic United States, "across the frontier" (234). French and English need each other, MacLennan suggests, because national unity is the only way Canada can survive culturally and economically in an increasingly globalized world dominated by the hegemonic influence of the United States.

Paul Tallard is the character who symbolizes this collectivism in the second half of *Two Solitudes*. The son of French and English parents, Athanese Tallard and his second wife Kathleen, he embodies the two cultures in his psyche, and his romantic union with Heather Methuen signals his ability to reinforce his cultural hybridity through marriage. A victim of the depression, like so many others of the post-war generation, he finds meaning in his writing. As with MacLennan's own writing career, Paul's creativity begins to flourish during the 1930s, as "the post war slump" transforms "into a pre-war boom" (380).

Paul's first attempt at a novel, *Young Man of 1933*, resembles both *So All Their Praises* and *A Man Should Rejoice*. Like MacLennan's own apprentice works, Paul's novel concerns "a young man caught between the old war that was history and the new one whose coming was so certain it made the present look like the past even before it had been lived through" (383). Like Paul, his novel's protagonist weathers the depression years under the shadow of burgeoning Nazism, anticipating the madness soon to overtake Europe with the ascension of Hitler. Although Paul's novel fails artistically (unlike MacLennan, he burns his manuscript), it paves the way for an epiphany in which he decides to turn to Canadian settings and idiom, as MacLennan did with *Barometer Rising*. Before Paul can complete his new work, however, the Second World War descends on society and he decides to enlist out of a sense of duty toward Canada. Although his enlistment breaks the autobiographical parallels with MacLennan, who never enlisted, Paul shows the extent to which MacLennan charges the artist with the role of reinforcing Canada's national culture while upholding patriotic principles.

The Watch That Ends the Night is the final instalment in MacLennan's war trilogy and his most enduring novel. Published fourteen years after *Two Solitudes*, the novel revisits the First World War through the traumatic memories of Jerome Martell, one of two principal characters, although its main focus is on the period between the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the Korean and Cold Wars, circa 1952. In this sense the novel is both a continuation and summation of the war narrative that links *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes*. Thematically and structurally, however, the novel diverts from the regional Canadian perspective of the earlier published works, returning to the cosmopolitan sweep of *So All Their Praises* and *A Man Should Rejoice*.¹³ Themes of communism, fascism, and depression-era disillusionment mirror those of the apprentice novels, although MacLennan's powers of description and character development were much greater by 1959 than they had been in the thirties.

The Watch That Ends the Night is the first of MacLennan's war-related novels to depict war retrospectively while measuring its long-term impact. Both *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes* depict events as they unfold, without retrospection; the apprentice novels, concerned mostly with "the next war," anticipate war rather than reflect on it. By looking from present to past, *The Watch That Ends the Night* emphasizes the importance of memory in the creation of narrative and shows how war shapes both personal and collective identity over time.

The main characters, George Stewart, who narrates the novel, and Jerome Martell, the idealistic anti-hero, typify different kinds of modern experience. MacLennan's only first-person narrator, George, is the closest MacLennan came to creating a modernist

character, one whose shifting conscience and ambivalence toward the modern world are shown directly to the reader. George is a Prufrock-like figure who agonizes over his mediocrity and inability to make sense of the modern condition. His laconic answer to Catherine's question about how his week has gone—"My weeks are always the same" (233)—echoes Prufrock's lament, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (Eliot, "Prufrock" 51).

Like Michael Carmichael and David Culver in the apprentice novels, George enters the working world during the tumultuous thirties to see his dreams of fulfillment dashed. Trapped in a dead-end teaching job, he finds himself unable to live up to the social responsibilities and demands of his profession. His disillusionment typifies his generation: "During this long, drab hiatus three things happened to me, as they happened to millions of other young men at that time. I lost my faith in religion; I lost my faith in myself; I lost my faith in the integrity of human society" (107). Reflecting upon the thirties two decades later, George sees the period as a psychological doldrums in which the trauma of post-war consciousness drowned the hopefulness of youth:

I tell you, there are few people who passed through the Thirties who even dare or can recall what that time was really like or what it did to human beings.... There were times when, being young, I allowed myself the luxury of hope. But there was poison in the air then, and I think it spread from the rotting corpses of the first war. The Thirties lie behind us like the memory of guilt and shame. (123)

His reminiscences are often contradictory, however. For all its hardships, the thirties were a time when people were more politically aware, less materialistic than he finds them to be in the fifties:

In the Thirties all of us who were young had been united by anger and the obliviousness of our plight; in the war we had been united by fear and the obliviousness of the danger. But now, prosperous under the bomb, we all seemed to have become atomized. Wherever I looked I saw people trying to live private lives for themselves and their families. Nobody asked the big questions any more. Why think, when the thing to be thought about is so huge it is impossible to think about it? Why ask where you are going, when you know you can't stop even if you wish? Why ask why, when it does no good to know why? (323)

George laments how the thirties gave way to the mindset of the fifties, in which the ever-present threat of nuclear obliteration overwhelms the ability to engage in meaningful debate about progress and politics. The age of Nazism and the Second World War, for all its anxieties and brutality, provided people with a clear sense of moral right and wrong. In the post-war nuclear age, the possibility of Armageddon generates an odd complacency in the way that people interact with each other and the world.

A more heroic and romantic character, Jerome remains psychologically rooted in the past. His return to Montreal, years after his acquaintances and family thought he was dead, symbolizes the degree to which the past haunts the present. Unlike George, Jerome is never able to escape the trauma of the thirties and move into the placid psychology of

the fifties. Although Arthur Allenby characterizes him as “born ahead of his time” (98), by the 1950s he is caught inexorably in the past, trapped by his traumatic memories and idealistic sacrifices. Alienated from the modern world, he is a haunting reminder of what might have been had the crisis of a violent age not ruined the altruistic ideals of its brightest minds: “Jerome’s life might have been easy had it not been for the change that came over the whole world in the early Thirties” (156). His outsider status is typical of the whole of humanity in a troubled age: “Jerome ... could never belong to any particular group of human beings; he belonged to humanity itself” (157). In his comments on *The Watch That Ends the Night* in “The Story of a Novel,” MacLennan claims, “The conflict here, the essential one, was between the human spirit of Everyman and Everyman’s human condition” (37). Jerome is this Everyman.

His downfall begins during the First World War, when as a young man he falls into the violent abyss of the trenches. His sense of patriotic duty is shattered as he is forced to commit atrocious acts against his fellow human beings. He kills eleven German soldiers with his bayonet, reflecting later that “the bayonet is murder” (166):

It got one poor devil through the throat. I kicked him off it and he fell back into the hellhole.... I fell into the hole on top of him. He gurgled his life away before I could get off him, and then I had to spend ten hours in that hole with the body.... There’d be no wars if every soldier who killed a man with the bayonet had to spend ten hours immediately afterwards in a hellhole with his body. I took that kid’s life away, and that’s all he was—a kid. A frail blond boy who never had a chance against a man as strong as me. (166)

Like Harrison's narrator in *Generals Die in Bed*, Jerome indicts himself for the crime of murder, taking personal responsibility and guilt for actions born out of necessity in dire circumstances: "I never really got over that last bayonet murder I committed" (166). His war experiences transform him from a green, bewildered youth into a hardened, faithless casualty of the modern condition. As George says of Jerome, "the war... had destroyed his religion and launched him into a new orbit" (215).

Jerome's "new orbit" leads him into the humanitarian work as a surgeon he undertakes with obsessive relish in Montreal between the wars. Beguiled by communism and its appeal to the underdog, he becomes a man of the people whose humanitarian impulses blind him to the way in which political realities overshadow his idealistic principles. Going to Spain to serve in medical unit in aid of Republican forces is the culmination of all of his humanitarian impulses. Rejecting claims by others that he is a communist revolutionary, he sacrifices his job, his reputation, and his relationship with his family to do what he feels is essential: to go to Spain to support the Loyalist cause. While those around him fail to recognize the reasons for his convictions, his visionary outlook allows him to see past ideological currents to the real significance of the war: "unless fascism is stopped in Spain... [t]here'll be a war we'll probably lose" (244). Labelled as a political rogue by his colleagues, he cuts through the political rhetoric of fascism to see the violent impulses underlying it: "I know ... what fascism is. It's not political at all, it's simply the organization of every murderous impulse in the human being" (244).

Critics note Jerome's similarity to Norman Bethune.¹⁴ Both the fictional character and Bethune were surgeons based in Montreal. Both were obsessive humanitarians who

gave freely of their time and influence (among Bethune's philanthropic endeavours was a children's art school funded out of his own pocket). Both Jerome and Bethune were communist sympathizers—Bethune, unlike Jerome, was a card-carrying member—and both were involved in political rallies in support of Spain which began peacefully before turning violent, much like the one described in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. Both went to Spain and eventually to China. That Jerome is not simply a fictional version of Bethune is apparent when the novel mentions Bethune separately, but both the real man and fictional character represent heroic commitment to principles of decency and humanity.

The Watch That Ends the Night is one of the few Canadian novels about the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. Two Canadian veterans, Ted Allan and Hugh Garner, wrote fiction inspired by the war. Allan's *This Time a Better Earth* (1939) is the only Canadian novel by a veteran of the war, and Garner's short stories "The Expatriates," "How I Became an Englishman," and "The Stretcher Bearers" (all in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories*) are hard-boiled narratives based on his own experiences. The Spanish Civil War also provides background for Mordecai Richler's early novels *The Acrobats* (1954) and *A Choice of Enemies* (1957).

Although the war's significance is overshadowed by the Second World War,¹⁵ in the mid-1930s it was impossible to overestimate its importance, especially for Canadian socialists and communists. The violent showdown between the communist-anarchist Popular Front (or Loyalists) and the fascists (who called themselves Nationalists) led by fascist dictator General Francisco Franco was a climactic struggle between the two nascent ideological systems of the inter-war period. The war was an important prologue

to the Second World War; the fascists' defeat of the Popular Front with the help of German military power increased confidence in the idea of a fascist takeover of Europe. Meanwhile the Canadian government, like the governments of most other democratic nations, refused to participate in the war, ignoring the significance of Spain's struggle to preserve democracy in the face of tyranny. Nevertheless, some 1,600 Canadians, most of them members of the Canadian communist party, volunteered to support the Popular Front as part of the International Brigades, which also included American, British, and other troops.¹⁶

In *The Watch That Ends the Night*, the Spanish Civil War divides characters along ideological lines; in George's words it is "the fulminate to so many conflicting fears and hopes that it caused explosions thousands of miles away from Madrid and Barcelona" (245). For conservatives, such as hospital intern Jack Christopher, leftist meetings to discuss the war are like "revivals in a Methodist tent" (230). Missing the significance of the anti-fascist struggle in Spain, he dismisses it as "an impossible country" and sees it merely as "an excuse" for Jerome and other socialists to "give free play to their neuroticism" (230). George takes a more objective position on the war; in hindsight he sees the Second World War as the result of "powers [that] refused to face what Spain meant" (245), linking both the world's and Jerome's downfall to the conflict.

Downfalls are always temporary, however, in MacLennan's fictional world. Like *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes*, *The Watch That Ends the Night* seeks closure after chaos by ending with didactic meditations on a hopeful future. George's reflections on the Second World War identify it as the catalyst for Canada's re-birth:

While the war thundered on, Canada unnoticed grew into a nation at last. This cautious country which had always done more than she had promised, had always endured in silence while others reaped the glory—now she became alive and to us within her excitingly so.... I even persuaded myself that here I had found the thing larger than myself to which I could belong. (317)

Passages such as this one are too sentimental to be acceptable in a literary novel and mar what is otherwise an insightful work about collective experience in an age of war. Again, MacLennan ignores his own advice by elevating nationalism to the status of religion, personifying Canada as a child-like entity that sheds its innocence to embrace its people like a beneficent mother. As a reflection of MacLennan's political outlook, George's ruminations ignore Canada's oppression of German and Japanese minorities during the Second World War and its refusal to allow more than a trickle of Jewish refugees from Europe to seek political asylum on its shores. Although Canada's economic and cultural prowess was indeed boosted by the Second World War, it is the task of the literary novelist to interrogate the dark ironies of this growth, not just gloat over its shiny surface as MacLennan does.

MacLennan was a man of his age, however, and the popularity of his work attests to the way in which it struck a chord with Canadians tired from decades of hardship, uncertainty, and conflict. After trauma and sorrow a search for hope is inevitable, and MacLennan was the novelist who was best able to provide this hope for Canadian readers. His work marks the end of an era when writers were direct witnesses to war and its violent side-effects, when personal experience and desire—for healing, change, and

remembrance—shaped the war-related fiction produced in Canada. *The Watch That Ends the Night* closes this period with an effusive paean to the future, articulating the hopes and dreams of a generation raised on war but determined to overcome its impact. As other novelists prove, however, the legacy of war was too ingrained in the Canadian collective consciousness to be relegated to the past or rationalized with softly-penned reflections about how triumph emerged from tragedy.

Notes to Chapter 4

¹ In Laura M. Mac Donald's *Curse of the Narrows: The Halifax Explosion 1917*, one survivor describes the explosion's sound as "humming like the noise of millions of wings flapping" (58); Mi'kmaqs at Turtle Grove near Halifax Harbour recall hearing "a buzzing sound" as the ship detonated (63).

² The claim underlies the whole of Zichy's essay, "MacLennan and Modernism," in *Hugh MacLennan—Reappraisals*.

³ Woodcock notices "a curiously embarrassed clumsiness which makes MacLennan incapable of dealing with any aspect of sex except in high-mindedly sentimental terms" (*HM* 66). An example of an unconvincing female character is Penelope Wain in *Barometer Rising*; she is supposedly intelligent and forthright enough to have become a self-taught ship's designer (overcoming nearly insurmountable gender boundaries in 1917), yet she speaks and behaves like a chauvinistic stereotype of female demureness.

⁴ See MacLennan's reminiscences about his world-wide success and reputation in Donald Cameron's *Conversations with Canadian Novelists*, p. 137.

⁵ War appears peripherally in *The Precipice* (1948) and *The Return of the Sphinx* (1967); *Voices in Time* (1980) imagines the aftermath of a nuclear war. My conception of MacLennan's war-related trilogy adapts David Staines's thematic grouping of *Barometer Rising*, *Two Solitudes*, and *The Precipice* into a "trilogy of national novels" ("Mapping" 145).

⁶ The typescripts of *So All Their Praises* and *A Man Should Rejoice* are held at the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of McGill University Libraries. *So All Their Praises* is a clean and apparently finished manuscript of 262 pages; *A Man Should Rejoice* survives in two versions, one a working manuscript filled with revisions, the other a cleaner though possibly unfinished version of 463 pages.

⁷ See, for instance, "Help Thou Mine Unbelief" in *Cross-Country*.

⁸ For Mackenzie King's attitude toward Hitler, see Stacey's *A Very Double Life: The Private World of Mackenzie King* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976).

⁹ For more on Sam MacLennan, see Cameron, *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life*, p. 10.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the explosion, see Chapter 4: "A Word on Explosions" in Laura Mac Donald's *Curse of the Narrows*.

¹¹ Appendix D in Mac Donald's *Curse of the Narrows* lists over 2000 killed, 6000 wounded, and 9000 homeless. The Epilogue of Michael J. Bird's *The Town That Died* lists "1,963 killed, 9,000 injured and 199 blinded."

¹² See, for example, Klein's article on the 1932 German elections in *Beyond Sambation*, pp. 29-31.

¹³ Staines argues that unlike *Barometer Rising*, *Two Solitudes*, and *The Precipice*, "*The Watch That Ends the Night* is a character novel ... an account of Jerome Martell's journey to self-knowledge," adding, "there is no dimension of [the novel] that necessitates the introduction of ... national themes" ("Mapping" 149).

¹⁴ See, for instance, Keiichi Hirano's article "Jerome Martell and Norman Bethune" in Goetsch, ed. *Hugh MacLennan—Critical Views on Canadian Writers*.

¹⁵ Neither the *Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* nor the 2000 edition of the *Canadian Encyclopedia* has an entry on the Spanish Civil War; the *Encyclopedia* does, however, have an entry on the less crucial Spanish-American War of 1898.

¹⁶ 1,600 is the number Zuehlke cites in *The Gallant Cause*. A memorial to the Spanish Civil War at Queen's Park, Toronto, cites "more than 1,500" as having participated.

CHAPTER 5

Novels of the Second World War

The Second World War cost the lives of fewer Canadians than the First, 42,042 compared to 61,661,¹ but for humanity as a whole it was a far deadlier war. One needs no greater evidence of this than the six million Jews murdered by Nazi Germany and its allies, along with the countless gypsies, homosexuals, mentally disabled, political dissidents, and prisoners-of-war swallowed by the same machinery of death. Add to them the residents of Dresden, Hiroshima, London, Nagasaki, Rangoon, Warsaw, and other cities killed in bombings, invasions, and nuclear attacks, and the war's death toll rises rapidly. If the First World War was primarily the soldier's nightmare, the Second was the civilian's.

Canada remained free of bombings, invasions, and nuclear attacks, its situation during the Second World War unusual, if not unique. Most of its domestic problems came from within, including racist policies against Japanese-Canadians and others "deemed suspect" (Koch). Further troubles stemmed from the conscription debate between francophones and anglophones in Quebec, and the anti-Semitism of National Unity Party leader Adrian Arcand—"Canada's Führer"—and Canadian Immigration Branch director Frederick Blair.² Carl Berger's claim that the First World War "killed" imperialism in Canada (264) rings false in the face of the rampant xenophobia, inspired largely by Anglocentric idealism, that overtook Canada during the Second World War. This disturbing legacy influenced the fiction and poetry of A.M. Klein, Joy Kogawa, and

Anne Michaels, and the memoirs of Henry Kreisel and Eric Koch,³ but the great majority of Canadian writers wrote about the war in the traditional way: as a soldier's war.

Between the early forties and late sixties, some forty novels, many of them by ex-soldiers, appeared in Canada. A few established writers—Philip Child, Hugh Garner, and Hugh MacLennan—wrote about the war, but most novels were by soldiers-turned-authors who published one or two war novels before fading into obscurity. Scarcely remembered today are G.H. Sallans's *Little Man* (1942), David Walker's *The Pillar* (1952), and Lionel Shapiro's *The Sixth of June* (1955), yet all three won the Governor General's Award for fiction in the year they were published. *The Sixth of June* was the basis of a major Hollywood film starring Robert Taylor, though the film's legacy has vastly superseded that of the novel. Ralph Allen's *Home Made Banners* (1946) and *The High White Forest* (1964) and Edward Meade's *Remember Me* (1946) are among dozens of other novels that were initially popular and later forgotten.

There is little mystery to why these novels disappeared: most came from writers who were either inexperienced or better suited to other literary forms. Sallans and Meade tried to write like Hemingway but neither shared his gift for evocative imagery and pithy dialogue. Allen and Shapiro were talented war correspondents, and while their novels faithfully reproduce realistic details of strategy and battle, they are workman-like affairs without stylistic distinction. All of these authors write with a self-conscious masculinity that is overbearing and has caused them to date badly. The protagonists of *Little Man*, *The High White Forest*, and *Remember Me* drink, brawl, and carouse their way through the war in a violent rite-of-passage toward manhood. Women are either caricatures of saintly virtue or "hellcats" (Meade 76), providing foils for the men's domestic and sexual

desires. Even battle scenes tend to be unoriginal and anti-climactic. In *The Sixth of June*, for example, the June 1944 D-Day invasion, purportedly “the climax, the last paroxysm, the moment when the ugly gods separated the lucky from the unlucky” (341), appears in a mere twenty pages near the end of the novel’s 351 pages. Similar problems of characterization and plot affect most of the Canadian Second World War novels.

One novel that stands out, though it is no better than the others, is Earle Birney’s *Turvey* (1949), one of the few Canadian war novels to use comedy as its basis. It is a picaresque tale about a young recruit who dreams of joining the legendary Kootenay Highlanders, a regiment he does not know has disbanded before the war. Turvey bumbles his way through the military system, interacting haplessly with officers, women, and his fellow soldiers. After training in Canada and a stint in jail for desertion, he leaves for England where he leads a convoy of troops astray during a training exercise before falling ill with dysentery. Near the novel’s conclusion he ships out for the continent, expecting to enter combat. Instead he finds only the disturbing remnants of a battle that has already ended. Again he falls ill, with diphtheria, his dreams of adventure and heroism shattered.

Turvey is farce rather than satire: there is no “middle way” underlying the novel’s comic-yet-bleak view of humanity. The soldiers are universally idiotic no matter what their rank, and the civilians they encounter are shallow and crass. Birney depicts the disorganization and stupidity of war and the people who fight it, though its message appears more misanthropic than moralistic. *Turvey* negates military authority, soldierly prowess, and national idealism as surely as *Generals Die in Bed*; because it also negates the capacity of human beings to accept the consequences of their actions, it flirts with nihilism in a way that Harrison’s work does not. Although Birney anticipates Joseph

Heller's definitive war satire *Catch 22* (1961), *Turvey* lacks the critical depth and humanist underpinning that balances the surface absurdity of *Catch 22*.

The war inspired three important novels, each of which rises above the mediocre ones. Colin McDougall's *Execution* (1958) is the only masterpiece among Canadian Second World War novels, sharing much with the others thematically while resisting the genre's stylistic pitfalls. Although McDougall never wrote a second novel, *Execution* is an ambitious and complex story of Canadian soldiers during the Italian campaign. It transcends its author's inexperience as a writer to become one of the most enduring of all Canadian war novels and is as important to the Second World War as *Generals Die in Bed* was to the First.

Edward McCourt's *Music at the Close* (1947) is prairie realist fiction in which war is a dominant theme. Like Montgomery and MacLennan, McCourt brings a regionalist perspective to his depiction of war on the Canadian home front. Although his work is largely forgotten today, it possesses a depth of character and thematic richness that is lacking in many other war novels, and it joins MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night* among the best home front novels to emerge from the Second World War.

William Allister's *A Handful of Rice* (1961) is a flawed but lively and historically-important novel about Canadians in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. Like Meade, Sallans, and many others, Allister was a one-off novelist and his work now lies in obscurity, though its readability makes it worthy of recovery. Its subject matter gives it a unique place in Canadian war fiction.

Born in Montreal in 1917, Colin McDougall graduated from McGill University before joining the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, with whom he served as a Captain during the Italian campaign of 1943. Like Farley Mowat, another officer in Italy who later wrote about his experiences, McDougall was an ordinary man caught up in extraordinary events.⁴ After landing at and recapturing Sicily, the Canadians fought their way through Ortona on Italy's east coast, before facing the Germans in a bloody clash at Monte Cassino, and then eventually capturing Rome.⁵ McDougall's war experiences followed the same trajectory as his characters in *Execution*, and in his notes for the novel he refers to the need to "purge" his war experiences. Awarded the Distinctive Service Order for outstanding service in Italy, he returned to Montreal after the war to work at McGill University as a counsellor, then registrar, and finally secretary-general. He died in 1984, scarcely remembered for his one monumental literary achievement.

There is little about McDougall's early writing—consisting of a mere five short stories published in Canadian and American magazines between 1951 and 1953—to indicate the talent latent within him. The fact that he wrote these stories around the same time he was writing *Execution* is puzzling because they seem like the work of a different and much less talented writer. The first of the stories, "Cardboard Soldier," published in *Macleans* in July 1951, is a sentimental tale about an aging First World War soldier forced to take humiliating employment as a sandwich-board carrier. Three other stories—"Treason in His Heart" (*This Week*, May 1953), "Let It Be Ellen" (*New Liberty*, May 1953), and "Love is For the Birds" (*Macleans*, July 1953)—are brief potboilers featuring evil scientists and college romances, tailor-made for the pulp magazine market. Only one story, "The Firing Squad" (*Macleans*, January 1953), relates to *Execution* and hints at

McDougall's literary gifts.⁶ "The Firing Squad" is an early version of the execution of Private Jones in the final chapters of *Execution*, although the execution in the story is mercifully called off at the end. The story won first prize in the *Macleans* fiction contest and the President's Medal from the University of Western Ontario, a fitting prologue to the acclaim that would later greet *Execution*.

First published in hardback in 1958 in Canada, Britain, and the United States, *Execution* gained worldwide prominence thanks to the acclaim of McDougall's fellow writers. It won the Governor General's Award for 1958 and appeared in Dutch and German translations. It survives today in a New Canadian Library edition.

McDougall's copious conceptual notes for *Execution* date from 1951 until 1957, with a substantial gap (roughly September 1954 to January 1956) when he temporarily shelved the novel.⁷ The manuscript he completed on November 14, 1956, close to the published version of the novel, was approved by Hugh MacLennan and thus proudly dubbed the "H.M." manuscript by McDougall.⁸ Having the endorsement of Canada's best-known writer was important to him; his ambitions for *Execution* were clear from the outset and far from humble: to write "the best (war) novel, of this last war, yet written," moreover to write "the best 'Canadian' novel yet written," to make it "great" and "universal," and to have it received as a "smash hit" bestseller.⁹ His notes reflect his obsession with literary greatness, of which he never lost sight during the years in which he composed his novel. His persistence, born equally of artistic and career motivations, made him a spiritual cross between James Joyce and Dale Carnegie.

Rarely has a literary novel been written with such tenacity, decidedly military in character. McDougall's notes, fascinating in themselves, map out his writing strategies,

plot development, and character motivations with all the foresight and detail of a general planning a major offensive. Pages and pages of typed and handwritten notes detail hours spent writing, deadlines for chapter completions, and the pros and cons of this or that character name or trait. Writing difficulties are obstacles to be faced down like an entrenched enemy—"There was resistance to the work on Story Line, & the part played by the characters."¹⁰ The cohesion of plot is as crucial as a coordinated attack: "Scenes & Events... must advance the story, & utilize to the full all possible facets of the situation."¹¹ For literary models, McDougall set the bar high—Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*, Waugh's *Men at War*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Faulkner, Flaubert, Kafka—and his ambition was to match or even surpass these authors.¹²

Although McDougall may not have topped Tolstoy or Faulkner, he did write an important novel that has been unjustly neglected in Canada since the 1960s. Warren Cariou calls *Execution* "a philosophical war novel, a symbolist meditation on the meaning of action" (273), and in this sense it has more in common with Tolstoy than with Allen's, Allister's, or Meade's gritty realism. *Execution*'s artistic strength lies in its definition of character, its multifaceted symbolism, and the unity of its theme—based on the premise that war is a form of mass execution, and that execution, as a central character, Major Bunny Bazin, states, "is the ultimate injustice, the ultimate degradation of man" (102).

"Cinematic" is a term often unjustly applied to modern novels that combine vivid description with short, shifting scenes. But with its short, unresolved chapters, visceral imagery, and accelerations and decelerations in action, *Execution* is cinematic in structure. Although McDougall set out to write a novel that would "carry a message of

hope to the world,”¹³ the message *Execution* carries is far more complex—neither overtly hopeful, nor pessimistic. Though moral in its intent, the novel is ambivalent about whether or not—and if so, how—morality can survive in a world of chaos. More so than MacLennan’s novels, *Execution* flirts with modernism in the way that it combines form and existential uncertainty. Basically, however, it is a work of realism, containing elements of MacLennan-esque allegory and Christian symbolism.

Execution is structured around a series of executions that take place throughout the novel. Two literal executions take place, that of two Italian prisoners in “Book One—The First,” and that of the Canadian Rifleman Jones in “Book Four—the Last.” A series of other executions, metaphoric rather than literal, most notably the ruthless slaughtering of Canadians by the Germans during a battle at the Hitler Line near Cassino, dominates the centre of the novel. The centre was originally a single section entitled “Book Two—The Others” (i.e. “other” executions), and later changed to two sections, entitled “More” and “And More,” for the first edition. McDougall intended these laconic section titles to represent both divisions in the text and to act as a metaphor for the structure of the novel: each execution follows the last with the stark inevitability of a tolling bell.¹⁴ The execution of Rifleman Jones at the end of the novel is linked symbolically with Christ’s crucifixion, and it is here that *Execution* becomes most allegorical.

The novel begins in Sicily in July 1943 with a battle scene in which the fictional Canadian 2nd Rifles (based on the Princess Pats) fend off an Italian cavalry attack. The moral quandary faced by the men is established immediately, as Bren-gunner Krasnick, a prairie boy with a soft spot for animals, refuses to shoot horses. Sergeant Mitchell counters that Krasnick’s task is not to “shoot horses,” but to “[s]hoot the men—*off* the

horses” (13). The scene shows how war skews the moral perspective of otherwise compassionate men: Krasnick would rather risk his own life than shoot innocent horses, yet he shows little conscience for the men on the horses whom his Bren gun slaughters. Krasnick is intrinsically moral, yet in the kill-or-be-killed circumstances of warfare, he is forced into a selective and dispassionate brutality. Yet it is war itself—figuratively “execution”—not Krasnick that is to blame.

The opening scene also shows the fatal juxtaposition between traditional methods of warfare, typified by horses and sabres, and mechanized weaponry, typified by Bren and tommy guns. In a moment of cinematic clarity, platoon leader Lieutenant John Adam watches amazed, almost unaware of his own danger, as the Italian cavalry attacks:

A troop of cavalry, sabres flashing in the sun, came galloping out to charge against the line of infantry. For an unbelieving instant Adam watched while a huge captain of dragoons raised his sabre to cut him down. But before he could even lift his tommy-gun the dragoon went flying from his horse, his sabre tumbling through a flashing arc in the sunlight. Krasnick’s Bren gun was firing in short, methodical bursts ... and in a matter of seconds the cavalry charge was finished. Riderless horses whinnied and kicked their heels in terror. (14)

Krasnick’s cold, “methodical” machine gun fire makes a deadly mockery of the cavalry’s romantic bravado. A charge that a hundred years earlier would have struck fear into the hearts of anyone facing it is cut down in seconds, mercilessly. The scene shows the modern battlefield to be a brutal and unpredictable place, where bravery and dedication

count little toward the success or failure of an assault. Whichever side has the advantage in weaponry and the skills necessary to operate it wins the battle. No one is immune to this harsh reality, as the Canadians find out later when they wage a hopeless attack against well-fortified Germans at the Hitler Line. Neither bravery nor resilience can save them from being slaughtered; the world they inhabit is a savage one where only “execution” prevails.

It takes time for the men of the 2nd Rifles to awake to the reality of execution and lose the ideals and principles brought with them from civilian life to the battlefield. Initially the men fall into a range of typological categories familiar from other war novels. John Adam is a solid and capable leader, willing always to answer his superiors with an enthusiastic “Sah!” and chivalrous enough to allow an Italian cavalry officer to keep his sword as he is taken prisoner. Padre Doorn is a gaunt and pious “sky pilot,” convinced that the Canadians are “crusaders” on a holy mission and best served by prayers to God to “go gently with them” (16). Brigadier Ian Kildare, figurehead of the Scottish Borderers regiment, is a bellicose extrovert whose appreciation for military pomp and circumstance is spared ridicule only because of his tactical brilliance and ruthlessness. Only Rifleman Jones, solid and handsome but with a mind that “had simply not ripened at the same rate as his body” (24-25), is anything other than ideal soldier. Despite being able to follow simple instructions, he has little ability to think for himself and is treated more as a mascot than a comrade by his fellow soldiers. Yet it is he who impresses Kildare the most as “a damn fine soldier” (25), merely because of his ability to repeat drill instructions and cut the figure of a disciplined soldier.

Despite his greater intellect, Kildare, like Jones, is bound rigidly and unthinkingly to military procedure, leading him to order the execution of two harmless Italian deserters. Against his orders the Canadians adopt the affectionately-nicknamed “big Jim” and “little Joe” for their amusing antics and culinary skills. Particularly upsetting for the Canadians is the way they are forced to obey orders to shoot big Jim and little Joe, despite the Italians’ obvious harmlessness. The two are conscripts, glad to be finished with the war and indifferent to being on the losing side, and shooting them gains nothing for the Canadians. To execute them by order of Kildare is unconscionably brutal—not to mention a violation of the Geneva Convention. Lieutenant-Colonel Dodd gives the job of shooting the prisoners to Sergeant Krebs, a strong-arm from the Regimental Police, who botches the execution in a gruesome scene:

As soon as they passed through the picket gate Sergeant Krebs fired a shot which hit little Joe in the back. Little Joe squealed with pain. He fell forward onto the manure, the suit-case flew from his hands, and its meagre contents scattered all around him. Big Jim turned about; he went down on his knees, his hands came together beneath his chin as though he would pray—not to his executioner, but, for a moment, to God. Sergeant Krebs fired again and shot him in the shoulder. Then both men were squealing at once; Sergeant Krebs fired his remaining four rounds into their bodies. But they both were still alive, both flopping despairingly in the manure. Sergeant Krebs broke his pistol and began, laboriously, to load another six rounds into the cylinder. (44)

The execution and the horrific way in which it is carried out shatter the Canadians' military and spiritual ideals. Like a curse, the execution casts the men into a dark forest of brutality and uncertainty, where they are forced to confront ethical questions about war that, despite all their physical and tactical training, they are unprepared to deal with. Affected most deeply is Adam, the good soldier forced to awaken to the insane chaos of war, where military duty and human ethics conflict. Worst of all is the recognition in himself of "the sick, vulture fear which chained itself to one's shoulder forever" (45). This is where McDougall's "message of hope" becomes destabilized, as the author himself realized late into the writing when "the vulture fear" became "the symbol of Adam's whole burden."¹⁵ Although in appearance he remains "every inch the competent infantry officer," Adam feels an "aching void" inside himself, caught, like Conrad's Marlow, in a world where only "efficiency" can partially mask an insidious "horror": "The emptiness was the horror; and he tried to fill it with his competence" (59).

Also changed by the execution is Padre Doorn, the man of faith who in the wake of his own army's savagery begins to doubt the existence of God. Like Adam, Doorn becomes a kind of hollow shell, administering last rites over fallen soldiers in "a rapid, insistent drone," indifferent to the identity of the victim (50). Instead of looking skyward for spiritual comfort, as he used to, "now he never looked higher than the junction point of earth and sky" (51). He becomes a burden to his regiment and replaces loyalty to his fellow soldiers with half-mad sprawls around the Italian countryside, exploring ruined churches in search of the "True Cross," and fooling himself when he thinks he finds it.

Foreshadowing is present as Rifleman Jones accompanies Doorn on his quest for the True Cross, symbolizing Jones's later "crucifixion."

Not all members of the 2nd Rifles are as traumatized by the execution as Adam and Doorn. Major Bunny Bazin, whose long experience of war has long destroyed any humanist ideals he might once have held, rationalizes the event as one more instance of brutality in an intrinsically brutal endeavour. Pondering existential philosophy and conjugating Latin while he squeezes off rounds against the enemy, he is the soldier best equipped to endure the war psychologically because he holds no illusions about the moral righteousness of his actions. Yet he is also doomed, because his cynicism and war-hardened outlook make it impossible for him to be comfortable again in civilian society. He knows instinctively that he will not survive the war, and his death at the end of the novel is a fulfillment of his conviction that the only cure for suffering is obliteration of both mind and body.

Similarly unaffected by the execution, but for different reasons, is Rifleman Jones, who lacks the intellectual capacity to appreciate its ethical dilemma, although even he recognizes the horror of the killing itself. Spiritually and morally, he has little to lose by participating in brutality, but it is also his great tragedy that he is a soldier without the capacity either to love or to hate, or to be accountable for his own actions. His innocence reinforces the Christ-like image he assumes after his wrongful conviction for murder, although his naiveté makes for a strangely childlike, almost a-moral Christ.

Least affected of all by the execution is the one most responsible for it, Brigadier Ian Kildare, who orders the killing without being forced to witness it. Preoccupied with the responsibilities of commanding a major invasion, he views the execution of the two

Italians as an expediency, a glitch in the routine of command, to be forgotten as soon as the order has passed down the wire. Early in the novel, he comes across as a blustery, heartless and incompetent commander—a stereotypical war novel officer, in other words. Later, however, this initial impression alters as he displays his honest sympathy for his men, backed by a willingness to risk his military career when they are put in danger needlessly by the hackneyed battle tactics of his own superiors. He commits “military hara-kiri” (107) at an operations meeting, for example, by challenging his superiors’ plan for a set-piece attack on the Hitler Line—inevitably suicidal for the Canadians—with his opinion that it is “balls” (108). Kildare, we find out, *does* have a conscience and is a competent leader, and although he wields a certain amount of power, he is neither lacking in integrity nor free of limitations in his own authority.

It is not individual officers like Kildare who are the greatest detriment to the common soldier, but an incontrovertible political system—operated from the ranks of the Canadian Government and Canadian Military Headquarters—that shadows the decisions of even the highest-ranking operational officers. The system is political, controlled by effete politicians who hand down decisions to commanders in the field to keep up bureaucratic appearances regardless of what is morally right. Following his promotion to Major General of Administration (his “hara-kiri” is temporary, it turns out), Kildare comes up against this system when he tries to intervene in the execution of Rifleman Jones. Kildare remembers meeting Jones in Sicily and realizes that Jones is far from the ideal soldier he originally appeared to be. He knows Jones is being made a scapegoat for a murder others committed, largely because the victim was an American soldier. Compassionately and pragmatically, Kildare orders a stay of execution for Rifleman

Jones, but his superiors override his authority and the execution must take place in the name of political expediency.

Kildare might be faulted on the grounds that his dissent has limits—he never resigns his command to protest a decision from above and never disobeys an order even when it dooms the men under him—but it is clear that the Canadian Military Headquarters views him as expendable. For all his physical prowess and military skill, he is “Ottawa’s office boy” (193), and his resignation would result in his being replaced by someone less tactically competent and compassionate. In this sense, Kildare is in the same position as the men under him: bound to carry out orders, no matter how unethical they might be, yet determined to preserve whatever shreds of humanity remain available to him.

McDougall’s portrayal of Kildare exemplifies how *Execution* presents a more sophisticated view of military authority than other war novels. Kildare has his faults, but he is far from the typical “donkey” leading “lions” into battle—unlike Captain Clark and the Brigadier in *Generals Die in Bed*, the idiotic officers in *Turvey*, or the ruthless Captain Leather in Findley’s *The Wars*. The typical war novel commander is part Machiavellian Prince, part *miles gloriosus*, but Kildare is neither, apart from the impression he creates superficially in *Execution*’s opening scenes. For all its criticism of the military command structure, *Execution* is not intrinsically anti-authoritarian. From Private to Major-General, the novel portrays all soldiers as essentially moral human beings who fail to uphold ethical principles, not because they are ignorant or contemptuous of them, but because war itself is a force far beyond the capacity of any

individual human to control, with its own perverse logic about who lives or dies, and why.

Once men have entered this world of execution, they are cut off from normal society. Soldier and civilian become alienated from each other; neither is able to understand the other's perspective, and this dilemma leads to an unwitting exploitation of the soldier's commitment to his country. The crux of this exploitation is the concept of "Rehabilitation," a program devised in comfortable offices by civil servants, who believe without any factual justification that the war's "end could not be long delayed":

In every capital of the Allied World Civil Servants plucked neatly-ribboned files from pigeon-holes. These were the blue-prints from which the brave post-war world would be fashioned.... Nations were grateful: they wished to reward their soldiers and speed their return to civilian life. This set of plans bore the file-title of 'Rehabilitation'.

In the city of Ottawa there were conferences, reports, and abstracts—all to be read, discussed, and legislated. And when this task was done the Civil Servants regarded one another with pride and satisfaction. The end is close, they decided: let our boys know at once. In 1944, therefore, couriers were despatched to take the good news to the fighting men.

There was only one trouble: the fighting men were still fighting. (154)

The irony conceals an underlying contempt for the bureaucratic world. No one at home understands what war is like, the passage implies, and the Brave New World the civil

servants hope for is a false utopia with no realistic basis. The bureaucratic world responsible for perpetuating such false hope is the same one that overrides Kildare's command and demands that Jones be executed to appease the Americans. The result is hypocrisy perpetuated by those who pay lip service to the common soldier yet fail to intervene when a travesty of bureaucratic injustice threatens one of them, Rifleman Jones specifically.

Equally unjust and hypocritical is the way the rehabilitation scheme is sold to men in the field in the guise of a feel-good marketing campaign. In one scene a government representative, whom Bunny Bazin likens to Bob Hope, visits the troops to outline the promises of the rehabilitation program. For four-and-a-half years' service the men are offered \$400, a meagre sum for all the misery the men endure in the name of their country. Especially pathetic for Bunny Bazin, who watches from the side, is how young soldiers who are as likely as not to die on the battlefield make greedy calculations of their earnings, oblivious to the government man's patronizing attitude. These are young soldiers, many of whom enlisted to escape unemployment and poverty, and who continue to be exploited by bureaucracy and class prejudice without realizing it is happening. Krasnick is one such soldier: he hoards his small earnings in a money belt and dreams of owning a farm—a dream, it is clear, he will not live to fulfill. Like his comrades, Krasnick has been sold a lie about his country's appreciation of his war service, and when he dies ignominiously in battle, only his fellow soldier Ewart is there to appreciate the value of his life and the tragedy of his death.

McDougall's criticism of the rehabilitation program signifies the alienation many Second World War veterans experienced in the late forties and fifties. Like the old soldier

forced to parade about wearing sandwich boards in McDougall's story "Cardboard Soldier," the soldiers in *Execution* face indifference and ignorance in a post-war society in which consumerism and bureaucratic double-speak take the place of community and honesty. This post-war life, never portrayed directly in the novel, underlies its political outlook—its outcry not against military authority, but against civilian apathy. Despite the tentative hopefulness of its ending, *Execution* remains ambivalent about the values for which men fight, and, unlike MacLennan's novels, denies that war contributes anything to a nation's "coming-of-age." It is enough simply for men to survive.

It is a mystery why McDougall never published a second novel; it certainly was not for lack of encouragement. *Execution* was praised worldwide in magazine and newspaper reviews, it won several of Canada's top literary prizes, it sold well, and many luminaries of the literary world wrote to McDougall to praise his work. Vera Brittain viewed *Execution* as inhabiting the crux between past wars, fought (as she believed) in the name of humanity and comradeship, and the cynical "press-button wars" of the future: "the Second World War will go down to history as the last example of this comradeship and this heightened sense of living, and [*Execution*] will have an enhanced value as one of the few war books that really convey it."¹⁶ Saul Bellow highlighted the ethical dimension of the novel by recognizing "a terrible question beyond our ability to resolve... how much cruelty puts out our human light? What can we endure?"¹⁷

McDougall's contemporary Canadian writers were no less supportive. Ralph Allen stood "in awe of [McDougall's] true and clean performance,"¹⁸ and a fellow veteran of Italy, Farley Mowat, jealous that *he* had not written *Execution*, found it to be "the closest approximation to the truth of the matter that I've encountered."¹⁹ McDougall's greatest

supporter was Hugh MacLennan, who after approving an early “H.M.” manuscript of *Execution*, praised the published version as “a very great book.”²⁰ He later cited it as proof of Canadian literature’s maturity in his essay “The Story of a Novel” (34), and referred to it in a 1973 interview with Donald Cameron as having “poignantly, marvelously, and succinctly concentrated the whole dilemma of justice in an organized society” (Cameron, “MacLennan” 146). These comments highlight the way in which *Execution* epitomized the mood of the post-Second World War era, a time when readers and writers alike were prepared to confront the ethics of war without the blatant ideological investments of the past.

McDougall had the makings of a major writer, but after *Execution* he published nothing else, aside from a short historical article about the Battle of Vimy Ridge in Pierre Berton’s *Historic Headlines: A Century of Great Canadian News Dramas* (1967). At first glance McDougall’s authorial silence is mysterious, especially since McDougall envisioned writing follow-ups to *Execution*.²¹ In another sense, it is logical that he wrote only one novel. Early in his conceptual notes for *Execution*, he cites a major reason for writing the novel: “the purging of the whole war experience—either then to be forgotten, or to provide the material for further work.”²² This need to purge war experience—literary creation as a form of psychological catharsis—is typical of many of the Second World War novelists, and it explains why so few of them sustained long literary careers. Once the traumatic residue of the war was released into fiction, it lowered its intensity, paving the way for psychological healing and a return to normal existence. For McDougall, writing *Execution* was bound either to tame the ghosts of war or to force him

to keep them at bay by continuing to write about his experiences. Apparently, *Execution* accomplished the former and McDougall fell silent.

Edward McCourt was a contemporary of MacLennan: both were born in 1907, both were Rhodes Scholars, and both published first novels in the 1940s after years of teaching and literary apprenticeship. Like MacLennan, McCourt produced three war-related novels: *Music at the Close* (1947), about a young man growing up on the prairies in wartime; *Home is the Stranger* (1950), the story of an Irish war bride; and *The Wooden Sword* (1956), about a university professor who is unable to overcome his traumatic war memories.²³ Whereas MacLennan focused on Canada's eastern provinces, McCourt was a prairie realist—more like Sinclair Ross than MacLennan in this regard. An admirer of Ralph Connor, McCourt contributed one of the few critical examinations of Connor's work in his book *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1949). His admiration crosses over into *Music at the Close* where he cites Connor (as Charles Gordon) among “the names of leaders who had died on behalf of mankind and thereby taken on immortality” (220)—a list that also includes David Livingstone, Abraham Lincoln, and Edith Cavell!²⁴ Overall, though, McCourt's fiction is less concerned with the spiritual triumph of war than with its mundane realities and long-term psychological impact.

McCourt was one of the first Canadian fiction writers to explore the significance of post-traumatic stress. His work shows the influence of Freud in its emphasis on non-physical trauma—invisible wounds that lie deeper than the ravages of being shot, shelled, or gassed. In *Music at the Close*, when veterans from a prairie farming community return

from the First World War with missing legs and eyes, others suffer just as intensely from shell-shock; it is so severe that, figuratively speaking, “they would never come home again” (26). *The Wooden Sword* explores trauma extensively in its portrait of Steven Venner, a veteran and university professor who suffers from debilitating nightmares and horrendous flashbacks. By the time MacLennan published *The Watch That Ends the Night* in 1959, psychology was a common theme in Canadian post-war literature, but McCourt’s work established a precedent for the interiority of Jerome Martell and George Stewart.

McCourt’s first novel, *Music at the Close*, remains his most important. It examines how war affects the moral, psychological, and economic life of young farmers who find themselves caught in the tide of world events. The novel begins as the main character, Neil Fraser, grows up on his uncle and aunt’s farm during the First World War. Unlike the young boys in *Barometer Rising* or *Rainbow Valley*, Neil is scarcely affected by the war and its adventurous ideals. The workaday world he inhabits has little concern with patriotic principles or faraway battles; economic considerations dominate patriotic ones as farmers provide the grain to feed thousands of overseas troops.

Neil’s one concession to conventional patriotism is his admiration of Rupert Brooke’s poetry, a passion he shares with his girlfriend (later wife) Moira. In Brooke, Neil recognizes the energy and idealism that are missing from his own life, and they inspire his own budding literary efforts—efforts that ultimately go to waste. As Neil grows up and takes over his family’s farm, economic hardships born of the Depression cast him ever farther into disillusionment. Brooke’s purple phrases eventually lose their sheen and “a kind of sick despair” seeps into Neil’s soul (168). Indirectly he is a casualty

of an age of war, as the ideals of a society founded on principles of empire collapse into uncertainty.

Neil's despair deadens his reaction to the outbreak of the Second World War—and here McCourt touches on something typical of post-war novels of the forties and fifties. Instead of greeting the war with enthusiasm and a thirst for adventure, as young men did commonly in 1914 and occasionally in 1939, Neil's reaction is dull and pragmatic:

He could not understand the constant clamour to be sent overseas. He was quite content to stay where he was [on reserve in Edmonton]. It would be pleasant to move about Canada for a bit, but he had no wish to cross submarine-infested waters in an uncomfortable troop-ship for the sake of a little excitement and possibly six feet of earth at the other side.... He lived in a kind of contented lethargy, sure that his wife and child were provided for, and with little concern for the future. (217)

Such an apathetic response would be unimaginable in a Canadian First World War novel. Neil is neither jingoistic, like Barry Dunbar in *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, nor apprehensive and fearful like Walter Blythe in *Rilla of Ingleside*, nor cynically concerned with self-preservation like the narrator of *Generals Die in Bed*.²⁵ Rather, he is indifferent, willing to fulfill his military duty but displaying neither overt heroism nor cowardice. As long as his family is provided for, he is content, his life worth only as much as their comfort. Living through the First World War and the Great Depression has deadened his

ability to react strongly to major events; he becomes an apathetic automaton—what characters in anti-war novels of the First World War *claim* to be but are not.

Neil is sent overseas, where he dies on the beaches of Normandy during the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944. There is neither glory nor horror in his death, and McCourt implies that, for Neil, there is no heavenly afterlife for young men who die serving their country. Instead, there is temporary pain, followed by oblivion:

But the pain stopped after a while, and the stars faded and the darkness lay over the land, not transparent now but like a heavy shroud. The sound of the guns continued a little while longer, but faint, no more than a barely perceptible muttering, a vibration to be felt rather than a sound to be heard. Then silence, absolute, unbroken. And darkness that enveloped the universe. (228)

There is an ironic juxtaposition between Neil's mundane, godless death, and those of the young soldiers he read about in Brooke's poetry—who "poured out the red / Sweet wine of youth" (Mccourt 168; Brooke 21) in service to God and Empire. The end of *Music at the Close* presents a laconic acceptance of war's realities.

Mccourt touches a common note in society's response to the Second World War. As Dagmar Novak argues, "[m]ost of the men who crowded the enlistment depots were there looking for a job, not searching for a crusade" (95). The Depression years produced a large underclass of young men who, when war loomed in the wake of Hitler, enlisted less out of patriotism than hunger. The unprecedented bloodshed and horror of the First World War, which tore apart a generation as no war had done before it, lowered

expectations that “the next war,” which many had predicted since the early thirties, would be anything but cruel, futile, and bloody. McCourt wrote without the shock or shattered ideals that created the ideological anxieties of fiction of the First World War. His work depicts the Second World War as an endeavour that is devoid of meaning, despite its physical, economic, and psychological consequences. In *Music at the Close*, war is not heroic, adventurous, or necessary; neither is it terror-inducing or particularly horrible. It is the inevitable consequence of modern socio-political patterns and events.

William Allister’s *A Handful of Rice*, published in 1961 and never reprinted, was Allister’s one foray into fiction before he took up a successful career as a documentary filmmaker and painter. Probably no other soldier-turned-author had more reason to be traumatized by his experiences than Allister. Born in Benito, Manitoba in 1919, Allister grew up in Montreal amid the tumultuous world evoked forcefully by George Stewart in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. After a brief acting career, Allister enlisted and was sent to Hong Kong in November 1941 as part of an ill-trained and ill-equipped contingent of green recruits. What happened next is the stuff of notorious military legend: the Japanese invaded Hong Kong, capturing the hapless Canadians, killing many mercilessly, and sending others to prisoner-of-war camps on Pacific islands to be tortured, starved, and enslaved, before their liberation in 1945.²⁶ As Allister later recalled, “I counted ten instances in which I should have died but for a freak of chance.”²⁷ After two years in a Malayan camp, he was transported to Japan where he found “hysterical fanaticism, gentle sympathy, hatred, sadism.”²⁸ Slated for execution by the Japanese in the event of an

Allied invasion, he was saved by an otherwise horrific event: the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which quickly ended the war. Traumatized for decades by his experiences, Allister returned to Japan in 1983, an experience that finally allowed him to deal with his traumatic memories.²⁹

Set in a Malayan POW camp much like the one Allister survived, *A Handful of Rice* eschews the background to how the Canadians landed in the prison camp. It focuses on the camp itself, its routines, tortures, and deprivations for men living under a corrupt and heartless command structure. Starved, beaten, and susceptible to wasting diseases, the enlisted men manage to preserve a modicum of humour, a survival measure against despair. The protagonist, Tony Welles, lives among soldiers from various regional and cultural backgrounds: Blacky Valois is Métis, Stud Downey is a Newfoundlander, and Joey Weinberg is a Jewish Montrealer. They work as slave labourers in the camp's vicinity, loading supply trucks in a nearby town and paving an airstrip for the Japanese military. The camp's senior Allied officer, Captain Welland, wages harsh disciplinary measures against the men in an effort to disguise a profiteering scheme that diverts camp rations to the black market. Welland and his accomplice, the Japanese commandant Watanabe, lose power when the prisoners expose the scheme to the camp overseer, Colonel Nagashi.

Although *A Handful of Rice* is a memoir disguised as fiction, it is more than a lurid account of prison-camp horrors or a cathartic purging of trauma. Like Solzhenitsyn in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* or Primo Levi in *Survival in Auschwitz*, Allister acknowledges the essential humanity of even the worst of his tormentors. The Japanese soldiers who imprison, torture, and occasionally kill the characters in his novel are not

intrinsically evil; rather, they demonstrate the savagery men can descend to under extreme circumstances. Underlying *A Handful of Rice* is a principle similar to Hannah Arendt's notion of "banal evil"—evil by bureaucracy and circumstance, not by nature.

Human good and evil are defined not by nationality or race, but by individual actions. The Canadian characters are sometimes sympathetic (the Métis Blacky Valois, the Newfoundlander Stud Downey), though just as often they are not (the spineless Overby, the vindictive Greene). Likewise, the Japanese who run the camp have glints of conscience (the engineer Hariyama) to balance their exploitative actions. Outright cruelty, too, exists on both sides. No less humane than the sadistic Japanese interpreter, Sato, who beats and humiliates prisoners out of a deep-seated resentment against North American society, is Captain Welland, who exploits and starves his men while bowing to the camp commanders. While not devoid of cultural stereotypes, *A Handful of Rice* is an insightful alternative to war novels and films where "the Hun" or "the Japs" are set against brotherly and righteous Allied soldiers. Like McDougall's portrayal of the Italian enemy in *Execution*, Allister suggests that inhumanity stems from war itself, but that there is nothing intrinsically malignant about the human species or particular nations. Whereas McCourt's *Music at the Close* ends with a descent into darkness, Allister's *A Handful of Rice* concludes with a note of optimism, symbolized by the sun "glaring down" on the prisoners (288).

After the mid-1960s, the Canadian war novel fell into a lull that lasted until 1977 when Timothy Findley published *The Wars*. During this period the subject of war did not

disappear altogether, however, and it turns up as a secondary theme in works by some of Canada's major writers.

Most commonly, war appears in the form of a minor character—usually a father or husband—whose traumatic memories of war leave him unable to function in society. Often he becomes alcoholic, delusional, or impotent, lashing out at his family, or withdrawing from them. In Margaret Laurence's *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), for example, Stacy MacAindra's husband Mac is a veteran of the Italian campaign whose buried memories eat at him like a poison. His desultory career as a salesman stems from a university career interrupted by the war, and his inability to recover his motivation and self-esteem afterward. In Richard B. Wright's *The Weekend Man* (1970), Wes Wakeman's father Art, a Second World War veteran, is a "weekend man"—someone who wallows in "the nostalgies" by harbouring sentimental recollections of wartime that alienate him from the mundane, post-war world. Wes himself is a "weekend man," dwelling on fond memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, when the imminent threat of a nuclear holocaust made everyday existence seem tense and exciting in a way that it no longer is. In Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976), Joan Foster's father is psychologically distant owing to his guilty past as a wartime spy and assassin. His social withdrawal leaves Joan at the mercy of her domineering mother; when her mother dies, Joan is forced to return to Toronto to assume a quasi-parental responsibility for her father.

In all these novels, post-war trauma contributes to the breakdown of normal, healthy family relationships, leaving members of the post-war generation chained to the past as they struggle to move into the future. Each of these novels shows how war is never over and how it lies subverted in present experience. They articulate a logical

extension of the thesis explored in McDougall's and McCourt's earlier work: characters who have been embroiled in a world of execution can never re-adapt to the smaller routines and passions of civilian life.

From McCourt through Atwood, novels directly or indirectly about the Second World War bring the theme of war into a contemporary idiom that is still intelligible to today's readers. Few people of sensitivity would now agree with Connor that war is an "adventure" or with MacLennan that it is a catalyst for national maturity, but they might agree with Allister or McDougall that it is an unremittingly brutal force worsened by misguided bureaucracy. Global media have allowed millions to witness the plunder of nations and the wholesale slaughter of populations. War is bloody, senseless, and also mundane—with its own routines and traditions that make it oddly predictable even to the lay-person in front of a television.

This modern conception of war underlies *Execution*, *Music at the Close*, and *A Handful of Rice*, evoking a sense that, although war is a part of all of us, it does not define who we are as moral beings. These novels view such concepts as heroism, honour, and progress with cautious irony—yet unlike the anti-war writers of the twenties and thirties, they do not deny that such values are capable of surviving amid chaos (Birney possibly excepted). The best of the Second World War novels bring a measure of balance to the subject of war, privileging neither the crusader nor the cynic. In this sense they represent a maturing of Canadian war fiction and set the stage for further explorations of the meaning of war in contemporary Canadian literature.

Notes to Chapter 5

¹ Casualty statistics are from Morton's entry on World War I and Stacey and Hillmer's entry on World War II in the *Canadian Encyclopedia: 2000 Edition*.

² For Blair's influence on keeping Jewish refugees out of Canada during the Holocaust, see Abella and Troper's study of Canadian anti-Semitism, *None is Too Many*.

³ For fiction, see Klein's *The Second Scroll* (1951), Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), and Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* (1996). Various poems by all three writers reflect similar themes. For memoirs, see Koch's *Deemed Suspect* (1980) and Kreisel's "Diary of an Internment" (in *Another Country*, 1985).

⁴ See Mowat's account of the Italian campaign in *And No Birds Sang* (1979).

⁵ The history of the Canadians in Italy is documented extensively in Mark Zuehlke's scholarly trilogy, *Ortona* (1999), *The Liri Valley* (2001), and *The Gothic Line* (2003). Matthew Parker's *Monte Cassino* (2004) details that particular conflict.

⁶ "The Firing Squad" was recently re-printed in Muriel Whittaker, ed., *Great Canadian War Stories* (U Alberta Press, 2001).

⁷ McDougall's notebook, note pages, manuscripts, and letters concerning the writing and reception of *Execution* are held in the Colin McDougall Papers at the Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University Libraries.

⁸ The "H.M." manuscript is clearly marked as a separate file in the McDougall Papers.

⁹ These "intentions," as McDougall calls them, occur frequently throughout his conceptual notes (see McDougall Papers, notebook and loose leaf notes).

¹⁰ McDougall's notebook, entry for 6 September 1954.

¹¹ McDougall's notebook, undated entry under "Lines and Words."

¹² All these works and authors are mentioned repeatedly in McDougall's notes. Several times he cites *The Caine Mutiny* as the ultimate example of a novel that is both artistically and commercially successful.

¹³ McDougall's notebook, entry for 15 May 1953.

¹⁴ In a notebook entry dated June 19 (1956?), McDougall maps out this metaphoric intention for the novel's structure.

¹⁵ McDougall's notebook, entry for 14 August 1956.

¹⁶ Brittain to McDougall, 17 February 1959 (McDougall Papers).

¹⁷ Bellow to McDougall, 5 January 1974 (McDougall Papers).

¹⁸ Allen to McDougall, 31 October 1958 (McDougall Papers).

¹⁹ Mowat to McDougall, 29 January 1960 (McDougall Papers).

²⁰ MacLennan to McDougall, 6 October 1958 (McDougall Papers).

²¹ Ideas for follow-ups to *Execution* crop up occasionally in McDougall's notes for the novel, and his papers give the general impression of someone who envisions a lengthy literary career for himself. At one point he imagines writing a separate book based on the Hitler Line episode, but then decides against it.

²² McDougall's notebook, entry for 14 July 1952.

²³ For a general discussion of McCourt's work, see Winnifred M. Bogaards's article "Edward McCourt: A Reassessment."

²⁴ McCourt's implication that Gordon/ Connor was a "martyr," as Cavell or Lincoln arguably were, is misleading if not disingenuous: Connor died "peacefully" at home at age 77 (Connor, *Postscript*: xvii).

²⁵ See S. Claus for gifts.

²⁶ For a controversial portrayal of this history, see Brian McKenna's 1993 National Film Board documentary *The Valour and the Horror*, Volume 1 - "Savage Christmas: Hong Kong 1941."

²⁷ Allister's account of his experiences is recounted briefly on the dust jacket of *A Handful of Rice*.

²⁸ *A Handful of Rice* dust jacket.

²⁹ My thanks to William Allister for his email to me, 21 December 2005, in which he describes his 1983 return to Japan. For details, see his memoir *Where Life and Death Hold Hands* (1989).

CHAPTER 6

Timothy Findley: The Rise of Contemporary War Fiction

The end of the Korean War in 1953 initiated a long period of peace for Canada, which avoided official involvement in the Vietnam War and other major international conflicts. Although Canadian soldiers participated in various peacekeeping missions—the Suez Crisis of 1956 and Cyprus in 1964 were two of the most significant—and were engaged domestically in Quebec during the October Crisis of 1970, the number of troops involved was minor compared to the two world wars. After the 1950s, the pool of war veterans was too small to produce significant numbers of authors who wrote about war from first-hand experience. During the sixties and most of the seventies, a lull in war fiction ensued; despite references to war in such novels as Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* (1969) and Robertson Davies's *Fifth Business* (1970), war was a minor subject in Canadian literature.

The lull ended in 1977 when Timothy Findley published *The Wars*, his third novel and the first in a series of war novels and stories interspersed throughout his career. *The Wars* signaled a new type of Canadian war fiction, one that treats war retrospectively, without the reliance on personal war experiences that characterized so many earlier war novels and stories. Focusing on the First World War, *The Wars* revealed the enduring impact of war on the Canadian imagination, bringing new techniques of postmodern fiction to bear on a subject that had lost none of its emotional power or cultural relevance.

After winning the Governor General's Award for fiction, the novel established Findley as a novelist of the first rank, bringing war fiction into the literary mainstream like no work since MacLennan's novels of the forties and fifties. Readers and critics responded enthusiastically, creating a bestseller and critically-acclaimed sensation out of a novel that at first glance is a throwback to the anti-war novels of the 1920s and 30s, yet establishes a new precedent for war fiction in Canada.

Findley followed *The Wars* with another war novel of a different sort. *Famous Last Words* (1981) is a postmodern espionage thriller set in the context of the Second World War. Like *The Wars*, it combines historical events with fictional characters and situations, using metafictional techniques to create a self-reflexive meditation on the nature of history, memory, and violence. More so than *The Wars*, *Famous Last Words* is a cosmopolitan novel that depicts war from a worldwide perspective. Echoing Freud's theory that war is part of humankind's "instinctual endowment" (*Civilization* 50) and Hayden White's view of history as a discourse comprised of "competing narratives" (*Figural* 29), *Famous Last Words* portrays war as intrinsic to twentieth-century politics and society.

A third work of fiction, the short story "Stones" (1988), bridges the thematic concerns of the earlier novels, completing a trilogy of works about war that dominates Findley's middle period. "Stones" is less metafiction than realism, recreating the infamous Dieppe Raid of August 1942 as the background to a story about a Toronto family's inability to deal with the trauma of the Second World War. Like MacLennan's key works, "Stones" portrays war from a domestic Canadian perspective, showing the transformative effects of war on working-class, urban Canadians. Although *The Wars*,

Famous Last Words, and “Stones” are not the only works by Findley to address war, they are the ones in which war is most dominant, establishing formal and thematic patterns that remain prevalent in contemporary Canadian war fiction.

Findley was a writer given to obsessions, as he admits in the introduction to his first collection of short stories *Dinner Along the Amazon* (1984). Reflecting on work written between the 1950s and 1980s he writes: “It came as something of a shock, when gathering these stories for collective publication, to discover that for over thirty years of writing my attention has turned again and again to the same unvarying gamut of sounds and images.... In fact, it became an embarrassment and I began to wonder if I should file A CATALOGUE OF PERSONAL OBSESSIONS” (ix). Findley’s fiction dwells repeatedly on descriptions of old photographs, hastily scrawled memoirs and notes, beleaguered animals, and scenes of apocalyptic destruction. Characters sometimes appear in more than one work: Ezra Pound is in several and Juliet d’Orsey, central to *The Wars*, is also mentioned in *Famous Last Words*. Symbolic tropes reappear in various novels, including the mysterious iceberg described in a photograph in *The Wars* and featured more prominently in *The Telling of Lies* (1986). Findley viewed the world through a dark lens and returned time and again to his favorite subjects and images.

Central to Findley’s “catalogue of personal obsessions” is his concern for war—both its sights and sounds and its lasting effects on the lives of all who experience it. *Dinner Along the Amazon* contains a story entitled (and about) “War” and two others, “Sometime—Later—Not Now” and “Daybreak at Pisa” in which war forms a significant backdrop to the lives of the characters. The latter story, about Ezra Pound’s trial after spreading fascist propaganda in wartime Italy, is a forerunner to both *Famous Last Words*

and the play *The Trials of Ezra Pound* (radio 1990, stage 2001). War's impact on domestic society is explored in *The Piano Man's Daughter* (1995) and *You Went Away* (1996), where women and children live under the shadow of conflict. In *The Telling of Lies*, the narrator Nessa Van Horne flashes back to her teenage years in a Japanese prison camp during the Second World War.

Born in 1930, Findley was too young to participate directly in either world war, but he was old enough in 1939—certainly by 1945—to be conscious of the monumental impact the Second World War had on Canadian society. Just as the Halifax Explosion affected MacLennan as a boy, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 were life-changing events for Findley, who reflected on them in a 1981 interview:

I will never forget as long as I live that moment when that bomb fell, and the inconceivability of it. We must remember the children that are being taught now have always lived with it. They have no concept of the human race as it was before someone made that thing; they have no concept of the fact that it was a human being who devised it, because it's like television and telephones and things—you don't really sit around thinking "well, somebody took the trouble to invent this." They all accept these things—it's the acceptance of a dehumanized world. We're going to die. And after us there ain't anybody who's going to remember the world before the bomb. (Aitken 88)

The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War reinforced Findley's belief that this "dehumanized world" was not about to change, that it is a central condition of

modern society. Reflecting these anxieties, his work locates the seeds of conflict in the wars and social upheavals of earlier decades. Unlike Connor or MacLennan, both of whom viewed war as a temporary aberration in humankind's otherwise peaceful destiny, Findley's work emphasizes the inevitability of war, the relentlessness of humanity's propensity for harming itself and its environment.

For Findley, violence both past and present is part of an ongoing "war with nature" (Cameron I: 50) that has no clear source aside from a human instinct for violence. While this is hardly an original idea—Freud argued in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that war is intrinsically human—Findley was the first Canadian writer of war fiction to emphasize this instinctual, rather than circumstantial, basis for war. Whereas Connor blamed war on German megalomania, Harrison on class exploitation, and McDougall on moral failure, Findley locates war's impetus in human nature. Regardless, his work avoids cynicism by acknowledging the human capacity to choose life over death—as a horribly burned Robert Ross does at the end of *The Wars* when he replies "not yet" to a nurse's offer to euthanize him.

Findley's war fiction was influenced by his memories of his beloved godfather, "Uncle Tif," a veteran of the First World War. Born in 1895, Tif—Thomas Irving Findley—enlisted as a Lieutenant in the CEF on November 4, 1915.¹ A copious letter writer, he sent vivid accounts of trench warfare home to his family. The younger Findley inherited these letters after his godfather's death, and they influenced the tone and structure of *The Wars*. Just as influential were the young Findley's meetings with his godfather on his deathbed, which he describes in the opening chapter of *Inside Memory*:

I have many dead in my past, but only one of them died from the wars. And I think very fondly of him. He was my uncle. He didn't die in the War, but because of it. This was the First World War and so I don't remember the event itself. I just remember him. But what I remember of my uncle is not the least bit sad.

I was just a child—in the classic sense—a burbling, few-worded, looking-up-at-everything child. Uncle Tif—who died at home—was always in a great tall bed—high up—and the bed was white. I would go into his room, supported by my father's hands, and lean against the lower edge of the mattress. There was a white sheet over everything, and I can smell that sheet to this day. It smelled of soap and talcum powder. To me, Uncle Tif was a hand that came down from a great way off and tapped me on the head. (6)

Uncle Tif influenced several of the characters in Findley's war fiction, several of whom, like Tif, die not "in the War, but because of it." Robert Ross in *The Wars*, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley in *Famous Last Words* and David Max in "Stones" all die as a result of physical and psychological trauma caused by war. Robert resembles Uncle Tif by enlisting as an officer in the CEF in 1915, although there is little else to suggest that Robert is a biographical portrait of him.

Findley's work departs from earlier Canadian war fiction by focusing on a retrospective interpretation of events, rather than straightforward documentation. Whereas *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, *Generals Die in Bed*, *Barometer Rising*, and *Execution* depict war in the present, with little reflection on events after they occur, Findley's work builds a historical context around events, viewing war through the lens of

history. His fictional narrators are obsessed with finding out what happened in the past, yet they are often frustrated by the conflicting and ambiguous views of the events they try to interpret. This process of interpretation becomes progressively more difficult throughout his work, from the relatively disinterested historian who narrates *The Wars*, to the politically interested Quinn and Freyberg in *Famous Last Words*, to the emotionally wracked Ben Max, son of a tormented soldier, in "Stones." Each work is a morally complex tale about the ways in which war destroys the fabric of domestic society and haunts succeeding generations.

In the early 1970s, Findley set out to write the follow-up to his second novel *The Butterfly Plague*, a work that deals peripherally with fascism and more generally with violence. Convinced that by targeting nature humankind had "declared war on a defenseless enemy" (Cameron, I: 50), Findley admitted that his bleak outlook on contemporary society was more than a little Swiftian. Speculating that humankind had "almost done evolving" and civilization had become "meaningless" (Cameron I: 51), he imagined a future in which lower life forms such as frogs and bees superseded humans on the evolutionary scale. Human society, he argued, is doomed unless people awake to the consequences of their negative impact on the world.

Findley's outlook had much in common with various countercultural movements of the late sixties and early seventies, including the anti-nuclear movement, the animal rights movement, and the anti-Vietnam war movement. A product of sixties leftism and anti-materialism, these movements were a backlash against the tumultuous forties and materialistic fifties. Findley was older than the post-war baby boomers driving these movements, though young enough to relate to their outlook, which influenced both *The*

Butterfly Plague and *The Wars*. Notable for their portrayals of suffering animals, environmental destruction and the decay of human civilization, both novels made Findley the philosophical contemporary of such figures as animal rights activist Peter Singer, philosophers James Rachels and John Berger, and environmentalist David Suzuki.

Claiming that the “war with nature” would be “the subject of my next novel” (Cameron I: 51), Findley embarked on two attempts to write a third novel that would reflect his bleak view of modern society, producing manuscripts that he later considered “dark, depressed, depressing and totally unpublishable” (*Inside Memory* 135). Writer’s block set in until 1976, when he decided to write a novel about the First World War. The result was *The Wars*, a historical novel that in many ways also reflects the contemporary climate of violence that disturbed Findley in the seventies.

The Wars reinvigorated the war novel in Canada. As Eric Thompson observes, “since the publication of ... *The Wars*, readers have begun to realize that the war novel is a significant genre of Canadian fiction” (81). Barely two hundred pages long, the novel recreates the crucial aspects of war—the miseries of the trenches, the psychological trauma of young soldiers, the haplessness of officers, and the tension of the home front—while exploring how its dark legacy plays out over time and continues to haunt those who revisit it.

The plot of *The Wars* reflects the influence of many earlier novels about the First World War, sharing much in common with *Generals Die in Bed* and the works of Ford, Graves, and Remarque. Robert Ross, the main protagonist, is a naïve loner who joins the CEF in 1915 at age nineteen. After officer training on the Canadian prairies he travels overseas on an unsanitary ship crowded with men and horses, then disembarks in

England to await a posting on the Western Front. His first tour of duty is a horrendous and eye-opening experience in which he endures the stinking mud, cacophonous shellfire, and incompetence of his superior officers. After unwittingly killing a sympathetic German soldier, he goes to England to recover from a knee injury. At the manor house-turned-convalescent home Stourbridge, he has a brief romance with the enigmatic Barbara d'Orsey before heading back to the trenches to face a climactic test of will in a theatre of war that has lost all humanity and reasonable purpose. His final rebellion, in which he rescues a train load of military horses only to trap them and himself in a burning barn, leads to his being burned beyond recognition. At the end of the novel, Robert is isolated and in pain but, despite his agony, committed to survival.

For all of its plot conventions, *The Wars* takes a radically different approach to form than earlier anti-war novels, emphasizing intertextuality and self-reflexivity while problematizing realism's claims to narrative objectivity. At the heart of the novel's metafictional approach is a juxtaposition between past and present—the desire to understand history as fluid and ever-evolving. The story reveals itself in pieces, as told through the recollections of aging survivors of the war, the meanderings of the narrator-archivist, and—its most radical narrative innovation—“you” the reader. The novel does not document history so much as reconstruct and interpret it—something that the narrator makes clear is an imperfect and always incomplete process. “It could not be told” (5), the narrator states in the prologue's third paragraph, and again when the opening scene repeats later in the novel. Similar sentences connoting ambiguity appear throughout the novel: “There is no good picture of this [the Western Front] except the one you can make in your mind” (69). “The dates are obscure here” (92). “Here is where the mythology is

muddled” (189). The overall impression is of a story that keeps shifting and is never quite complete, resisting both factual history and literary realism.

The novel’s implied author appears to be a historian or archivist researching the First World War. He interviews survivors of the wars, visits archives, pours over old photographs, yet is never confident in the precision of his observations or his ability to separate fact from speculation. Through his voice, the novel expresses views similar to those of Hayden White, for whom history is a “narrative account” full of “poetic and rhetorical elements” by which “a list of facts is transformed into a story” (*Figural* 28). Like White, Findley is skeptical of the ability of any writer, no matter how rigorous a collector of information, to capture a definitive version of past events. The narrator’s failure to arrive at the “true” story of Robert and his legacy highlights this narrative approach to history.

This skepticism toward historical truth sets Findley apart from nearly all Canadian war novelists who precede him. For Connor and Montgomery, moral truth lay in the division between good and evil—with little doubt that Canada was on the side of good and its opponents on the side of evil. Anti-war novelists, Harrison in particular, were obsessed with documenting war “as it really happened,”² presuming that personal experience could adapt transparently into realist fiction. Findley, however, realizes that the memories and perceptions of which history is formed are multifarious and sometimes inaccurate. As *The Wars* shows, writing about war, no matter how conscientiously or vividly, does not uncover *the* truth but conflicting versions of *possible* truths.

The Wars draws heavily from the modernist British literature produced in the aftermath of the First World War. D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, both of whom

published novels about the war, make brief appearances in *The Wars*, as guests at Stourbridge. The narrator alludes at various times to Conrad and Joyce, and refers to such figures as Graves, Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. In one parenthesis the narrator explains Juliet d'Orsey's reference to "the First of July":

(When men and women of Juliet d'Orsey's vintage refer to the 'First of July' they inevitably mean the first of July, 1916. It was on that date the Somme offensive was begun. In the hours between 7.30 a.m. and 7.30 p.m. 21,000 British soldiers were killed—35,000 were wounded and 600 taken prisoner by the Germans. This is perhaps as good a place as any to point out that Lord Clive Stourbridge, Juliet and Barbara's eldest brother, was one of the Cambridge poets whose best-known work—like that of Sassoon and Rupert Brooke—had its roots in the war. Other poets who were present on the First of July, besides Stourbridge and Sassoon, were Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen. Both Sassoon and Graves have written accounts of the battle.) (100-01)

Here the narrator makes his (and Findley's) knowledge of the First World War tradition clear to the reader who, if familiar with that tradition him or herself, will notice the similarities between the stark trench imagery of *The Wars* and that of Owen's and Sassoon's poems and Graves's and Sassoon's memoirs. Such passages provide intertextual links between *The Wars* and the modernist tradition, disrupting the illusion of accuracy by including the fictional poet Lord Clive Stourbridge in its list of wartime authors.

Although the above passage mentions Rupert Brooke, *The Wars* rejects the patriotic tradition of war literature of which Brooke was a part. For Robert and his fellow soldiers, the war is bloody, futile and absurd, leaving no room to entertain the patriotic slogans or ideals of progress that were so much a part of Brooke's—and Connor's and Montgomery's—views of the war. When Robert's mother attends a church service in Canada, the Bishop who “spoke about flags and holy wars and Empire” (48) without irony is exposed as an icon of all that is hypocritical and misguided about Christian North American society. Like the “fighting parson” in *Generals Die in Bed*, the Bishop is an exemplar of outdated values and false idealism.

Similarly misguided, according to the Canadian soldiers in Robert's company, is Carl von Clausewitz, the great nineteenth-century military tactician and author of *On War*, for whom battle is a “minuet.” After one violent bombardment, Rodwell dismisses Clausewitz with an off-hand comment—“Some minuet” (106). Levitt, a disciple of Clausewitz's theories, goes mad, suggesting that adhering to the rationalist principles of warfare makes no sense in the context of the First World War.

Despite its historical skepticism, *The Wars* uses accurate descriptions of army life and trench conditions to build a convincing portrayal of wartime conditions. Many of its facts are verifiable: the British Army did commission wild horses from Canada (and the United States) to provide mounts for its officers in France.³ The horrific conditions faced by soldiers on the *S.S. Massanabie* (though the ship's name is fictional) are recounted time and again in memoirs and histories of the war. Descriptions of the development and physical effects of chlorine and phosgene gas, and other weapons such as flamethrowers, are all well-researched and presented with a legitimacy akin to a work of military history.

Such facts and references allow *The Wars*, for all its ambiguities and wordplay, to appear credible as an authentic piece of historical fiction—which in many ways it is.

At the same time, the novel resists straightforward historiography with a complex layer of untruth that is not always easy to distinguish from fact. For example, the “Irish essayist and critic Nicholas Fagan” (197) cited as an authority in the novel’s Epilogue is fictional, yet his words are presented matter-of-factly, as if Fagan’s works sat on the narrator’s library shelf alongside Owen’s and Sassoon’s. Also fictional are Stourbridge and the asylum Desolé, and such vividly described places as Bailleul and Magdalene Wood. These fictional details are weaved seamlessly into real ones—places like Plymouth, Ypres, Le Havre—creating a complex web of fact and fiction.

This tension between fact and fiction has led some critics to characterize *The Wars* as an exercise in myth-making. Evelyn Cobley argues that “Findley stresses from the beginning that he is representing a *representation* and not a reality” (“Postmodernist” 109). Linda Hutcheon takes this point further by noting that the “evidence” Findley describes in order to make the novel’s historical underpinning believable—archival documents, photographs, taped memoirs—are “many times removed from any historical ‘reality’” (*Canadian Postmodern* 50). Deepening this mythopoetic dimension are allusions to classical myths and characters. Quoting Frye, Bruce Pirie refers to the novel as “ironic myth” and “a parody of romance” (70), noting such mythological tropes as the fusion between human and animal identity and the similarity of battlefield descriptions to the waste land of Arthurian lore. When Robert shoots an injured horse aboard the *S.S. Massanabie*, its writhing mane is likened to the tangled snakes of Medusa, and the horse that saves him from drowning in the Belgian mud is dubbed “Pegasus” (80). Such details

are reminders to read *The Wars* not as documentary realism, but as a postmodern fable that conflates classical and modern narrative strategies.

Robert Ross is a modern equivalent to Bellerophon, the beleaguered warrior depicted variously in the classical works of Apollodorus, Hesiod, Homer, and Pindar.⁴ In *The Iliad*, Bellerophon's birthplace of Argos is "good stallion country" (179), paralleling Robert's affinity with horses. Bellerophon is effectively sentenced to death when Iobates, king of Lycia, orders him to kill the Chimaera, a fire-breathing beast that inhabits a waste land of its own creation, where all the cattle have been destroyed. In all but the Homeric version of the myth, Bellerophon captures and breaks the winged horse Pegasus and together they kill the Chimaera, yet Bellerophon cannot escape the world of war into which Iobates casts him. Rebelliously, a battle-hardened Bellerophon attempts to ride Pegasus up Mount Olympus to join the gods, but fails and falls back to earth (although Pegasus succeeds), where he is doomed to wander the Alean plain as a lonely fugitive.

The myth adds an archetypal dimension to *The Wars*, where incompetent officers play the role of gods, the Western Front is a modern waste land, and flamethrowers and shells are mechanical equivalents of the Chimaera. Like Bellerophon, Robert is a resilient soldier, cheating death and rebelling against his superiors, only to find himself isolated and alone in a dismal, post-war world.

Robert commits acts that are part heroism, part desperation. During a bombardment on a barnyard, he defies his superior officer, Captain Leather, and ignores the cries of soldiers trapped in a burning signals office in an attempt to save a corral full of horses. His compulsion to protect innocent horses drives him to reject his military duty; he shoots Captain Leather when the latter becomes deranged and shoots Robert's

accomplice, Devlin. From a military standpoint, Robert's act is unethical if not mutinous, regardless of Captain Leather's incompetence. His compassion for horses is noble and his defiance necessary, yet he indirectly contributes to the deaths of the soldiers in the signals office by ignoring their cries.

The barnyard scene is a precursor to Robert's ultimate act of rebellion, foreshadowed in the prologue and played to its conclusion in the novel's final section. Separated from his unit and the front line, he wanders toward a railroad siding where he finds a lonely dog and trainload of horses destined for the battle zone. He frees the horses and rides with them away from the front, committing a second murder when he shoots a soldier, Private Cassels, who tries to stop him from escaping. Seeking refuge in a barn, Robert traps himself and his charges when a hot-headed officer, Major Mickle, orders the barn set on fire, burning the occupants until Robert escapes in flames on horseback. Again, sympathy rests with him, despite the fact that he has again committed military treason by shooting an innocent man who did not deserve it. The scene challenges the reader's sensibilities, as the urge to applaud his rebellion conflicts with the violence he commits and the futility of his actions. It epitomizes both the insanity and absurdity of war, where any attempt to uphold morality is problematized by the consequences of decisive action.

The Wars cuts through myths about the First World War as a catalyst of Canadian progress and independence. By deliberately steering clear of Vimy Ridge, Amiens, and other famous battles, the novel emphasizes war's confusion and failure over its heroism and triumph. Initially, Robert's physical attractiveness, athletic prowess, and sensitivity to nature suggest that he is an ideal soldier—an exemplar of the militia myth and

Connor's manly Christians. His failure to live up to this image and his physical decimation by the end of the novel expose fallacies in the militia myth: war is brutal and deadly and targets its victims indiscriminately. No patriotic ideal or moral rectitude can assuage war's overwhelming capacity to destroy; there is no "adventure" to be found in the trenches, just chaos and misery. *The Wars* revises the tradition of First World War fiction by refusing to uphold ideals of patriotism, showing at the same time that the anti-war writers' desire to depict the war truthfully and realistically is fraught with complications that are inherent in the contingent process of interpreting memory and history through narrative.

Findley returns to the theme of war in his next novel, 1981's *Famous Last Words*, yet it is a radically different work from *The Wars*—longer, more subtle, focused not on Canada but the Western world in general. Part war novel, part spy novel, *Famous Last Words* is a postmodern potboiler raised to the level of high literature, shifting perspective from trench warfare to wartime espionage while evoking the work of John Buchan, Graham Greene, and John LeCarre. The novel combines real characters and events with fictional ones, taking liberal artistic license with events surrounding the Second World War. Like MacLennan in *The Watch That Ends the Night*, Findley presents a fictionalized sweep of the events that engulfed an entire generation in the mid-twentieth century.

Famous Last Words continues Findley's fascination with high modernist literature. The central character, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is a reconstitution of the fictional protagonist of Ezra Pound's famous poem *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. Whereas

Pound provides only the barest hints of Mauberley's biography—a poet of romantic leanings who finds he is out-of-tune with modern aesthetics and society—Findley turns him into a fully-rounded character with a convincing interiority and biographical background. Outmoded and frustrated by bad press reviews of his work yet reputable enough to gain entry into the tightest circles of high society, Mauberley becomes a messenger between members of a fascist cabal, code-named Penelope, intent on usurping the fascist and capitalist governments of Europe. At the centre of the cabal are Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, the aviator Charles Lindbergh, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, all of whom are aided by various spies and thugs who do their bidding.

Although the novel mixes real-life personages with fictional ones, the “real” characters are fictional in all but name. Von Ribbentrop's character matches the ruthless bureaucrat he was in real life, but his conversations and thoughts are fabrications. The fictional plot to overthrow Hitler that he leads bears little resemblance to a real plot in which he was not implicated: the 1945 assassination attempt masterminded by Colonel Henning von Tresckow, executed unsuccessfully by Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg.⁵ Lindbergh, portrayed as a Penelope operative who tries to win over British MP Sir Edward Allenby to the organization, is pegged as a committed fascist, something he was not in reality despite an interest in eugenics and the racist America First movement.⁶ The Duchess of Windsor, the former Wallis Simpson, becomes a central figure in Penelope, also demonstrating fascist sympathies that the novel exaggerates. The Duke of Windsor, formerly King Edward VIII until his abdication from the British

throne, is a bumbling shell of a man whose private conversations with his mother the Queen are imaginary creations without historical basis.

A few historical facts and events lend credence to Findley's manipulation of history, most notably the Duke's and Duchess's notorious 1937 visit to Hitler in Germany. Findley treats the visit as a watershed event that brings the Duchess and Duke into complicity with Nazism. The couple's trip to Spain and Portugal really occurred, as did a subsequent trip to the Bahamas where the Duke was installed as Governor, and there is some historical speculation that the two were sympathetic to fascism, which Findley emphasizes for dramatic effect.

Throughout the novel, Mauberley remains the most important character. His inside knowledge of Penelope, recorded in a series of journals, becomes dangerous to those who wish to preserve the cabal's secrecy. Mauberley is targeted and killed by the vicious henchman Harry Reinhardt, but not before he secretly transcribes his journals, kept between 1924 and 1945, onto the walls of the Grand Elysium Hotel in Austria, where he seeks refuge in the final days of the Second World War. This narrative, read by the Allied officers Quinn and Freyberg as Mauberley's corpse lies in an adjacent room, forms a framed narrative at the heart of the novel.

Mauberley's narrative is the most ambiguous and complex part of *Famous Last Words*. It begins with an epigraph that stands out from the main text etched into the plaster: "*All I have written here is true; except the lies*" (58). Mauberley's revelation—the admission that he tells both truth and lies—forces the reader to question the veracity of his account of events, highlighting the problems of using first-hand accounts as a basis of historical representation. He imagines conversations—between Edward VIII and the

Queen, and between Lindbergh and Allenby—that he was not privy to and which support the possibility that they exemplify the “lies” he warns of. Yet the conversations *seem* plausible given the context of the events which surround them—Edward’s abdication, Allenby’s assassination—so it is difficult to dismiss them as utter fabrications. Some version of these conversations must have taken place for events to unfold as they do in the novel, but Findley allows the reader to speculate on how much of Mauberley’s narrative to believe.

The framed narrative raises a number of important questions about the nature of historical interpretation, problematizing the relationship between personal narrative and historical fact. Given that much of history is comprised of information gleaned from memoirs and other recollections, it suggests much of history is fiction—even “lies”—and there are few reliable ways to distinguish truth from untruth.

Questions of language and its reliability force readers—those within the novel and without—to judge for themselves how much of Mauberley’s story to believe. Quinn and his superior officer Freyberg disagree about its veracity. Quinn, an admirer of Mauberley’s poetry, wants to think the best about the once famous writer, seeing his flirtations with fascism as an anomaly in an otherwise honorable life. Trusting and somewhat gullible, Quinn is Mauberley’s ideal reader, one who reads with compassion and attention yet believes potential “lies” that support the version of history Mauberley wishes to preserve. Asked for his opinion about the first part of the narrative, Quinn states: “from what I’ve read so far, he hasn’t lied” (142). Clearly, he has forgotten Mauberley’s epigraph and believes what he has read with little corroborating evidence to support or contradict it—aside from the murdered corpse in the next room.

Freyberg is more skeptical. A hater of fascism and all who flirt with it, he sees Mauberley as the epitome of the corruption poisoning modern society. He believes that everything Mauberley writes must be untrue and is determined that “I won’t be fooled by it” (143). His skepticism leaves him unwilling to believe that any worthwhile information can be gleaned from Mauberley’s narrative. On the one hand, he is so immune to Mauberley’s “lies” that he discredits the narrative completely. On the other, he believes Mauberley whenever the narrative paints one of its characters as a committed fascist. Lindbergh’s militant involvement in Penelope—the conversation between him and Allenby that Mauberley can only have imagined—may be one of Mauberley’s lies, but Freyberg believes this aspect of the narrative because it supports his contempt for the European and American intelligentsia.

Quinn and Freyberg represent two types of historical reader: one for whom history provides a convenient and satisfying account of events, and one for whom history is a deception that distorts truth. These different attitudes toward Mauberley’s narrative parallel those that greeted Pound when he went on trial for treason after wartime radio broadcasts in support of Mussolini.⁷ For some, Pound was a flawed yet artistically significant poet whose achievements outweigh his corruption; for others he was a scoundrel whose poetry is nullified by his fascism, whose books should be burned. Both Pound and Mauberley elicit the question of whether an author who fails morally also fails artistically.

Famous Last Words differs from most Canadian war novels by avoiding a specific national context. Whereas Connor’s, Montgomery’s, and McDougall’s novels, like *The Wars*, are distinctly Canadian—featuring Canadian settings, characters, and themes—

Famous Last Words is an international novel, featuring characters from a wide range of national backgrounds. Settings involve Germany, Britain, Spain, Austria, Italy, China, and the Bahamas. Characters are American, British, German, Spanish, and in one case—the doomed Sir Harry Oakes—Canadian. Switching from a native to cosmopolitan context allows the novel to demonstrate how war is rooted not in national ambitions, but in an instinctual human desire for power. Mauberley, Pound, Von Ribbentrop, and the Duke and Duchess strive for personal gain and political influence, adopting fascism as a vehicle of power that has little to do with Hitler's tenets of racial superiority. In Mauberley's case, his fascist leanings are disturbingly casual, motivated by his desire to curry favour with his beloved Duchess and maintain his social status.

Freyberg is the only character not involved in Penelope who sees Mauberley for the misguided imbecile that he is. Yet Freyberg is himself grotesque, forcing his men to attend to Mauberley's mutilated corpse and forcing Quinn into the pointless task of covering it with snow. Although Freyberg professes a hatred of fascism, he fetishizes it, keeping photographs from Dachau in scrapbooks "showing Mickey and Minnie Mouse dancing on the cover" (371) as part of his massive "Dachau Collection" (373). Freyberg, the one character in the novel in a position to promote humanity in the face of inhumanity, falls instead into a megalomaniacal fury that is as dictatorial as those he despises. *Famous Last Words* despairs of heroes, painting all of its characters with the same cynical brush. In this sense, it is Findley's darkest portrait of human nature, lacking the redemptive spirit that even *The Wars* hints at in its final pages.

Famous Last Words breaks with the thematic conventions established by earlier war novels, bringing international politics and intrigue into sharper focus. For the first

time in Canadian war fiction, something experimental, worldly, and innovative emerges from an attempt to create a novel that treats war, not as a function of national and political dichotomies, but as something more hopeless and much uglier—a grotesque element of human nature.

Although “Stones” is a short story of only 7000 words, its thematic scope is comparable to that of a novel, comprising Findley’s profoundest statement on the traumatic aftermath of the Second World War. The story eschews the complex structure and metafictional dimensions of *The Wars* and *Famous Last Words*, offering instead a realist account of a family traumatized by war. Unlike *Famous Last Words*, “Stones” uses local colour in the form of Gibson Avenue, a real street in Toronto, and Canadian characters as the basis for this most distinctly Canadian of war stories. As the thematic bridge between the battlefield scenes of *The Wars* and the Second World War focus of *Famous Last Words*, “Stones” completes Findley’s war trilogy.

“Stones” centres on the Max family, David Max and his unnamed wife who run a flower shop in a retail strip along Gibson Avenue, and their three children, Rita, Cy and Ben. The narrator of the story is Ben, an autobiographical equivalent of Findley despite his being closer in age to Rita (born circa 1932). Sequestered “over on the wrong side of Yonge Street” (195), the Maxes endure the snobbery and class prejudice of the wealthy inhabitants of Rosedale, east of Yonge. Venturing into Rosedale “put you in another world” (195) where the residents are “very polite, oblique and cruel” (195), belying the notion that pre-war Canada was a socially unified country of the sort Duncan, Connor and

MacLennan imagined. Only fleetingly do the two communities on either side of Yonge Street come together, when the British King and Queen—"symbols of who we were" (199)—visit amid "a surge of cheering and applause" (199). The royal visit creates a semblance of national unity that exists in the guise of ceremony but has little basis in reality.

Community does flourish, however, within the tightly-knit stratum of Gibson Avenue. David Max and his neighbour, Schickel the butcher, place friendly bets against each other on hot summer days, and during the Depression the Maxes hire itinerant tramps for odd jobs around the shop. For young Ben, the atmosphere is one of "perfect winters" (196) and summers that "smelled of grass being cut in the park" (197), connoting a pastoral simplicity amid the workaday urban environment in which he grows up. A feminine calm resides in the "smell of bread and cookies rising from the Women's Bakery" (197) and in Mrs. Max's quiet demeanor. Social and technological progress is palpable in the form of the Great World's Fair, held in New York City in 1939, an event that "had caught all our imaginations with its demonstrations of new appliances, aeroplanes and motor cars" (198), promising a future of wealth and material comfort. For young Ben, there is none of the angst and family trauma that afflicts Robert Ross in *The Wars*.

Typical of war fiction set in domestic environments, the Maxes initially react to war with naïve delusions about its impact on their lives. Ben's older brother Cy typifies a youthful reaction to news of the war, "crow[ing] with delight and yell[ing] with excitement" and hoping that "the war would last until he was a man and could join [his] father at the front" (200), recalling Roddie Wain in *Barometer Rising*. David Max, who

enlists voluntarily with no idea of the nightmare he is headed for, believes that the war “will be over in 1940” (200), echoing Joe Vickers’s sentiment in *Rilla of Ingleside* that “the war will be over by Christmas” (Montgomery, *Rilla* 57). Another echo of *Rilla of Ingleside*, in which women “must tarry by the stuff and keep a stiff upper lip” (60), exists in how Mrs. Max responds to her husband’s enlistment stoically, never letting her children “witness her tears” (200). “Stones” reaffirms the social conventions of earlier Canadian war fiction, showing masculine bravado and feminine restraint at the heart of community values.

This simple world and its sentiments are doomed to fall, however, and August 1939 is as much a “demarcation line” (198) between peace and turmoil as August 1914 had been for an earlier generation. For Ben, “the end of summer 1939 is a line drawn down through the memory of everyone then alive” (198), reflecting Findley’s own opinion that the Second World War represented the onset of a “dehumanized world” (Aitken 88). Like their neighbours and countless other Canadians, the Maxes fall “into a melting pot of violence from which a few of us would emerge intact and the rest of us would perish” (198). As the rest of the story makes clear, to “perish” can be as much a psychological phenomenon as a physical one, a concept that resounds throughout Findley’s war fiction.

The catalyst of this psychological trauma is David Max, who loses his naiveté, respect, courage, and mental stability during the Dieppe Raid of August 1942. The story provides a stark literary portrait of a battle that 5,000 Canadians entered but only 2,200 returned from, of which about 900 were killed and nearly 2,000 were taken prisoner.⁸ Half of those who returned never made it to shore, and “Stones” places David Max

among them. As the story states, “[t]his was our Waterloo. Our Gettysburg” (215); furthermore: “There isn’t a single history book you can read—there isn’t a single man who was there who won’t tell you—there isn’t a single scrap of evidence in any archive to suggest that the battle of Dieppe was anything but a total and appalling disaster” (215-16).

Findley overlooks the fact that on the morning of August 20, 1942, Torontonians picked up the morning *Star* to read that Dieppe was “a decisive Allied victory,” and that Canadian troops had returned to England “exhausted but happy.”⁹ Such grossly misleading statements were part of the propaganda aimed at denying the brutal truth of Dieppe at a time when the Allies desperately needed a break in Germany’s so-called “Fortress Europe.” Although “Stones” avoids mentioning such propaganda, David Max’s dilemma—typical of many real veterans of the raid—is even more acute in the face of contemporary misconceptions about what happened at Dieppe.

There is no victory for David Max. This “natural leader” who has risen “all the way from an NCO to the rank of captain” (215) loses his nerve before his landing craft reaches the beach and never joins the battle. Dishonourably discharged before the end of the war, he falls into a crisis of conscience while attracting the hatred of his fellow soldiers, one of whom he tries to murder with garden shears during a chance confrontation outside the flower shop. Ben, dispelled of the youthful illusion that “[f]athers cannot be cowards” (217), refuses to blame his father for what has befallen him, believing that “my father had been a victim” (210) of Dieppe. Ben’s statement is true in the sense that David was one of more than a thousand Canadian soldiers who

failed to reach the beaches of Dieppe, yet his suffering is solitary and his shame isolating, mainly because he deserted the battle of his own volition.

Over time, Ben must acknowledge that his father, apart from a brief protest against the anti-Germanism that has exiled Schickel from the neighborhood, has lost the capacity to be a decent human being. This loss becomes irreparable when David abuses Ben verbally and physically, then attacks and tries to murder his wife with a hammer, an event that completes David's alienation from his family and community.

Herein lies the moral complexity of the story. David is "a victim" of war, but he is also the perpetrator of his own downfall through murderous outbursts that are inexcusable on any grounds. Terrible as Dieppe was, not all who survived and were traumatized by it turned to homicidal violence as a form of catharsis. David must take the blame for his actions. While Cy and Rita disown their father, Ben continues to sympathize, visiting his father and weathering verbal abuse until his father's belated death decades after the war. The story is a testament to the endurance of filial love, but it is also a meditation on how violence can ruin a family. The question that the story never answers—indeed cannot answer—is: How much is war to blame for what has befallen the Max family?

War triggers David's downfall. He would never have experienced anything so soul-destroying had the war not occurred, and the tenets of masculine honour to which he and his community ascribe are social ideals that cannot withstand the chaos of Dieppe. Even so, there is no tolerance within either the domestic or military community for David's failure to leave the landing craft; as a soldier and a man he is expected to do his duty, even when it means almost certain death. The consequences of his actions are

dishonour and humiliation, and this climate of intolerance poisons David's conscience as much as his own guilt.

Great as David's personal failure during the war is, the failure of the community that surrounds him is at least as great. What seems a benevolent and close-knit community before the war disintegrates during it. Oskar Schickel, the butcher, is forced out of his shop because of his German name, even though, as David recognizes, "Oskar wasn't a German.... He was a Canadian" (209). David also loses the neighbourly support he once enjoyed; were he to wear his military greatcoat over his civilian clothes in the street, the stereotypical attire of a deserter, his community would turn on him. This situation disgusts Ben, once so fond of his neighbourhood, who recognizes the hypocrisy at large: "Our neighbours would have turned him in, no matter who he was. Our patriotism had come to that" (207). David's rejection by his community is complete after the two attempted murders, symbolized by a brick thrown through the flower show window with the word "Murderer" scrawled upon it.

The community's main problem is its inability to deal with the trauma of war openly and honestly. Instead of recognizing the common plight of its members who are cast into war, it chooses to repress any emotion, sight, or behaviour stemming from war's physical and psychological trauma. This repression begins when wounded soldiers return home amid a fog of silence and unease, couched as patriotic stoicism: "Plainly it was our job to lift their [the returning soldiers'] spirits and to deny the severity of their wounds. Above all else, they must not be allowed to feel they could not rejoin society at large. A man with no face must not be stared at" (202-03). Sympathetic as this tenet is intended to

be, a man with no face is, at first encounter, a horrific sight, yet there is no way for the community to express this horror, no way to purge the traumatic reality it faces.

Mrs. Max, Cy, and Rita are all afflicted with this determination to repress and deny trauma. Like her mother and brother, Rita “found a world of silence in which she kept herself secreted,” believing, with the community around her, that “[s]ilence was a sign of valour” (202). After the garden shear incident, the Maxes’ Gibson Avenue neighbours maintain this “valourous” silence to the point of absurdity, as Ben realizes:

we knew they were thinking, *there go the Max kids and David Max, their father, tried to kill a man today in his store with gardening shears....*

“Hello, Cy.”

“Hello.”

“Ben. Rita.”

“Hi.”

(214)

This quiet denial, this pretense that all remains fine on Gibson Avenue, isolates the Max children and their mother, exacerbating their victimhood at the hands of David Max and leaving them mortally vulnerable to him. As Ben remarks, the community’s capacity to deny is symbolized by the illegal cups of beer they secretly drink in public: “Whatever you can hide does not exist” (213).

“Stones” demonstrates the continuing validity of realism in Canadian war fiction. Unlike *The Wars* and *Famous Last Words*, where formal experimentation and the ambiguity of memory distinguish the stories they tell from earlier war novels, “Stones” is

of a piece with the works that precede it. The story reaffirms Canadian war fiction as a tradition, with its own conventions and themes, and uses the tradition as its basis. Like *Rilla of Ingleside*, “Stones” portrays how war disrupts a microcosmic community, challenging its conceptions of identity and patriotism. Like *Generals Die in Bed*, it analyzes how false ideals and human compassion disintegrate under the weight of war, leaving its victims helpless and isolated. Like *Execution*, it probes deeply into the psychological and moral effects of war, where human beings find themselves at the mercy of traumatic experiences they cannot avoid or overcome. With this story, Findley makes his most concise and profound statement about Canada and its uncomfortable place in a “dehumanized world.”

Findley lays the groundwork for later war fiction, providing the formal and thematic vocabulary that such novelists as Michael Ondaatje and Jane Urquhart utilize later on. He is the first to make memory, rather than direct experience, the basis for war fiction and the first to break with conservative formal structures, giving greater play to postmodern methods of narrative construction in his novels. His work shows how war lingers in the public and literary consciousness decades after the guns fall silent, establishing it as a central concern of the literary mainstream. It is the pinnacle of twentieth-century Canadian war fiction, the point at which the long development of a tradition achieves the thematic, aesthetic, formal cohesiveness it has risen toward through the decades. Findley’s critical and popular success has made more readers aware of Canadian war fiction than ever before, and shows this subject matter can transcend genre to stand among the best of Canadian literary achievements.

Notes to Chapter 6

¹ The elder Findley's attestation form is available on the Library and Archives Canada website: www.collectionscanada.ca.

² Harrison's comments in the 1930 news article "Denies New War Book Slanders Canadians."

³ See Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, Chapter 5.

⁴ See Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2.3.2, 2.4.2; Homer, *The Iliad*, Book VI; Pindar, *Odes*, No. 13.

⁵ For details of the von Tresckow-von Stauffenberg coup attempt, see Chapter 29 of Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.

⁶ See A. Scott Berg's *Lindbergh*, Chapter 13.

⁷ Findley's play *The Trials of Ezra Pound* explores the question of Pound as fascist versus artist.

⁸ For concise accounts of the raid, see Granatstein and Morton, *Canada and the Two World Wars* (206-210), and Brereton Greenhous's entry "Dieppe Raid" in the *Canadian Encyclopedia* (661).

⁹ Drew Middleton, "Calls Air Battle Greatest of War" and "All Night Long Commandos Stream Back From Dieppe," *Toronto Star* 20 August 1942: O2.

CONCLUSION

And Canada, our Canada, which smells not of maple forests but of French perfume, has amassed great fortunes in diamonds and currency from all over Europe. (Borowski 30)

In *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* (1959), a short story cycle by the Polish author and Auschwitz survivor Tadeusz Borowski, the term “Canada” has a double meaning—representing, on the one hand, “wealth and well-being,” and, on the other, slave labourers charged with unloading “incoming transports of people destined for the gas chambers” (30). The wealthier of these doomed people, told they were being re-located not exterminated, brought along their prized possessions—perfumes, diamonds, silverware, gold jewellery—and start-up money for the new life they believed awaited them after the war. In “Canada,” a compound at the north end of Birkenau, Auschwitz’s main extermination camp, piles of valuables accumulated to await conversion into much-needed war funds for the Nazis; nearby, the ashes of their former owners accumulated in muddy pits in the ground. In 1945, when the Nazis hurriedly abandoned the camp as the war drew to a close, “Canada” still contained 350,000 men’s suits, 836,000 women’s outfits, and 38,000 pairs of shoes.¹

During the twentieth century, war killed approximately 110,000 Canadians,² less than a quarter of the number of people who died in Warsaw between 1939 and 1945, about a tenth of those who died in Auschwitz in the same period.³ Apart from the 2,000

killed during the Halifax Explosion, most Canadians who died were soldiers who enlisted voluntarily and thus tacitly accepted the risk of dying in battle. Most of the Polish and Jewish dead were civilians, caught unwittingly in a megalomaniacal tug-of-war between Hitler and Stalin, fuelled by cultural prejudice. Accidents of geography situated Poland in the maws of two national lions, just as accidents of geography kept Canada free of them. Today, Canadian historians discuss how war boosted the country's independence, how it was a violent rite-of-passage toward cultural maturity. Polish historians try to figure out exactly how many of their countrymen lie buried or scattered in the soil.

Canadian war deaths are no less significant or tragic than Polish ones, but it is worth bearing in mind how lucky Canada—especially its civilian population—was during the twentieth century. Compared to most countries, Canada was a place of “wealth and well-being,” regardless of war debts, conscription riots, or any other domestic crisis save the egregious treatment of so-called “enemy aliens.” Any discussion of Canada's war legacy, including war literature, should retain a measure of humility about Canada's fortunate outcome in a century that for many nations was the most miserable in history. Smug pronouncements about Canada's coming-of-age in times of war have no place in any serious contemporary discourse about the twentieth century. The Somme, Passchendaele, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rwanda—what happened in these places precludes our right to gloat.

“Smug pronouncements” about Canada date the war novels of Ralph Connor and, to some extent, those of Hugh MacLennan. Of all the works examined in this dissertation, Connor's *The Major*, *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, and *Treading the Winepress* have withstood the test of time the least, and the increasing critical neglect of MacLennan

suggests that *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes*—if not also *The Watch That Ends the Night*—will eventually follow Connor's works into oblivion. For all of Connor's romantic exuberance and MacLennan's descriptive eloquence, there is something disingenuous, even ugly, about novels that depict war as an "adventure" (*Treading* 22), death as "splendid" (*Sky Pilot* 256), and Canada as "the central arch" uniting "the new order" (*Barometer* 325). These works remain important, however, because they were written by the most popular Canadian authors of their time and thus had an enormous influence on the Canadian public and its shared consciousness about the meaning of war. For better or worse, they are the seminal works of a tradition of war fiction that is fraught with tensions about Canada's war legacy and future as a nation.

Harrison is probably the most skeptical of nationalism, an author who succinctly upbraids Connor for his Christian jingoism and anticipates the problems inherent in MacLennan's vision of a glorious future. His socialist depiction of beleaguered soldiers exposes the class prejudice inherent in the military command structure, implying that there is little glory in store even for those who survive the war. McDougall is similarly convinced of the futility of war, showing its status as evidence of the moral corruption and folly of modern society. His characters dream of returning to material wealth and pastoral simplicity in a Canada that does not—has not—existed except in the imaginations of war profiteers and political propaganda. Findley, less focused on nationalism or morality than on human impulses, recognizes a deep-seated compulsion for humans to commit violence, a conundrum that appears to typify the political events and social climate of the twentieth-century.

Other authors, most notably the two women covered by this dissertation, take a less-easily defined, more ambivalent view of nation and society. For Montgomery, the First World War signals “the birth-pangs of a new era” (*Rilla* 173), but she refuses to condone Connor’s or MacLennan’s utopianism, signalling to readers that this era “will be born a feeble, wailing life” and they should not “expect a new heaven and a new earth” (273) to emerge. For Duncan, war is less of a transition or upheaval than a political expediency in which Canada, seeking greater influence over the affairs of the British Empire, needs to heed “the call to arms” (*Imperialist* 49) if it wishes to acquire a significant place in international relations. For Allister and McCourt, it is enough for individuals to survive and return home: concerns of nationhood and the future are beyond their characters’ immediate purview.

Not all of these authors agree on the meaning of war and its significance for Canada, but all agree that war is the catalyst of change—the dividing line between a simpler past and a more complicated future. All depict characters who are thrown into the midst of war’s chaos (save Duncan—whose “chaos” is political and comparatively mild), and each character is a representative of shared experience in wartime, whether they be soldiers, family members, or children who inherit their parents’ tragic legacies. In Findley’s phrase, all are “occupants of memory” (*The Wars* 6), representatives of a cultural past that reveals itself in fragments, often conflicting and ambiguous, highlighting the complexity of Canada’s relationship with war. Connor and Harrison, for example, experienced many similar things during the First World War yet went on to fictionalize those experiences in terms that are irreconcilable. Both nonetheless contribute to a tradition of war fiction that thrives on its contradictions and dialectical nature.

By no means does this dissertation say all there is to say about the tradition of Canadian war fiction, let alone war literature in general. By ending with Findley's "Stones" the dissertation omits a number of significant contemporary works, many of which employ interesting narrative strategies and contexts in their interpretations of war. A few notable works (all have been studied elsewhere, albeit insufficiently) include Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), a romance story set in North Africa during the Second World War; Daphne Marlatt's *Taken* (1996), about women's experience during the first Gulf War and the Japanese invasion of Malaya during the Second World War; and Jack Hodgins's *Broken Ground* (1998), about First World War veterans desperately trying to build new lives in the rocky forests of the British Columbia interior. Any of these works might have substituted for Findley's as representatives of contemporary war fiction—except inasmuch as they follow rather than anticipate Findley's innovations.

The early twenty-first century has seen a new boom in Canadian war fiction and this, too, offers fruitful ground for further study. Although a number of recent articles have appeared concerning Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* (2001) and Francis Itani's *Deafening* (2003), little critical attention has so far been devoted to such works as Alan Cumyn's *The Sojourn* (2003), David Bergen's *The Time in Between* (2005), and Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2005). All are remarkable works that may prove to form a new chapter in the tradition of Canadian war fiction, with grounds for expanding the critical paradigms explored in this dissertation. As it is, one can only do so much in a single study, and the critical field of Canadian war literature remains ripe for planting.

Notes to Conclusion

¹ Aretha, ed., *The Holocaust Chronicle*, p. 525.

² 61,661 in the First World War, 42,042 in the Second, plus allowance for the victims of smaller wars and domestic disasters, especially the Halifax Explosion.

³ See Rees, *Auschwitz: A New History*, p. 298.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources used in the dissertation are grouped into four categories: I: Primary Sources in Canadian Literature; II: Primary Sources in Non-Canadian Literature; III: Primary Sources in Archives, Interviews, and Newspapers; IV: Secondary Sources. The first category makes a useful if not exhaustive list of further reading in Canadian war literature. The second category lists works that influenced Canadian war fiction or have some bearing on Canadian war experiences. The third category includes manuscripts, newspaper reports, archival documents, database materials, and interviews conducted specifically for this dissertation. The fourth category gives a critical, historical, and theoretical context for Canadian war fiction; like the first category, it can be used as a starting point for further reading and scholarship.

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