

**The Invasion of the Home Front:
Revisiting, Rewriting, and Replaying the First World War
in Contemporary Canadian Plays**

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ABSTRACT

The history of the Great War has been dominated by accounts that view the War as an international conflict between nations and soldiers that contributed to the consolidation of Canadian cultural and political independence and identity. In many cases, the War has assumed a foundational—even mythic—status as integral to the building of a mature state and people. Since the 1970s, however, there has been an efflorescence of Canadian plays that have problematized traditional representations of the War. Many of these plays are set on the home front and explore the ways in which the War, in the form of disease, disaster, and intra-communal in-fighting and suspicion, invaded Canadian home space. What they suggest is that the War was not simply launched against an external enemy but that the War invaded Canadian communities and households. This dissertation examines five of these plays: Kevin Kerr's *Unity (1918)*, Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Dancock's Dance*, Trina Davies' *Shatter*, Jean Provencher and Gilles Lachance's *Québec, Printemps 1918*, and Wendy Lill's *The Fighting Days*, all of which were written and published after 1970. Ultimately, it demonstrates that these plays, by relocating the War to Canadian terrain, undertake an important and radical critique; they suggest that the understanding of the War should not be restricted to overseas conflicts or Canadian national self-definition but that it should be expanded to encompass a diversity of people and experiences in domestic and international settings. At the same time, this thesis recognizes these plays as part of an emergent, burgeoning Canadian dramatic genre, one which attests to Canadians' continued preoccupation with the War past.

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INTRODUCTION

Within twenty years the veterans will have gone to their last roll call—then they can bury forever, with the spiders and stale tobacco, everything regarding the Great War. It will then be of no interest to the existing generations.

—Will R. Bird, Preface, *The Communication Trench*

I) The Great War in the Canadian Popular Imagination

Canadians have long embraced the Great War as an international conflict between nations and soldiers, which led to the establishment of Canadian cultural and political independence and identity. This traditional remembering of the War as Canada's coming of age, a time when Canada shifted from colony to nation, has been pervasive since the War's end. As many Canadian war historians attest, the Great War's association with Canadian national development has dominated Canada's memory of the War and has remained the preferred means of understanding and assessing the War. In *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada's Great War*, Jeffrey A. Keshen points to the enduring quality of this association, noting that "[t]here . . . persists the picture of soldiers who, through their extraordinary bravery, won the hardest and most important battles—particularly Second Ypres and Vimy Ridge—and thus emerged a singular and heroic force in transforming Canada from colony to nation" (xvii). In *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, Jonathan F. Vance adds to this assumption, noting that the representation of the Great War "as a nation-building experience of signal importance" has been pervasive since "the earliest days of war." He also argues that "Canada's progress from colony to nation by way of Flanders, an interpretation born in the early days of war, has become the standard method of judging the impact of 1914-1918" (10).

Certainly, many Canadian historians represent the Great War as seminal to Canada's national development. In *Building the Canadian Nation*, George W. Brown suggests that Canada's participation in the Great War enabled "further advances on the road to nationhood" and earned Canada "recogni[tion] by Britain as a partner" (503). Considering that *Building the Canadian Nation* was a high-school textbook for over ten years and "sold about 600,000 copies" (Igartua 110), it is likely that Brown's representation would have reached many Canadians, contributing to the accumulating myths of the Great War in the Canadian imaginary.¹ Not surprisingly, these opinions were reiterated and expanded as the War became increasingly constituted as a founding moment in the nation's collective memory. Canadian historian Pierre Berton, for example, represents the First World War as "a searing experience and also a turning point" that enabled Canada's maturity. Berton argues that "Canada entered the war as a colony, emerged as a nation" and "grew up as a result of that war" (Foreword 8). Writer and journalist Sandra Gwyn also points to the War as a key point in Canadian history (*Tapestry of War*). She argues that "it is the Great War that marks the real birth of Canada" (xvii). What she also suggests is that Canada's significant contributions to the War effort enabled this "birth": "our blood and our accomplishments transformed us from colony to nation" (xvii). Canadian war historians Jack Granatstein and Desmond Morton also call attention to Canada's significant transformation in and as a result of the War.

¹ Historian José E. Igartua argues that two textbooks (Brown's *Building the Canadian Nation* and J.W. Chafe and Arthur R.M. Lower's *Canada: A Nation, and How It Came to Be*) strongly contributed to Canadians' understanding of the past. He acknowledges that "[i]t is of course difficult to know what high school students actually retained from what they read in textbooks"; however, he also argues that "it is highly improbable that the depictions of Canadian society they encountered in their texts did not leave any imprint, especially since there was little countervailing 'official knowledge' to offset it" (107).

They refer to the Great War as Canada's "war of independence" (*Marching to Armageddon* 1) and suggest that "[t]he single biggest impact of the First World War on Canadians was our evolution from British colonials to citizens of a sovereign state" (*Canada and the Two World Wars* xiv).

The wealth of growth, coming of age, birth, and development metaphors employed by those writing on the First World War illustrate the extent to which the War has been remembered as a nation-building event and specifically as an incident that brought Canada into a modern and cosmopolitan age. Though these infantilizing metaphors are somewhat problematic, creating a sense of Canadian immaturity that ignores Canada's rich historical past and figuring the nation as being dependent on human sacrifice, they were widely embraced, in part because they offered Canadians a simple means to understand the significant—yet symbolic—international recognition Canada achieved as a result of the nation's extensive contributions to the War effort. For example, in 1917, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George invited Prime Minister Robert Borden to the Imperial War Conference. George recognized Canada's significant sacrifice and realized that he could not ask Borden to invigorate recruitment campaigns without offering him a place in the Imperial War Cabinet and a voice in war affairs (Granatstein and Morton, *Canada and the Two World Wars* 92). Borden seized this opportunity and proposed Resolution IX, which called for the "full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth" ("Extracts from Minutes" 2373). The resolution passed, granting the dominions "an adequate voice in foreign policy and in foreign relations" and ensuring they would be consulted "in all important matters of common imperial concern and for such necessary concerted action

founded on consultation as the several Governments may determine” (“Extracts from Minutes” 2373).

Canada also earned further international recognition as an autonomous nation in January of 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference. Though Canada attended as a branch of the British Empire, Borden requested and was granted a separate seat in the newly formed League of Nations. He acquired this seat, in part, by pointing out that Canada lost a more significant portion of her population than the United States in combat and thus deserved fair recognition and representation. Canada’s losses in the War thus came to be recognized as one of the means that enabled Canada’s transformation. The signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1918 also allowed Borden to call attention to Canada’s extensive contributions to the War effort and to her status as an autonomous nation.

Borden did not request land or financial benefits from Germany and received only a small indemnity from Germany; however, Borden was granted the right to sign the Treaty of Versailles independently from Great Britain. Though largely a symbolic gesture, the signature affirmed Canada’s post-War shift and demonstrated Canada’s control over her own military matters and foreign policy. Certainly, Canada’s declaration of independence in Resolution IX, in the League of Nations, and on the Treaty of Versailles suggested that Canada had achieved something important: not that Canada had itself come of age as a result of the War, but that it was perceived as having done so. Canada was no longer of international insignificance.

Many of the birth and coming of age metaphors in Canadian Great War discourse are centred primarily on the Battle of Vimy Ridge, which took place in April of 1917 and which featured four divisions of the Canadian Corps fighting together for the first time as

a unified national unit—rather than as provincial regiments or as British reinforcements. After extensive planning and rehearsal (Christie 16), heavily laden Canadian soldiers crossed muddy, devastated No Man’s Land, approaching the Ridge, “an impregnable position” and “the most difficult to attack on the Western Front” (Krawchuk 381). Despite “heavy machine-gun” bombardment and high casualty rates, the Canadian Corps continued to move forward (Christie 20-21), and they achieved “the seemingly impossible” (Morton, *A Short History* 150); they captured the highly fortified crest, which the British and French had been unable to do. The capture was widely celebrated because it was the first “British victory in thirty-two months of frustrating warfare” (Berton, *Vimy* 14). However, newspapers, such as the *Morning Post*, the *Nottingham Guardian*, the *New York Tribune*, and the *New York Times*, did not celebrate it as an allied success; rather, they singled it out as a Canadian victory (Berton, *Vimy* 291). This not only called attention to the distinctiveness of Canadian troops in an international arena but also precipitated a wave of pride and patriotism on the home front (Berton, *Marching* 179-80). It offered Canadians a victory that could be configured as distinctly their own, affirming the emergence and existence of a unified nation in the process.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge thus became synonymous with the emergence of a Canadian national consciousness and collective identity.² Berton points to the pervasiveness of this association, noting that the expression “Canada came of age at Vimy” has become “shorthand for the singular Canadian contribution to the war and for

² This association is also widely held outside of academia, as CBC reporter Ann MacMillan reveals in her 2010 article “Remembrance Day: Lest we forget,” which equates Canadian success in Vimy, Passchendaele, and Ypres with the birth of the nation: “[i]n many ways, the identity of the young country was forged on those bloody battlefields.” Her statement reveals the extent to which Canada’s memory of the Great War has remained somewhat unchallenged and unchanged since 1918.

the wave of nationalism that the war touched off” (*Marching* 180). This is evident in many representations of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. In the Preface to *Canada at Vimy*, for example, Brigadier General Alex Ross explains that “the memory of Vimy still lives, and I like to think this was because on that day Canada grew up and became a nation in fact. It was on that day that the whole might of Canada’s ground forces, as one unit of all arms, working as a united force, struck a mighty blow against enemy strength” (vii). This, as he further explains, was “the birth of a nation” (Ross viii). The author of *Canada at Vimy*, Lieutenant Colonel D.E. Macintyre, also employs figurative language as a means to explain the Battle of Vimy Ridge and its effect on Canada and Canadians. He graphically describes the Battle of Vimy Ridge as Canada’s “baptismal blood bath,” and he argues that this “baptism” not only led Canada to “nationhood” but also “filled every thoughtful Canadian with pride” (215). In doing so, Macintyre not only reiterates the immaturity metaphor (since baptism is typically associated with a childhood ritual) but also equates war with a religious sacrament, which saved Canada from international ignominy.

Other historians use less vivid language, yet similarly represent the Battle of Vimy Ridge as a turning point in Canadian history. In “Nationality: The Experience of Canada,” Charles P. Stacey, for example, isolates the Battle of Vimy Ridge as a seminal moment in Canadian development. He suggests that “[i]f a single milestone is needed to mark progress on the road to national maturity, one might do much worse than nominate that famous Easter Monday” (11). This idea is echoed in *The Battle of Vimy Ridge: Wall of Fire*, with Michael Krawchuk identifying the Battle of Vimy Ridge as a “springboard” projecting Canada to greatness (380). As he explains, “[i]t was the first time that the

Canadians had served together. The Canadians demonstrated what they could do when they captured the impossible Ridge. From Vimy, the Canadian Corps and Canada as a nation, took the path toward true nationhood” (380).

These historical representations of the Battle of Vimy Ridge as Canada’s “birth” and/or coming of age have been pervasive since the War’s end and have enabled the Battle of Vimy Ridge to accrue and maintain a heroic resonance throughout Canada. For Canadians, as Berton suggests, the narrative of Vimy is “an imperishable legend,” signaling Canada’s “march to maturity” (*Marching* 179). It is “imperishable,” in part because it is so fixed in Canada’s memory of the War and because it is reiterated and celebrated in national folklore, educational facilities, and commemorative ceremonies. As Berton explains,

[Canadians] carry [the story] with [them], for it has been drilled into [their] minds by constant repetition, a tale retold, like a looped movie—the heart-thumping spectacle of the entire Canadian Corps clambering up that whale-backed ridge, enduring the dreadful din, and hugging dangerously close to the creeping curtain of high explosives that stupefied the burrowed defenders. (*Marching* 178)

The visual, cinematic style of commemorations of Vimy Ridge, in and of itself, has facilitated Canadians’ retention of it and has inspired contemporary Canadian works of fiction on the subject. Jane Urquhart’s novel *The Stone Carvers* and Vern Thiessen’s play *Vimy*, for example, recycle the story and, in doing so, both attest to the narrative’s enduring power and perpetuate it. The Vimy Memorial (1936, rededicated in 2007) in France has also reinforced the status of the Battle in the Canadian consciousness. This memorial, which arose “phoenix-like, from . . . catastrophic horror” and which features

classical Greek and Judeo-Christian imagery (Valpy), serves to intensify and maintain the battle's heroic resonance for the many Canadians who make the pilgrimage to it each year. For individuals, the monument not only acknowledges Canada's glorious past but also suggests Canadians' potential for greatness. Indeed, Michael Valpy's phoenix image suggests that the Canadian nation itself achieves its emergence in a moment of mythic self-generation.

The Vimy National Historic Site thus posits a Canadian collective capable of seeing its reflection both in the monument and in its associated narrative. It declares that a national community was born in war and asks this community to consolidate in the act of remembering and celebrating its genesis. Ultimately, what the Vimy National Historic Site creates and maintains is an "imagined community" of Canadians united in a shared past, which defines them. This community is "imagined" because its members "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). The story of Vimy, represented in monument form, reinforces this image by providing the "imagined [Canadian] community" with a particular representation of itself as a heroic people who demonstrated patriotism, camaraderie, self-sacrifice, and sheer nerve as they marched up Vimy Ridge in order to defeat German aggression and to promote world peace.³ This construction, in part, explains why the Vimy narrative has resounded and survived so powerfully in the Canadian consciousness; it not only provides the "imagined community" with a glorious unified past, explaining Canada's genesis, but also offers

³ Like much war discourse, this image establishes a problematic "us/them," ally/enemy dichotomy. What it does is represents the "us" as a unified front connected in a common cause: the defeat of the German enemy. This is problematic, considering that a significant portion of the Canadian population has always been of German descent.

Canadians a repository of validating, self-reflecting images that define the Canadian identity. This might also explain why the Battle of Vimy Ridge has overshadowed other Canadian experiences of the War.

II) Critiques of Canada's Great War Mythology

In recent decades, Canadian social and cultural theorists have become increasingly critical of inherited nationalist narratives, calling attention to the constructed nature of these historical imaginings. Many contemporary Canadian war historians, for example, have questioned the objectivity of Canada's preferred memory of the War by exposing the multiple ways in which that memory was shaped into existence. Keshen, for one, returns to wartime Canada, examining the way in which war propaganda falsely shaped Canadian civilians' understanding of the Great War. As he explains, Canadian war propaganda attempted to bolster morale and war-support by offering Canadians highly romantic images of Canadian soldiers abroad. For the Canadians at home, these images were pervasive and unavoidable, and they contributed to the envisioning of Canada's role in the War as a noble and necessary undertaking:

While reading, worshipping, studying, singing or even shopping, Canadians were besieged with messages propounding patriotism, duty and honour. . . Words and images from privately-controlled means of communication both reflected and intensified a mass psyche largely disposed toward imperialist, romantic and nativist beliefs. From 1914 to 1918, citizens . . . were told that the war constituted an exhilarating competition played by the bold and chivalrous; that death in a just

cause ensured eternal life; that through his noble sacrifice, Johnny Canuck was forging a record of renown. (24)

What this suggests is that propaganda programmed Canadians to believe in the War as a romantic and patriotic adventure leading Canada to national maturity. Keshen notes that this belief was made possible in part because of “pre-war jingoism and naivete, geographic isolation, along with press corps’ patriotism and relative tractability” (xvii). As he explains, these factors enabled “Canadian propagandists and censors . . . to exert a level of influence that not only made it possible for romantic notions about combat to survive the butchery, but also, where post-armistice events provided some rationality, to practically predestine that they surface as core explanations” (xvii-xviii). Though Keshen notes that this memory was challenged in the aftermath of the War, especially with the writings of the Lost Generation (206-08), his work nonetheless illustrates the ways in which propaganda and censorship masked the true horror and, at times, futility of the War and contributed to a widely embraced image and understanding of Canada’s heroic coming of age. What Keshen’s work thus makes evident is one of the ways in which the popular image of Canadians at war was forged into existence by those in power.

Tim Cook’s *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* similarly considers how early representations of the First World War were created. In particular, Cook examines the struggles faced by Canada’s official Great War historians in their attempts to write government-published objective, contemporary history. Cook argues that the works of official war historians are “important studies based on war records” (5) and “the very foundation for all subsequent study of the world wars in Canada” (254); however, he also notes the importance of assessing official historians’

proximity to war events, and, in particular, to war veterans. As he explains, “[t]he first generation of official historians was denied the luxury of waiting for time to dull recent events, and they were expected to produce scholarly, contemporary history for soldiers and civilians very soon after the end of each war” (5). They wrote while experiencing “[o]vert pressure from senior officers, politicians, veterans and even other nations, as well as the more subtle pressures of being responsible for capturing the ‘official’ authentic memory of these momentous wars” (254). As Cook explains, the writing of official history thus required a “nuanced approach” (159) and a “delicate consideration” of living, historical subjects (159). Thus, while Cook celebrates official war histories as vital sources of information, he also acknowledges that they are the products of historians’ contextual positioning. In doing so, he illustrates the importance of understanding the context of war historiography and its role in the production of resonating national narratives.

Similarly to Keshen and Cook, Vance calls attention to the production of what he sees as Canada’s Great War “myth.” He argues that Canada’s preferred memory of the War is “a complex mixture of fact, wishful thinking, half-truth, and outright invention” (3), which “communicate[s] the past in a pure, unambiguous and simple fashion” (8). Vance considers the various ways in which the myth materialized “in novel and play, in bronze and stone, in reunion and commemoration, in song and advertisement” (3) in an attempt to explain the myth’s emergence and centrality in Canadian consciousness. He concludes that while “Anglo-Canadian intellectuals, political leaders, social elites, and renowned members of the literati. . . . played a significant role in the propagation of the myth, it would never have caught on without active and enthusiastic support elsewhere in

the Canadian mosaic” (7). Ultimately, he argues that the myth had a particular function; it emerged as a means to render the War serviceable and to infuse the extensive number of sacrifices with use-value. As he explains, “[i]n remembering the war, Canadians were concerned first and foremost with utility: those four years had to have been of some use. The war had to be recalled in such a way that positive outcomes, beyond the defeat of German aggression, were clear. In short, the mythic version existed to fashion a usable past out of the Great War” (9).

Though Vance does not cite the term “usable past,” it comes from literary critic Van Wyck Brooks’ seminal 1918 essay “On Creating a Usable Past.” Brooks called for Americans to piece together aspects of their past into a cohesive whole that would be beneficial and “usable” in the present. Literary comparatist Lois Parkinson Zamora builds on Brooks’ discussion in her book *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas*, noting that Brooks’ use of the term

“[u]sable” implies the active engagement of a user or users, through whose agency collective and personal histories are constituted. The term thus obviates the possibility of innocent history, but not the possibility of authentic history when it is actively imagined by its user(s). What is deemed usable is valuable; what is valuable is constituted according to specific cultural and personal needs and desires. (ix)

Canadians in the post-War context had particular “cultural and personal needs,” stemming directly from their painful experiences of the War. The Great War myth thus emerged not only as a means to fortify the nation but also to help Canadian citizens make

sense of the extensive losses engendered by four years of war.⁴ Canada lost approximately “198,056” lives in the First World War, and countless returned permanently injured (“Number of casualties”), leaving Canadians in a bereaved and vulnerable state. For these Canadians, the Great War myth “was . . . appealing because it filled needs. For some people, it was consolatory; for others, it was explanatory” (Vance 9). Ultimately, it illustrated the War’s purpose (to defeat German aggression, to bolster the country, and to create a unified national community) and helped Canadians make sense of the extensive horror they had just experienced as well as to cope with the significant human losses in their post-war existence.

First World War historian Jay Winter, in a discussion of war commemoration practices in England, makes a similar argument about the relationship of mourning to commemorative efforts. He argues that civilian commemorative practices in post-War England were not simply a means to bolster the nation and its social order, as many assume it to be; rather, this process was about mourning the dead and finding meaning from the deaths in the post-War context (*Sites of Memory* 11; 79). Like the Great War myth in Canada, “commemorative efforts aimed to offer a message that loss of life in the conflict had a meaning, that these sacrifices were redemptive, that they prepared the ground for a better world” (*Remembering* 32). Winter therefore suggests that though war

⁴ Historians T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper explain that “[w]ar memory and commemoration have tended to be studied within one of two main paradigms. On the one hand, there can be found arguments which construe its significance as fundamentally political; that is, as a practice bound up with rituals of national identification, and a key element in the symbolic repertoire available to the nation-state for binding citizens into a collective national identity. On the other, war memory and commemoration is held to be significant primarily for psychological reasons, as an expression of mourning, being a human response to death and suffering that war engenders on a vast scale” (7).

memorials featuring myths of a glorious war were and continue to be “important symbols of national pride . . . these monuments had another meaning for the generation that passed through the trauma of war. . . . War memorials were places where people grieved, both individually and collectively” (*Sites of Memory* 79).

This might explain why such a romanticized and singular war myth persisted so strongly in Canadian consciousness as well as why its interrogation coincides with the passing of the First World War generation. In contemporary Canada, the Great War myth may be losing its use-value as a form of reparative mourning. In turn, its ability to command reverence is being interrogated. With the death of the last Canadian Great War veteran, John Babcock, in 2010,⁵ Canadians no longer have a direct, living connection with the War past. Though this means aspects of the past have become irretrievable, it also suggests that the War bereaved have passed and that the memory of War can be articulated in a less tentative manner. This reasoning might explain why a wealth of Canadian materials on the War has emerged in recent years, opening up the story of the War in Canada to new perspectives.

III) The Death of Living Memory and the Preoccupation with the War Past

The preoccupation with the War past has not been unique to Canada; in fact, the international output of scholarly and non-scholarly material on various facets of memory has been so extensive that some scholars have identified it as a movement. Historian Geoff Eley, in his Foreword to *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, for one,

⁵ For more information, see Nicolaas van Rijn, “Canada’s last World War I vet, John Babcock, dies.” See also “Canada's last WWI veteran dies: John Babcock's death at 109 marks ‘end of an era.’”

categorizes it as a post-1990 “boom in memory” (vii) involving “the narration and visualizing of history, personal and collective, private and public” (vii). Winter similarly identifies it as a “memory boom” and defines it as “the efflorescence of interest in the subject of memory inside the academy and beyond it—in terms of a wide array of collective meditations on war and on the victims of war” (*Remembering* 1).⁶ Other scholars have attempted to highlight the pervasive interest in war memory by describing it as analogous to an infectious disease: Andreas Huyssen, for example, associates the movement with an “epidemic” and a “fever” (27). The language of mental illness is also invoked to highlight the widespread interest in memory: David Berliner identifies it as a “craze” (203) and Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn refer to it as an “obsession” (28).

According to Winter, “[t]he subject of war has dominated the memory boom” (*Remembering* 6). Authors employ war metaphors not only to describe war texts but also to equate the prolific output of memory material with a destructive force. “Boom,” for example, is onomatopoeic, recalling the sound of an explosion. Disease imagery calls to mind infection and associates the interest in memory with a spreading, multiplying virus, which consumes all (academic and non-academic, soldier and civilian) in its path. What these metaphors imply is that some commentators envision the instability of memory

⁶ The “memory boom” has also been referred to as a “turn” towards new historical subject matter and forms. Historian Geoffrey Cubitt explains that “[i]n turning to memory, historians have been turning not just towards an interest in new kinds of subject matter, but towards new ways of organizing and labeling and describing their objects of study, and new ways of conceptualizing the nature of their own discipline and the knowledge it is geared to producing” (2). For more on the “turn,” especially in North America, see Jay Winter, Section 5, “The ‘Cultural Turn’ in Historical Studies” in “The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the ‘Memory Boom’ in Contemporary Historical Studies.”

material as a potentially destructive force. This might suggest a mild residual anxiety over the democratization of history in the wake of the death of living memory—for memory is the domain of layperson and historian alike.

A question at the forefront of this discourse, however, is why did the interest in memory and, in particular, the war past emerge. French historian Pierre Nora, in his seminal study *Les lieux de mémoire* [*Realms of Memory*], considers the reasons twentieth-century French society was so deeply fixated upon memory. He speculates that the French “speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” (“Between Memory” 7). What he means is that “living memory,” that which is held within an individual who experienced an event first hand (Gillis 7), has disappeared from French society, precipitating a wave of social anxiety about the irretrievable past. This certainly appears to be a viable explanation for the contemporary interest in the War in Canada, which has coincided with the passing of the Great War generation. Especially in the last thirty years, Canadians have demonstrated a significant interest in the War’s memory—namely, in how and why Canada remembered the War and in the living memories of the elderly. Though historians and academics have largely focused on the emergent field of memory studies and its many discursive sub-fields, the interest in memory and commemoration has expanded well beyond the academy. Many contemporary Canadian authors and playwrights, for example, have produced literary treatments of the past, as one sees in the plethora of historical fiction that has dominated Canadian literature in

recent years. More specifically, many authors have sought to recover the living memories of their ancestors and relations before these unnoted memories were forever lost.⁷

Nora argues that the anxiety engendered by the death of living memory inspired the French to create “sites of memory” as a means to safeguard their past. “Sites of memory,” as he explains, demonstrate “[a] will to remember” (*Realms* 14) and include “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (*Realms* xvii). “Sites” consist of spaces (museums, exhibitions, memorials, etc.), practices (rituals, ceremonies, commemorations, etc.), and objects (inherited property, monuments, emblems, documents, etc.). Ultimately, as Nora specifies, a “site of memory” is anywhere “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (“Between Memory” 7). In Canada, a wealth of “sites of memory” commemorating those lost in the First World War have appeared in recent years. Theatre performances and play-texts about the Great War, for one, have abounded in Canada.⁸ Canadians have also produced a wealth of literature, films, and conferences on the subject of the First World War and created new war monuments.⁹ The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (2000) and

⁷ See, for example, R.H. Thomson’s *The Lost Boys: Letters from the Sons in Two Acts, 1914-1923*, which recounts the experiences of his great-uncles in the War.

⁸ Plays include Jean Provencher and Gilles Lachance’s *Québec, Printemps 1918*, John Gray and Eric Peterson’s *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, Anne Chislett’s *Quiet in the Land*, Wendy Lill’s *The Fighting Days*, Michael Hollingsworth’s *The Great War* (in *The Village of the Small Huts*), Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *Dancock’s Dance*, R.H. Thomson’s *The Lost Boys: Letters from the Sons in Two Acts, 1914-1923*, Kevin Kerr’s *Unity (1918)*, David French’s *Soldier’s Heart*, Stephen Massicotte’s *Mary’s Wedding*, Trina Davies’ *Shatter*, Kevin Major’s *No Man’s Land*, Vern Thiessen’s *Vimy*, Maureen Hunter’s *Wild Mouth*, Dennis Garnhum’s *Timothy Findley’s The Wars*, Don Hannah’s *While We’re Young*, and Michel Marc Bouchard’s *The Madonna Painter*.

⁹ Several novels on the First World War—Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*, Jack Hodgins’ *Broken Ground*, Jane Urquhart’s *The Stone Carvers*, Frances Itani’s *Deafening*, and

the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument (2001) were erected in Ottawa alone, and the Vimy Memorial in France was rededicated in 2007. What this abundance of “sites of memory” in Canada perhaps suggests is Canada’s continued preoccupation with the War as both a foundational signifier of national identity and a site of intra-national multiplicity and contestation.

The extensive number of “sites of memory” in Canada suggests the ways the War has become subjected to multiple interpretations, particularly by groups who have felt stigmatized or ignored within the symbolic narrative of the War. The advent of identity politics and postcolonial studies in the 1970s and 1980s made increasingly apparent the ways in which hegemonic narratives determine membership in a given nation, encouraging marginalized voices to challenge their negative or non-existent scriptings within war myths. Ultimately, the critiques launched by these individuals has made evident that “identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa” and that “[t]he core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity” (Gillis 3). This has fuelled a widespread interrogation of traditional modes of remembrance, which often have “transparent political agendas” and which strive to construct (and reconstruct in the act of remembering) a homogenous, exclusive national entity (Winter, *Remembering* 32). Much critical work on collective memory attempts to interrogate such exclusionary myths, redress the historical record, recover little-known

Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*—received critical acclaim. In 2010, Alliance Films released *Passchendaele*, starring Paul Gross. Select conferences pertaining to the Great War include The Royal Society of Canada’s conference “The Cultures of War and Peace” (2008), the University of Western Ontario’s conference “The Great War: From Memory to History” (2011), and the University of Ottawa and Carleton University’s conference “History, Memory, Performance” (2011).

experiences, and, most importantly, redefine the parameters of national membership. Certainly, the Great War myth in Canada implies that a unified and heroic nation emerged in and as a result of war. At the same time, however, the myth stigmatizes or ignores many constituents who have felt written out of the national War narrative and the exclusionary Canadian identity it produces.

Much of this memory work has been done by minority associations seeking redress for their wrongful demonization in times of war and in subsequent war discourse.¹⁰ Ukrainian-Canadian, Japanese-Canadian, and Italian-Canadian organizations, to name a few, have actively sought apology and reparation for their communities' mistreatment at the hands of the Canadian government during the First and/or Second World Wars.¹¹ Though compensation has not always been the outcome of this work, the redress movement, in its focus on the "enemy" experience, has made apparent the way in which war discourse frames certain minority groups as second-rate citizens. A prominent member of the Japanese-Canadian redress movement Ken Adachi, for one, makes this process apparent in *The Enemy That Never Was*, where he exposes the wrongful

¹⁰ As Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper explain, this has also been the case in other countries: "social groups suffering injustice, injury or trauma that originates in war have become increasingly prepared to demand public recognition of their experience, testimony and current status as 'victims' or 'survivors'" (3).

¹¹ Aboriginal veterans have also sought redress for having been denied many of the post-war benefits accorded to non-Aboriginal veterans. In 2002, the federal government acknowledged this injustice and issued "a redress package of \$20,000 to individual First Nations veterans; in November 2004, the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and non-status Indians announced \$100,000 in funding for Métis veterans to promote their contributions to war-time efforts" (Lackenbauer). For more information, see James L. Dempsey, "The Indians and World War One," *Alberta History* 31.3 (1983): 1-8; James L. Dempsey, "Problems of Western Canadian Indian War Veterans after World War One," *Native Studies Review* 5.2 (1989): 1-18; James L. Dempsey, *Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, U of Regina P, 1999); and Timothy C. Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 2012).

representation of Japanese-Canadians in the Second World War. In doing so, Adachi rewrites history in a manner that undermines the understanding of Japanese-Canadians as a threat to the nation, representing them as Canadian citizens worthy of rights and respect.¹²

A preoccupation with the exclusionary memory of war has also been of central concern to second-wave feminists. Many women involved in the second-wave feminist movement sought to retrieve and recover little-known women's narratives of war that affirmed women's place in war narratives and confirmed their membership in the nation. Since the late 1960s, women have been challenging historical accounts that focus solely on male experiences of war and illustrating the extent to which women remain excluded

¹² There is a wealth of material on the Japanese-Canadian experience of the Second World War. The most celebrated novel about the Japanese-Canadian internment is Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981). Other works include Kogawa's *Itsuka* (Toronto: Viking, 1992); Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (Calgary: Red Deer P, 2001); Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 1999) and *One Hundred Million Hearts* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2004); N. Rochelle Yamagishi's *Nikkei Journey: Japanese Canadians in Southern Alberta* (Victoria: Trafford, 2005); and Frances Itani's *Requiem* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2011). Historical documents include Roy Ito, *We Went to War* (Ottawa: Wings Canada, 1984) and Roy Miki, ed., *This is My Own - Letters to Wes and Other Writings on Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985). Less has been written on Italian-Canadian and Ukrainian-Canadian internment. Vittorio Rossi's play *Paradise by the River* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1998) has garnered attention as has the seminal historical text *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin, and Angelo Principe (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001). For information on the Ukrainian-Canadian experience of war, see James Farney and Bohdan S. Kordan, "The Predicament of Belonging: The Status of Enemy Aliens in Canada, 1914," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 39.1 (2005): 74-89; J.B. Gregorovich, ed., *Ukrainian Canadians in Canada's Wars: Materials for Ukrainian Canadian History* (Toronto: Ukrainian Canadian Research Foundation, 1983); Lubomyr Luciuk, *In Fear of the Barbed Wire Fence: Canada's First National Internment Operations and the Ukrainian Canadians, 1914-1920* (Kingston: Kashtan P, 2001); and F. Swyripa and J.H. Thompson, eds., *Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians in Canada During the Great War* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1983). Little has been written on the German-Canadian experience of the Great War, and no form of redress has been sought.

from remembrances of war and, consequently, from admission into symbolic communities forged in war. This omission has been of central concern to many contemporary gender critics who examine women's representation in Great War discourse. Angela K. Smith, for example, calls attention to the fact that "[h]istory has gendered the Great War as male. The haunting images of trench warfare (which seem to epitomise the conflict) represent the years of suffering for hundreds of thousands of men" (Introduction 1). Agnès Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway similarly argue that the War has been remembered as a "man's affair," and they suggest that this "notion . . . has been supported and reinforced by a literature of war which, traditionally, arises almost exclusively out of men's experience" (4). Claire M. Tylee, Elaine Turner, and Cardinal echo this point (1), noting that the majority of "women are kept to the periphery of First World War history in the popular imagination" (1). This marginalization is of central concern to Jean Bethke Elshtain who points out that women have long been represented as "backdrop[s]" in war discourse (165). As she explains, "[w]omen's involvement in war seems . . . inferential, located somewhere offstage if war is playing" (165).

In recent years, however, much work has been done on women's varied experiences of the First World War.¹³ This work attests to the fact that women were not "offstage" throughout the War and illustrates that the War was more complex and far-reaching than its phallogentric imagining suggests. What has become particularly evident is that the Great War, unlike earlier wars, was a "universal war"—one that involved the

¹³ See "Women and WWI—Bibliography and Useful Links," *A Multimedia History of World War One*, 22 August 2009, Web, 20 February 2012.

participation of both men and women (A. Smith, *The Second Battlefield* 2).¹⁴ As historian Susan R. Grayzel explains, it was a “total war,”¹⁵ necessitating “the mobilization of both civilians and combatants” and “the active participation of both men and women” (*Women and the First World War* 3; see also *Women’s Identities at War* 2). Thus, for Grayzel, it is of paramount importance to “study women and war together” (*Women and the First World War* 4). As she explains, “in order to comprehend war’s political, social and cultural effects, we must understand the experience of the entire population of the nations involved. One could argue that wars are decided on battlefields, but in the case of total war on the massive scale of the First World War, the battles are not enough” (*Women and the First World War* 4-5).

The examination of the Great War as a “total war” is particularly important in Canada, where the War is synonymous with overseas battle and the birth of the nation. The experiences of Canadian women at home remain little known and on the periphery of mainstream Great War history—though many women were a vital component of the War effort.¹⁶ A rethinking of the Great War as a “total war” expands the margins of traditional

¹⁴ In the introduction to *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted With or Without Consent*, historian Nicole Dombrowski explains that “[t]he First World War marked women’s definitive entry into the war machine” (6). As she explains, “women were mobilized into the labor force and into civilian defense units,” and “[l]ike many of their brethren,” they “answered the patriotic call to arms as an expression of their national sympathies and their family solidarities” (5).

¹⁵ In “the absolute form of war,” as military theorist Carl von Clausewitz explains, a belligerent nation utilizes all possible resources, including all human ones, to obtain victory. Thus, all aspects of life, including all discourse, become occupied by forms of warfare, making it impossible to have any “neutral space” (46).

¹⁶ Though much has been written on the Canadian Suffrage Movement, work remains to be completed on the subject of Canadian women’s varied experiences of the Great War. Sarah Glassford and Amy J. Shaw’s co-edited 2012 volume, *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War*, seeks to remedy this void. For more on Canadian women’s experience of the War,

history and includes women as War subjects within them. At the same time, it calls attention to the various manifestations of the War at home—in the form of propaganda, intra-communal in-fighting, suspicion, violence against the “enemy,” man-made disasters (especially those resulting from the production and transportation of munitions), and illness (including viral infections, mutilation, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder—to name a few). In doing so, it opens up the definition of *war* and frees Canadians to explore new meanings of the term.

IV) Contemporary Canadian Plays About the Great War

Since the publication of Timothy Findley’s *The Wars* in 1977 and the initial production of John Gray and Eric Peterson’s critically acclaimed World War I musical-drama, *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, in 1978, there has been an efflorescence of plays about the First World War. In fact, in 2008 alone, two plays were published about the Great War: Dennis Garnhum’s *Timothy Findley’s The Wars* and Maureen Hunter’s *Wild Mouth*, along with an anthology of contemporary Canadian World War I and II plays entitled *Canada and the Theatre of War: Volume 1*. Several of the Great War plays explore

see Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, “Women During the Great War,” *Women at Work, Ontario, 1880-1930*, ed. Janice Acton et al. (Toronto: Women’s P, 1983) 261-309; Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998); and Joan Sangster, “Mobilising Women for War,” *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David Mackenzie (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005) 157-93. The subject of Canadian women and the Second World War has received more sustained attention. See, for example, Ruth Roach Pierson, *Canadian Women and the Second World War* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1983); Carolyn Gossage, *Greatcoats and Glamour Boots: Canadian Women at War (1939-1945)* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1991); Barbara Ladouceur & Phyllis Spence, eds., *Blackouts to Bright Lights: Canadian War Bride Stories* (Vancouver: Ronsdale, 1995); and Mary Hawkins Buch, *Props on her Sleeve: The Wartime Letters of a Canadian Airwoman* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1997).

traditional history, which most often focuses on the events experienced by male soldiers on the battlefield; however, the majority of these plays centre on the social-domestic history of the Canadian home front during the War. In fact, there are eight plays set in Canada during the Great War: Jean Provencher and Guy Lachance's *Québec, Printemps 1918*, Anne Chislett's *Quiet in the Land*, Wendy Lill's *The Fighting Days*, Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Dancock's Dance*, Kevin Kerr's *Unity (1918)*, Trina Davies' *Shatter*, Maureen Hunter's *Wild Mouth*, and Michel Marc Bouchard's *The Madonna Painter*.¹⁷ Only *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, Kevin Major's *No Man's Land*, Vern Thiessen's *Vimy*, Dennis Garnhum's *Timothy Findley's The Wars*, and Don Hannah's *While We're Young* focus primarily on the experiences of soldiers overseas—though plays such as Michael Hollingsworth's *The Great War* (in *The Village of the Small Huts*), R.H. Thomson's *The Lost Boys: Letters from the Sons in Two Acts, 1914-1923*, and Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding* split their focus between characters overseas and in Canada.¹⁸

Despite the prolific output of Canadian plays about the First World War, there is little scholarship on these plays and on the subject of contemporary Canadian theatre and

¹⁷ David French's *Soldiers Heart* also examines the effects of the War on the Canadian home front; however, the play takes place in 1924.

¹⁸ There is also an extensive number of contemporary Canadian plays about the Second World War and its effects. These include Roch Carrier's *La guerre, yes sir!*; Brian Wade's *Blitzkrieg: A Play About Hitler and Eva*; Tom Hendry's *Fifteen Miles of Broken Glass*; John Murrell's *Waiting for the Parade*; Peter Colley's *You'll Get Used To It: The War Show*; Blake Brooker's *Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp*; Stephen Scriver's *Letters in Wartime*; Norah Harding's *This Year, Next Year and Sometimes, Never*; Irene Kirstein Watt's *Goodbye Marianne*; Jason Sherman's *None Is Too Many*; Margaret Hollingsworth's *Ever Loving*; Vittorio Rossi's *Paradise by the River*; Michael Healey's *The Drawer Boy*; Hannah Moscovitch's *East of Berlin*; Marie Clements' *Burning Vision*; and John Mighton's *Half Life*. There are also two contemporary anthologies: *A Terrible Truth: Anthology of Holocaust Drama* and *Canada and the Theatre of War: Volume 1*.

war.¹⁹ In fact, to date, Donna Coates and Sherrill Grace remain the only literary/theatre scholars who have produced a body of work on contemporary Canadian plays about the Great War. Coates has published two articles,²⁰ which explore Wendy Lill's *The Fighting Days* in relation to Francis Marion Beynon's *Aleta Dey*,²¹ and Grace discusses a significant number of plays about the First World War in her seminal chapter "Theatres of War: Battle Fronts and Home Fronts" in *On the Art of Being Canadian*.²² Coates and Grace also co-edited *Canada and the Theatre of War: Volume 1*, the only Canadian drama anthology about the First and Second World Wars. Grace's introduction to this anthology, entitled "A different kind of theatre," remains the only comprehensive analysis of contemporary plays about both World Wars.²³ The anthology brings together five plays about the First World War (R.H. Thomson's *The Lost Boys*, David French's

¹⁹ Theatre scholar Alan Filewod has pointed to the importance of examining military re-enactment as performance and has noted the significant convergences between the theatre and the military; however, his work largely focuses on performances outside of traditional theatres spaces and does not consider contemporary Canadian plays about the Great War. See Filewod, "Theatre, Navy and the Narrative of 'True Canadianism,'" "National Battle: Canadian Monumental Drama and the Investiture of History," "The Nation on Parade: The Empire as *Mise en Scène*," "The Theatre Army," and "The Face of Re-enactment: A Photo Essay."

²⁰ See also Coates' entry on "War" in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*.

²¹ See Coates, "Pot Shots to Parting Shots: Wendy Lill's *The Fighting Days*" and "The Best Soldiers of All: Unsung Heroines in Canadian Women's Great War Fiction."

²² Historian David Dean of Carleton History has received a SSHRC Research Development Initiative Grant for the project *Performing History, Remaking History: Representing the Past on Stage* (2010-2012).

²³ In Grace's introduction to *Canada and the Theatre of War: Volume 1*, she notes that the anthologized plays are not "war plays" (v), specifying that they are "plays about war" (v) and/or "memory plays" (vii). The plays adhere, however, to literary scholar Heinz Kosok's definition of the term "war play." In *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama*, he explains that "war plays can be defined as plays: (1) that present actual events of the War, either in various theatres of war or on the home front; (2) which deal with the War's consequences, either for their central characters or for society at large; (3) that use the experience of the First World War as a starting point for a dramatic campaign against another war; and (4) that focus on theoretical issues raised by wartime events" (3).

Soldier's Heart, Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding*, Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Dancock's Dance*, and Vern Thiessen's *Vimy*) and three about the Second World War (Margaret Hollingsworth's *Ever Loving*, Jason Sherman's *None is Too Many*, and Marie Clements' *Burning Vision*).²⁴ In doing so, the anthology calls attention to the prolific output of “quality plays . . . produced in Canada and abroad since about 1977” (Grace, “A different kind of theatre” v). Grace explains that the First World War has been the central subject of this literary outpouring, and she notes that “contemporary Canadian playwrights (like novelists, historians, and filmmakers) have returned to the Great War, more so than to World War II, with a passionate desire to retell it, to refine the understanding of its events, to weigh and adjust its importance, and to linger . . . over the long term implications of loss” (“A different kind of theatre” iv). Grace speculates that this revival of interest in World War I might be based on the “symbolic power” of battles such as Beaumont Hamel and Vimy Ridge within the “national story” and Canadian consciousness (iv), yet she notes that these contemporary plays also “invite [Canadians] to reconsider [their] history and [their] views” (v) by featuring voices and experiences previously excluded from the historical record. The anthology, which “cover[s] as many strategic points as possible” (“A different kind of theatre” vi), undertakes a similar project. It offers a pluralistic image of the Canadian experience of World War—both overseas and at home—that attests to the pervasiveness and reach of war. As Grace explains, the plays, especially when read collectively, “oblige [Canadians] to consider the

²⁴ Coates and Grace's second volume of *Canada and the Theatre of War* focuses solely on contemporary wars. This volume features six plays: Abla Farhoud's *Game of Patience*, Guillermo Verdecchia and Marcus Youssef's *A Line in the Sand*, Colleen Wagner's *The Monument*, Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End*, Wajdi Mouawad's *Scorched*, and Sharon Pollack's *Man Out of Joint*.

impossibility of insulating [them]selves, comfortably at home, from the effects of wars fought thousands of miles away on foreign soil” (vi), and they “remind [Canadians] of the ease with which conflict permeates national and cultural boundaries” (“A different kind of theatre” vii-viii).

My dissertation builds on Grace’s argument, offering a sustained examination of Canadian drama that explores various ways in which the Great War infiltrated Canada and created deep social-domestic conflicts. All of the plays considered in the main chapters of this thesis are set on the home front during the Great War and/or shortly after the armistice. The plays include Kevin Kerr’s *Unity (1918)*, Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *Dancock’s Dance*, Trina Davies’ *Shatter*, Jean Provencher and Gilles Lachance’s *Québec, Printemps 1918*, and Wendy Lill’s *The Fighting Days*. These plays are set in various parts of Canada (Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Manitoba), and they explore different ways in which Canadians experienced the War at home.

All of the English-Canadian plays featured in this dissertation were created and produced after the 1981 publication of Gray and Peterson’s *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, which continues to be one of Canada’s most celebrated and produced plays. In English Canada, the production and publication of *Billy Bishop Goes to War* appears to have widely influenced playwrights, as the wealth of Canadian plays about the War attests. In Quebec, however, the situation is noticeably different. In fact, I have been able to locate only two Quebecois plays set during the Great War, Michel Marc Bouchard’s *The Madonna Painter* and Provencher and Lachance’s little-known *Québec, Printemps 1918*, which was written in response to the military’s invasion of Quebec during the October Crisis of 1970. I include *Québec, Printemps 1918* in my study—despite the fact that it is

written in the 1970s—because it offers such a trenchant contestation of the Canadian Great War myths. Indeed, the play illustrates how much of French Canada experienced the War in a markedly different manner than English Canada.

The first chapter of this dissertation, “Kevin Kerr’s *Unity (1918)*: The Influenza Outbreak and the Uncanny Germ(an)s at ‘Home,’” examines Kevin Kerr’s Governor General Award-winning play *Unity (1918)*, a two-act drama that unsettles the notion that Canada was untouched by the horrors of the War. The play dramatizes the rapid spread of “war fever” from battlefields overseas to domestic spaces on the home front. Kerr literalizes this metaphor by focusing on the lethal outbreak of the “Spanish” influenza in Canada, which erupted at the end of World War I and lasted until 1919. This flu virus was spread by surviving soldiers returning home from the War and so represents an instance of the War infiltrating the home front. In Kerr’s play, the flu brings with it an accompanying “fever” of fear and suspicion (one might say warfare) to the small, isolated prairie town of Unity, Saskatchewan, representative of the “unified” Canadian polity. The Unity townspeople take up arms against this invisible virus in their midst, which they see as a mysterious and deadly “enemy” (118), and, subsequently, against each other as fear and paranoia take hold within the community and the threat of contagion spreads. What this behaviour reveals is the core community’s deep-seated fear of outsiders, whom they envision as contaminating enemy Others. The title thus takes on a highly ironic tone, as Kerr depicts 1918 Unity/Canada in a state of internal conflict.

Chapter two, “‘Be a good soldier again’: Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *Dancock’s Dance*, Militarized Masculinity, and the War in the ‘Asylum,’” also centres on wartime illness and conflict on the home front. Similar to Kerr’s *Unity (1918)*, Guy Vanderhaeghe’s

Dancock's Dance illustrates that there is no refuge from the War's infectious reach. To highlight this notion, Vanderhaeghe sets his play in the Saskatchewan Hospital for the Insane (North Battleford, Saskatchewan), which functions as a microcosm for the Canadian home front. Though this asylum stands in a remote, isolated area of central Saskatchewan, the War nevertheless infiltrates the hospital, "infecting" orderlies and inmates in various and multiple ways: the memory of overseas warfare haunts the central character, former officer Lieutenant John Carlyle Dancock; anti-German discourse shapes orderly Kevin Kennealy's thinking, and he repeatedly tortures the "enemy"—the innocent German immigrant and in-patient Rudy Braun; and, the War manifests itself in the form of the "Spanish" influenza, which decimates the hospital population. By attesting to the War's various manifestations at home, the play succeeds in exposing little-known history and destabilizing the notion of asylum, especially of asylum from war. It also illustrates that those who were given asylum and defined as mentally ill were sometimes those who threatened the sanctity of the War effort and failed to assimilate into the War-rallied collective.

Though both *Unity (1918)* and *Dancock's Dance* offer graphic dramatizations of an "infected" home front, Trina Davies' *Shatter*, the subject of chapter three, explicitly draws attention to the literal manifestation of the War on Canadian soil. *Shatter* takes place in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a city intrinsically linked to Great Britain's war effort and bustling with military activity. The War, however, only produces suffering and substantial loss of life after the Halifax Explosion, a massive detonation that devastates the city's landscape and inhabitants. What is evocative about Davies' play, however, is not only her location of the War at home but also her literal and metaphorical exploration

of the “fog of war” that descends over Halifax. Debris greys the Halifax skyline as Haligonians embark on a futile search for information explaining the explosion. Newspapers capitalize upon wartime fears of enemy infiltration and the local populace is led to believe that German Canadians caused the explosion. Xenophobia erupts as Canadian vigilantes take up arms against their German-Canadian neighbours, defined by the newspapers as the enemy Other. What the play achieves is a “shattering” of the widespread assumption that the First World War was a conflict that took place overseas and unified the nation as a just and homogenous entity.

Historian Jean Provencher and playwright Gilles Lachance’s *Québec, Printemps 1918* similarly draws attention to conflict at home in order to undercut the representation of the Great War as righteous, moral, and unifying. Chapter four, ““They were Canadiens’: Reframing the War in *Québec, Printemps 1918*,” centres on Provencher and Lachance’s representation of the Easter Riots of 1918, when the government invoked the War Measures Act and the military invaded Quebec in order to quell anti-conscription riots. This courtroom drama and adaptation of an actual coroner’s report illustrates that the government’s invocation of the War Measures Act and the military’s reading of the Riot Act on Easter weekend 1918 framed Quebecers as unlawful citizens and enemies of the state because they opposed conscription and threatened the War effort. This framing legitimated the military’s use of violence to subdue Quebecers and quell the protests. The play recalls this injustice—and sets it in the context of 1970s intra-Canadian politics—while also publicly remembering, reframing, and mourning the four individuals who were killed on home terrain by the Canadian military.

Chapter five examines Wendy Lill's *The Fighting Days*, a play that further calls attention to the way in which the First World War provoked conflicts on home soil, in particular between leading members of the Manitoba Women's Movement. The play's first act illustrates that prior to and during the War, many feminist pacifists were actively engaged in a fight for women's rights and social reforms and, despite ideological differences, stood as a united front. The play's second act, however, charts the dissolution of this unity in the later years of the War. Ultimately, it illustrates the way in which the War's onset and, in particular, its continuation divided the Women's Movement into two warring factions: those who supported the War, the oppression of perceived "foreign" threats in Canada, and conscription; and those who opposed the militarization of Canada. The play thus remembers Canada's fighting women prior to and during the War, undermining the stereotypical assumption of female passivity and attesting to the War's impact on women's organizations.

* * *

In their return to little-known home-front history, playwrights Kevin Kerr, Trina Davies, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Jean Provencher, Gilles Lachance, and Wendy Lill open up the traditional, popular imaginary of the War as an overseas military conflict, redefining it as a pervasive force that shaped all aspects of Canadian life, both domestically and internationally. By focusing on social-domestic experiences of the War and by channelling silenced voices from the past, such as those of women, injured soldiers, children, and minorities, they illustrate the extent to which many Canadians experienced the War as something less than a romanticized birth and forging of national identity. At the same time, their work attests to Canadians' continued preoccupation with the War;

what their work reveals is that, contrary to First World War veteran Will Bird's assumption, which I quote in the epigraph to this chapter, the War remains of utmost "interest to the existing generations." The plays, read collectively, suggest that even if Canadians wanted to "bury forever . . . everything regarding the Great War" (W. Bird), this would prove impossible, for Canadians remain fixated upon its memory.

CHAPTER ONE

Kevin Kerr's *Unity (1918)*: The Influenza Outbreak and the Uncanny Germ(an)s at Home

The disease cut a swath across the country.

–Pierre Berton, *Marching as to War*

The story of the nether millstone, epidemic disease, is infinitely less glamorous to recall; there were few heroes, no medals, and no monuments to glorify the dead.

–Maureen K. Lux, “‘The Bitter Flats’: The 1918 Influenza Epidemic in Saskatchewan”

Kevin Kerr's Governor General Award-winning two-act play, *Unity (1918)* (2002), offers a graphic, yet strangely comic, portrayal of an “infected” Canadian home front. The play, which was “developed as part of Touchstone Theatre's Playwright in Residence Program during the 1999/2000 season” and “at the Banff Centre *playRites 2000* playwrights colony” (Kerr 7), premiered in Vancouver at Touchstone Theatre in 2001. Unlike the other plays feature in this thesis, *Unity (1918)* did not premiere near its setting (Unity, Saskatchewan). This might be because the play offers a powerful universal commentary on the ways in which war and disease can unsuspectingly infiltrate any wide, expansive, and isolated prairie space and disrupt harmonious communal relations. The play's universal appeal, as well as its merging of dark humour and tragic, moving dramatic moments, might explain why the play has had a wealth of professional and amateur productions, including three in French.

What is so evocative about Kerr's play, however, is that it not only reproduces the infection metaphor, commonly featured in other Canadian plays about the Great War, but also literalizes this figuration by centring on the “Spanish” influenza, a viral infection

carried home by soldiers. Kerr locates an infectious outbreak in Unity, a small, rural Saskatchewan town that functions as a microcosm for the “unified” Canadian home front. This literal figuration enables Kerr to unearth important history obliterated by the events and climax of the First World War. At the same time, the metaphorical representation of the influenza as a wartime enemy, littering Canadian terrain with corpses, allows him to explore the collective wartime fears that were amplified and made apparent by the sudden outbreak of disease at home. As social theorist Susan Sontag explains, the metaphorical imaging of illness, especially in martial terms, reflects a cultural need to assimilate unknown, unexplainable manifestations of disease. This is certainly true in *Unity (1918)*, where the characters use military metaphors in order to understand the highly destabilizing viral presence.

The militarized figuration of influenza in *Unity (1918)* also reveals the collective fears of invasion and “contamiNation,” which permeate the wartime home space. “ContamiNation,” as literary critic Marc Prieve explains, describes “not only the epidemic infections of a single body, but also connotes the process of making impure, by contact or mixture, on a collective, cultural level” (400). The characters’ individual fear of corporeal infection, and of the concomitant breakdown of subjectivity such infection represents, speaks to larger, national fears of Germ(an) infiltration and cultural decimation. The fight against the influenza thus comes to symbolize the attempt to defend the newly conceived, homogenous nation from the “contamiNat[ing]” enemy Other. This fight also locates warring at home: corpses come to litter Canadian terrain, civilians engage in intra-communal in-fighting, and the home front comes to be a site of illness, devastation, conflict, and death. This invalidates the conventional understanding of the

home space as an idyllic refuge from war; ultimately, it reveals the home front to be an “unhomely” space (in the Freudian sense) that is both familiar and threateningly unfamiliar. It also reveals the tenuous nature of the borders of self and home and suggests that border regulation by military means is futile, simply a means of social control rather than of protection against a threatening outside world of warfare.

I) The “Spanish” Influenza

Kerr’s characterization of the influenza as an enemy invokes the influenza’s place in World War I history as a graphic example of the War’s pervasive spread. The influenza, however, receives little mention in historical accounts of the Great War despite the War’s intrinsic link to the pandemic. The influenza’s origin, for example, remains unknown, partially as a result of the frequency of military movement in 1918. There are indications that it may have originated in North America and/or China—rather than in Spain. Historians Howard Philips and David Killingray explain that “[t]hroughout Europe the outbreak was widely known as ‘Spanish flu’ because Spain was neutral in the First World War and, unlike the belligerent powers, news reports were uncensored. In the popular mind calamities often need to have their origin and cause identified and other countries or peoples credited with blame” (7). Phillips and Killingray also note that the first report of infection appears to have been in the United States in March of 1918; this was quickly followed with accounts of infectious outbreaks throughout the world. The first wave of influenza appears to have spread to Europe from the United States, then to Asia, North Africa, a larger part of North America (including Canada), and finally to Australia. The mortality rate for this first outbreak, which lasted until July of 1918,

remained relatively low. The virus mutated, however, and a “second and highly lethal wave” began to decimate the population in August of 1918. In early 1919, a third wave circulated on a much lesser scale (Phillips & Killingray 5; see also Patterson and Pyle 4).

The close proximity of soldiers, in addition to constant local and international military conveyance, enabled transmission of infection at an unprecedented pace (Phillips & Killingray 6; Patterson & Pyle 10). The soldiers’ weakened immune systems, as a result of malnourishment, battle stress, and chemical warfare, may also have contributed to their susceptibility to disease. Though exact mortality rates remain unknown, it is estimated that the influenza pandemic left 20 to 100 million people dead, a mortality rate significantly higher than that of World War I where there were “9.2 million combat deaths and around 15 million total deaths” (Kolata 7). In many places, mortality statistics were not kept, and “efforts at tabulating flu deaths were complicated by the fact that there was no definitive [influenza] test [sic]” (Kolata 7). What remains evident is that the mortality rates for the 1918-19 influenza are significantly higher than those of any other pandemics (Patterson and Pyle 4). Death could be sudden, with the infected person collapsing without visible symptoms, or gradual, with the patient experiencing weakness, chills, severe head and limb pain, fever, the coughing of blood, nose bleeding, and cyanosis. Bacteria frequently filled the lungs and made them fluid-like, often resulting in pneumonia and other lasting respiratory problems.

Canadians began to experience these symptoms in June of 1918, following infectious soldiers’ movements out of Europe and across the Canadian nation. As Pierre Berton explains, the spread of the influenza “was an indirect result of the war in Europe as troopships brought infected soldiers to Canadian shores and railways scattered them

from Nova Scotia to British Columbia” (*Marching* 218). Similarly to other countries, three notable waves took place: a “relatively mild” one in June of 1918, a “disastrous” one in October of 1918, and a second minor case in February and March of 1919 (Berton, *Marching* 218). By 1919, the influenza had “affected one in every six Canadians,” claimed the lives of “between thirty thousand and fifty thousand” people (Pettigrew 6), most of whom were “between the ages of twenty and forty” (Berton, *Marching* 220), and left others with lasting cardiovascular and respiratory illness. This resulted in significant socio-economic disruptions as many children were left orphaned and without means of support. Businesses came to lose profit either as a result of declined demand for products due to population decrease or as a result of their inability to meet produce demands with limited work forces.

In Saskatchewan, the epidemic not only disrupted socio-economic relations but also incited a public health crisis, which called for an examination of “[w]ho was responsible for disease control” (Lux 4). As historian Maureen K. Lux explains, “[w]hen the epidemic struck, the federal government passed responsibility to the provincial governments, that then relied on the municipalities, who in turn encouraged all citizens to be vigilant in protecting themselves” (4). A provincial Order-in-Council identified the influenza as a “‘crowd disease’ that could be spread by casual contact” (Lux 4) and mandated that it was “to be reported, isolated, and placarded” (Lux 4). Placards warned against entry into infected homes and, at times, led to social stigmatization and financial ruin. Municipalities also implemented other restrictive, locally enforced policies such as railroad limitations and the public closure of places of amusement, schools, churches, and public meeting places. As transmission continued, despite these restrictive policies,

provincial health problems became more apparent, especially those in rural areas. In an apt war metaphor, Lux explains that, “[w]hile urban Saskatchewan relied on physicians, nurses, and hospitals to treat the influenza patients, and charitable institutions and volunteers to slow the spread of disease, rural Saskatchewan was virtually unarmed in the fight against influenza” (7). Because only “thirty-four percent” of the province’s total hospital beds were delegated to rural areas, despite the fact that “eighty-seven percent of the province’s population lived in the country (Lux 7), rural residents received little to no medical attention aside from what family members could provide. Reserves were also isolated from medical facilities, and the death toll of Native people residing in these areas was significantly higher than that of the non-Native population in Saskatchewan (Lux 10).

Despite the high mortality rates for the 1918-19 influenza, the pandemic remains little known. Certainly, the short span of the outbreak, less than a year in total, and its occurrence in the early 20th century when people commonly experienced other pandemic diseases such as typhoid, yellow fever, diphtheria, and cholera may have contributed to its disappearance from collective memory. Philips and Killingray contend that the disease’s coincidence with “the climax of the First World War, when there had been a mass killing on an unprecedented scale,” has contributed to its absence from historical material (11). They also note that “[i]n Europe, predictably, it was the ‘glorious dead’ who were foremost in the public mind and the names of those ‘fallen in war’”—rather than those who had died of the influenza—“were recorded on national and local war memorials” (11-12). As they explain, “[b]y its very ubiquity, even when it came in unparalleled force, influenza and its victims were not a subject for public mourning or

memorials” (12). In Canada, there are no memorials specifically designated to those who died of the influenza, and there are only two history books entirely devoted to the subject.²⁵

II) Disease, Militaristic Imagining, and the Fear of “ContamiNation”

Unity (1918) not only contributes to the remembering of the influenza in Canada but also considers the social responses to the sudden, unexplainable materialization of infection at home. In Sontag’s *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, she considers the various figurations employed in public and medical discourse on fear-provoking diseases such as tuberculosis, syphilis, cancer, and AIDS. She calls for a full renunciation of illness metaphors as they associate the manifestation of disease with a patient’s psychological state and undermine the scientific understanding of illness at an essential level. However, as Sontag explains, the social function of metaphors

²⁵ There is very little mention of the influenza outbreak in Canadian historical texts and in literature; however, there are historical books devoted to the subject. See, for example, Eileen Pettigrew’s *The Silent Enemy: Canada and the Deadly Flu of 1918* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983), Eyllt Wynne Jones’ *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007), and Mark Osborne Humphries’ *The Last Plague: Spanish Influenza and the Politics of Public Health in Canada* (forthcoming 2012). Aside from Wallace Stegner’s *On a Darkling Plain*, the influenza does not surface in many Canadian novels. Stegner, who resided in Eastend, Saskatchewan between 1917 and 1921 and recovered from the influenza during this time, explores the effects of the epidemic on a small Saskatchewan community. The protagonist, Vickers, loses his romantic interest to the influenza, before he falls ill. From his cot in a schoolhouse/hospital housing influenza patients, he describes a macabre scene: a “pallid” grimacing young woman mourns the recent loss of her fiancé (222), and a mother attempts to calm her young son as “[b]lood burst[s] from his nose” and covers his nightgown (223). L.M. Montgomery’s *Rilla of Ingleside*, set between 1914 and 1918, does not include accounts of the influenza—despite the fact that Montgomery experienced the outbreak firsthand. Though she recovered from the influenza, her cousin Frederica Campbell Montgomery, to whom the book is dedicated, did not. In Frances Itani’s *Deafening*, Grania, the novel’s protagonist, is stricken with influenza; though she eventually recovers, her grandmother dies.

complicates this renunciation process. Metaphorical thinking enables a person to assimilate the destabilizing and unknown, especially in relation to “[a]ny important disease whose causality is murky” (*Illness* 58). Cancer, for example, which continues to be “understood as mysterious, a disease with multiple causes” (*Illness* 85), has come to be conceived almost primarily in figurative terms.

Sontag also observes that the primary metaphors used to explain “mysterious” diseases are military in nature. According to Sontag, the discourse of cancer, in particular, is replete with these figurations:

[C]ancer cells do not simply multiply; they are ‘invasive.’ (‘Malignant tumors invade even when they grow very slowly,’ as one textbook puts it.) Cancer cells ‘colonize’ from the original tumor to far sites in the body, first setting up tiny outposts (‘micrometastases’) whose presence is assumed, though they cannot be detected. Rarely are the body’s ‘defenses’ vigorous enough to obliterate a tumor that has established its own blood supply and consists of billions of destructive cells. However ‘radical’ the surgical intervention, however many ‘scans’ are taken of the body landscape, most remissions are temporary; the prospects are that ‘tumor invasion’ will continue, or that rogue cells will eventually regroup and mount a new assault on the organism. (*Illness* 64-65)

Sontag also notes that military metaphors pervade the language of cancer treatment and that these metaphors evoke graphic images of open, aggressive martial attack:

“[r]adiotherapy uses the metaphor of aerial warfare; patients are ‘bombarded’ with toxic rays. And chemotherapy is chemical warfare, using poisons. Treatments aim to ‘kill’ cancer cells” (*Illness* 65). Certainly, at the time of the influenza’s appearance, similar

metaphors were employed to speak of the unexplainable outbreak. As historian Heather MacDougall observes, newspapers of the time wrote of the influenza as “just another battle that we [Canadians] have to fight” (qtd. in Branswell). Titles such as *Invasion by Virus: Can It Happen Again?*, *The Silent Enemy: Canada and the Deadly Flu of 1918*, and *Hunting the 1918 Flu: One Scientist's Search for a Killer Virus* suggest the continued place of these metaphors in more contemporary discussions of the illness.

Though Sontag argues against the use of all figurative language in illness discourse, she is particularly eager to see the military metaphor “retired” (*Illness* 182). As she explains, “[i]t overmobilizes, it overdescribes, and it powerfully contributes to the excommunicating and stigmatizing of the ill” (*Illness* 182). Namely, “[t]he metaphor implements the way particularly dreaded diseases are envisaged as an alien ‘other,’ as enemies are in modern war; and the move from the demonization of the illness to the attribution of fault to the patient is an inevitable one, no matter if patients are thought of as victims” (*Illness* 99). She calls for a complete rejection of this language and suggests the employment of new terms such as “‘immune competence’” (*Illness* 87). Cultural critic Donna Haraway echoes this thinking in “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse” where she examines the way in which conceptions of the immune system “construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the crucial realms of the normal and the pathological” (4). These conceptions involve “fantasies of the utterly defended self in a body as automated, militarized factory” (18). Like Sontag, she encourages a new “oppositional/alternative/liberatory approach” to immune discourse (25). Anthropologist Emily Martin also adds to this line of thinking in “Toward an Anthropology of Immunology: The Body

as Nation State.” She argues that the main immune system image (in the United States) remains “the body as a nation state at war over its external borders, containing internal surveillance systems to monitor foreign intruders” (410). In this image, the immune system represents the “self” and illness the “non-self,” which must be attacked and killed off. Postcolonial critic Helen Tiffin argues that “the very invocation of such metaphors – ‘patrol; boundaries; border’ – propels us into militarism; into defence, war and aggression; into attack on others and on disease; into invasion, conquests and colonisations” (46). This not only naturalizes militarized thinking but also, as Martin speculates, “domesticate[s] violence” and “make[s] violent destruction seem ordinary and part of the necessity of daily life” (417). Certainly, in *Unity (1918)*, the policing of spatial boundaries, the monitoring of infected and non-infected citizens, and the infighting within the town of Unity exemplify the symbiotic relationship between martial metaphors and militarized behaviour.

The parallel figuration of the immune system/body and the community/nation on guard against “foreign intruders” (Martin 410) and the militarized regulation of both are suggestive of fears of invasion and contamination at both the individual and national level. To “contaminate” is “[t]o render impure by contact or mixture,” and “contamination” suggests a state of “defilement, pollution, infection” (*OED*). In “Bio-Politics and the ContamiNation of the Body in Alejandro Morales’ ‘The Rag Doll Plagues,’” Priewe draws upon this basic definition to develop his concept of “contamiNation.” His term refers not only to the literal manifestation of an epidemic virus in an individual’s body but also to the metaphorical infection of a national body (400). Infection thus stands as a metaphor for Others within a nation, who, as Priewe

observes, have been frequently conceived of as “alien elements” that “infect and ultimately destroy” the “ideal social body” of a nation (397). In *Unity (1918)*, the foreign, infiltrated influenza virus stands as a metaphor for a variety of Canadian Others. On one hand, there is fear of influenza infection and of the disintegration of embodied subjectivity. On the other, there is a more historically specific war-related fear of enemy infiltration and of the breakdown of the incipient Unity/Canadian identity forged in the First World War. Considering that the Canada of 1918 was a relatively new construct (and was occupied by many newly immigrated Canadians), national unity and homogeneity were fairly precarious concepts, particularly vulnerable to threats of “contamiNation” and deterioration.

In *Unity (1918)*, influenza “contamiNation” evokes fear on a personal level because it unsettles the “clean and proper body,” a phrase Julia Kristeva employs throughout *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* to designate the well-defined autonomous embodied subject and, by extension, the distinct body of a community or nation. The influenza in *Unity* therefore operates in much the same manner as the Kristevan “abject.” Kristeva defines this term as that which is “opposed to *P*” (1) and as “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous,” which “disturbs identity, system, [and] order” (4). Though Kristeva’s discussion centres primarily on the maternal entity,²⁶ she also extends her analysis to consider the way in which the corpse is a graphic example of the “abject.” The corpse, which is indivisible from its objects, “the mixtures, alterations, and decay that run through it” (108), “represents fundamental pollution” and must be expelled from plain

²⁶ Kristeva’s discussion centres primarily on the way in which “the *maternal entity*” operates as the “abject” and the way in which “abjection,” in the form of a “violent, clumsy breaking away” (*Powers* 13) from this “‘*object of primal repression*’” (*Powers* 12), enables an infant’s autonomy and subject constitution.

sight (109). In the town of Unity, though corpses are removed from the public domain, “abjection” and full expulsion of the influenza remains incomplete. The silent, invisible “enemy” infiltrates the boundary of the contained Canadian “body,” fusing the deadly foreign Other with the “Canadian” and “Canada.” It thus not only destabilizes the boundaries between subject and object, life and death while gesturing to the tenuous nature of embodiment and borders but also illustrates how quickly individual and communal subjecthood can be undone.

The influenza is thus highly dehumanizing and destabilizing, and this, in turn, heightens its terrifying quality. As Sontag explains, “[b]eing deadly is not in itself enough to produce terror. . . . The most terrifying illnesses are those perceived not just as lethal but as dehumanizing” (*Illness* 126). Initially, Unity’s inhabitants are frightened by the influenza, but they are unaware of its full, devastating effects. What they quickly realize, however, is its alienating capabilities. Though Sontag’s argument focuses on literal cases of physical dehumanization, it is both bodily injury and social stigmatization that come to be feared in Unity. The virus can lead to a physically disintegrated state, whereby self and other, subject and object merge, but it is the social management of the afflicted that is the most unsettling. The character of Michael, for example, is expelled from the living community and treated like “rubbish” (104)—even prior to the full manifestation of his symptoms. All the more frightening is the fact that symptoms are often undetectable; the influenza blurs the boundaries between human and non-human and between ally and enemy. Attempts to identify the “enemy”—as the non-locals, the Germans, the returning soldiers, the mailbags, the letters—are foiled, leaving the community in a constant state of tension.

III) Unsettling the Representation of the Home Front as an Agrarian Refuge

This pervasive state of anxiety allows Kerr to overturn popular early 20th century conceptions of the home front as an idyllic agrarian space. Traditional representations of Canada and the Great War have frequently included “wilderness and agrarian motifs” that identify the Canadian soldier as “a child of nature in harmony with his [home] environment” and as a peace-loving agrarian whose acceptance of the call to enlist signals his resolute desire to protect and preserve an idyllic Canada (Vance 140). These motifs promulgate a dichotomous understanding of the “pacific” home front and the “militarized” European war front (Vance 140). This dichotomous reasoning had purpose, enabling soldiers to endure the hardships of war, as they believed the horror was temporary and that they would soon return to the peaceful space of home. Later, it offered them a means to justify atrocious acts committed in war, as these acts were undertaken for the protection of “home” (Goldstein 301). However, this conception failed to account for and acknowledge what was, at times, a horrific wartime home front.

The circulating immigration literature of the late 1800s and early 1900s may also have contributed to the understanding of the Canadian West as an agrarian idyll. British Columbia’s 1871 entry into Confederation with Canada prompted the government’s launch of the western settlement phase of its nation-building policy, a project that would enable Canada’s movement “from colony to nation” (Owram 3). Clifford Sifton, appointed Minister of the Interior in 1896, began a large-scale immigration campaign that promoted a romanticized image of the prairies and initiated a significant wave of immigration. Speaking specifically of Saskatchewan, Dale Eisler explains that “[t]he forces of nationalism were such that settling the province, establishing a farm economy

and society as part of a national east-west economy were more important than pure truth” (71-72). Thus, despite reports that expressed doubt about Saskatchewan’s suitability for agricultural settlement, a myth emerged identifying the province as “a promised land of abundance and opportunity for all” (Eisler 72). This myth, circulated in government propaganda along with the offer of one-hundred and sixty acres of free (promised) land to prospective settlers, prompted a ten-fold population increase²⁷ and produced a highly skewed vision of the Canadian prairies on an international level.

Though Unity, at times, resembles the peaceful agrarian refuge figured in war discourse and immigration literature, it is also distinctly “uncanny.” It frequently reveals itself to be a place of concealment, housing the lurking “enemy,” abject bodies, and socially terrifying deaths that belie its mythic aspect. In Freudian analysis, the “uncanny” refers to an incongruous merging of the familiar with the foreign, which elicits an unsettled feeling of discomfort. Freud derives the term “uncanny” from its German counterpart, “*unheimlich*,” which literally translates as “unhomely.” To further understand this term, he examines the dual, ambiguous meaning of “*heimlich*,” noting “that among its different shades of meaning the word ‘*heimlich*’ [homely] exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, ‘*unheimlich*’ [unhomely]. What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*” (224). As Freud explains, this suggests that the term “belongs to two sets of ideas . . . on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight” (224-25). The uncanny thus consists of “homeliness uprooted,” as literary critic Nicholas Royle interprets it, and of “the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home” (1). To a certain

²⁷ “From 1901 to the 1930s,” the population grew “from 91,000 to 931,000” (Eisler 73).

extent, the “uncanny” is thus like the Kristevan “abject,” which despite rejection and repression, nevertheless reappears and/or recurs, making that which is familiar suddenly foreign and unsettling ideas of rational control and subjective coherence.

Without question, Unity is made foreign by the sudden influenza outbreak, which litters the home front with the unsightly presence of diseased and deceased bodies. Prior to the outbreak, “abject” bodies were systematically removed from public view and, most often, concealed within the subterranean mortuary space; however, the rampant spread of disease in wartime nullifies this process, fully exposing the myth of the idyllic, insulated home front and laying bare its “uncanny” nature. The influenza itself is a particularly “uncanny” element within the wartime home space; it is at once the familiar, seasonal influenza, yet it is also a mutated, foreign, lethal version of it. Furthermore, it is an enemy, but not the recognizable one assumed in war discourse. Rather, it is a spectral “enemy” that occupies without fully altering the space of home. Community members thus remain within the familiar terrain of Unity, but, within this space, they experience significant somatic and ontological fears of disintegration that parallel those of a nation during wartime. What makes Kerr’s “uncanny” characterization of the “enemy” and of the home front in Canada especially unique, however, is that it reveals war, like epidemic infection, to be an uncontrollable force that resists all means of repression and control. It penetrates and devastates all individual, communal, and national boundaries and borders of human experience, whether physical or metaphorical, and demonstrates the impossibility of Canadian insulation from war—both then and now.

IV) *Unity* (1918)

In *Unity* (1918), though the “enemy” does not come to fully occupy Unity until the play’s second act, Kerr immediately undercuts the mythic conception of the prairies, situating Unity within an oppressive wartime atmosphere. The Prologue opens with the technological sound of a “*threshing machine*,” articulated as “[a] *distant horrible roar*” (11). This enigmatic, mechanized sound, slightly reminiscent of First World War machinery, begins in “[d]arkness” (11), emphasizing the ambiguous nature of the threshing machine. This, along with the play’s 1918 context, enables the sound to take on a dual meaning: namely, as a metaphorical reference to the Great War, when the first forms of technological warfare took place, and as a literal representation of the highly dangerous, but effective, threshing machines on Canadian terrain. Kerr’s specification that the sound is “*distant*” is thus highly contradictory; as he comes to show, the agrarian idyll is neither distanced from machinery, violence, and horror, nor insulated from the War. What the ambiguous thresher sound suggests is an incongruous clash of agrarian space with machinery, of Europe with Canada, and of war front with home front within Unity.

The scene that follows the ominous threshing sound appears to expand the distance between war front and home front; however, the War constantly lurks at the peripheries of Unity, hinting of its impending occupation. As the “[l]ights slowly rise” (11), illuminating the public world of Unity, the protagonist, Bea, appears, writing in her diary, which presumably would be spoken in voice over. As a civilian woman with a Canadian accent, she instantly reinstates her home setting as distanced and alienated from the War overseas. Her narration and flashback to her twenty-first birthday party, complete with singing and “*party hats*” (11), colour Unity as a joyful, picturesque space distinctly

different from Europe where the Canadians Corps were in the throes of the Hundred Days campaign, a series of high casualty offensives on the Western front that contributed to the Allies' success.

Kerr further develops this contrast with the romantic relationship of Mary, a Unity civilian, and Richard, a Unity soldier positioned overseas. Kerr characterizes Mary as a kind of Penelope, awaiting the return of her fiancé from war. She is thus emblematic of what Jean Bethke Elshtain in *Women and War* deems “[t]he noncombatant female,” those who “[represent] home and hearth” (xiii). Richard, on the other hand, represents martial masculinity in contrast to Mary’s domestic femininity. As his letter to Mary recounts, he “killed a German with his bare hands” in his military adventure overseas (12). In wartime and postwar Canada, this martial violence would have been widely considered as a means to protect civilization from German barbarism and home from German infiltration and seizure. Certainly Mary’s comfortable position in Unity, at this point in the play, suggests the value of Canadian soldiers’ efforts overseas.

The spread of the influenza to Canada, however, complicates this heroism and suggests that Canadian soldiers’ contribution to the War effort overseas did not secure the safety of those at home. Richard, who suffers from what he perceives to be the familiar, seasonal “flu” (12), becomes bedridden and eventually dies from his influenza infection. As Kerr subtly suggests, his death emotionally and physically comes to wound those in Unity. Mary receives a black-bordered telegram announcing Richard’s death, and she immediately “*recoils*” (67), a significant reaction since, unbeknownst to Mary, the telegram itself is a potential carrier of disease. When she interrogates telephone operators Rose and Doris about this news, they immediately explain to her that Richard died a

“hero” (70), initially focusing on his employment as a soldier rather than on the reason for his death. Similarly, the telegraph announcing the death of the Spooner boy overseas omits his cause of death, but celebrates his contribution to the nation. As Doris explains, “[t]he usual, gave his life for King and Country, honorably in service,” despite the fact that he did not engage in active warfare (19). This death, most likely of “pneumonia” (19), nonetheless overshadows that of Ardell’s in childbirth, reported only minutes earlier. Doris, in fact, appears to momentarily forget about Ardell’s death in the wake of the news from overseas:

Rose: I’ll ring Millie.

Doris: Well, wait ’til this is delivered.

Rose: No, about Ardell.

Doris: Oh, yes. So sad. (19)

As these responses reveal, a soldier’s willingness to sacrifice himself for “King and Country,” demonstrated by his enlistment, secures him a certain degree of respect, regardless of his actual contribution to the War effort. While this honour is rightfully accorded, as Kerr illustrates, it problematically leads to the romanticization of the Canadian soldier and to the erasure of the way in which heroic enlistment contributed to mass-scale illness in Canada.

Bea, like Doris and Rose, conceives of the Canadian soldier in highly romantic terms. In a scene entitled “A Dream,” Bea “*surveys the night*” and “*a very handsome teenaged boy appears, shirtless . . . He holds a bundle of letters*” (20-21). Bea twice inquires, “Glen?” (21), assuming he is an overseas Unity soldier, but the apparition, textually specified to be Michael, a hired farmhand, does not answer. He simply asks her

name and states, “[y]ou waited” (21). This last line reveals Bea’s expectation of a union with the long-awaited soldier and the extent of her inability to reconcile reality with her romanticization of the War. Glen, for example, is stationed in Europe and is completely unaware of Bea’s affection. Furthermore, he is not the man present in the dream; the man carrying the letters is Michael, Unity’s first victim of the influenza epidemic. As Michael and the letters are later shown to be carriers of the influenza, this apparition foreshadows the illness and death that are being conveyed to Canadian terrain. It also suggests that the Canadian soldier was distinctly “uncanny”— a virulent contaminating Other in the shape of a familiar heroic figure.

When a soldier actually materializes in Unity, the community remains unaware of his potentially contaminating presence, and they warmly attempt to welcome him home; however, as Kerr reveals, home is not entirely a idyllic sanctuary from the War. “*Near the train station,*” Kerr juxtaposes the youthful Bea, Sissy, and Mary, “*carrying makeshift bouquets made from wheat shafts,*” with Ardell’s corpse, awkwardly positioned within a “*wheelbarrow*” (34). Though the young women resemble the mythic Demeter, goddess of agriculture, frequently pictured with a similar bouquet, and inflect Unity with a romantic, agrarian quality, the hearse-like “*wheelbarrow*” infects the atmosphere with the grim reality of death and leaves the group in “*awkward silence*” (34). The train whistle disrupts the tension, however, and “[e]veryone eagerly looks toward the platform” (34) in anticipation of the heroic figure’s entrance.

Kerr plots this return dramatically; a single soldier appears through the steam of the train, but his identity is shrouded (34). Just as home reveals itself to be a tenuous construct, so too does the romantic image of the soldier. In a moment of dramatic irony,

an unknown soldier appears who bears little resemblance to Bea's Glen/Michael apparition. Rather, "*he is blind (with his eyes still bandaged). . . . He takes a step forward and falls face-first off the platform*" (34-35). He jokes, "[i]t's not quite as flat as I was told it would be" (35). Though Mary attempts to welcome him to Unity by offering him her agrarian bouquet, this gesture is lost on Hart, who assumes she has handed him "a broom" (36). Kerr further subverts the soldier's return home by positioning him and the other characters in a moving tableau vivant, "*a strange procession*" (36) that resembles a funeral cortège. The procession includes "*STAN pushing Ardell in the wheelbarrow, the blind soldier following with one hand on STAN's shoulder to guide him, the three girls with their wheat bouquets*" (36). To this, Kerr adds "*a haunting Ukrainian funeral song*" (36).²⁸

Though it is primarily Ardell's corpse that contributes to the tableau's macabre quality, Hart, who is blind and possibly infectious, remains a graphic reminder of the horror of the War and an unsightly figure within the landscape of the town. Bea, however, innocently characterizes Hart in romantic terms: "[a] soldier. A wounded soldier. So beautiful, so horribly beautiful" (37). From him, she craves "contact with that other world" and longs for "[a] war story" (37) akin to the narratives of "Canadian Bravery" featured in newspapers (49, 96). Hart, however, disappoints her, as his "war story" neither takes place in the "other world" nor features battle heroics, but rather centres on the influenza outbreak in Halifax. The fact that the influenza is "coming this

²⁸ This is the second time Hart finds himself within a grim home atmosphere. Initially, he returned to Halifax, a city made distinctly "unhomely" by the Halifax Explosion and the influenza epidemic. As Hart explains, one of his brothers "got blown up last year when the city exploded" (59), and his mother and other brother died of the "flu" (58-59).

way” (38), as Hart reports, also suggests that there is no “other world” and that the War, like the influenza, has no boundaries. It also hints that Bea’s naiveté will be shortly undercut by her own experience of the War, which she will experience first hand in the form of her desired “contact”— though this “contact” will take the shape of a deadly, foreign virus. This ominous foreshadowing coincides with the sudden fall of Ardell’s corpse from the wheelbarrow (38), and the reminder of this deathly presence at home leaves the group in “*shocked silence*” (38), not only as a result of the awkwardness of the situation but also because it reminds the characters of the tenuous division between life and death, safety and vulnerability, especially in wartime.

Kerr remains focused on the presence of death on the home front, examining the intra-psychic anxieties it provokes and the means by which these fears are mitigated. He explores Sunna’s function as the town mortician and the way in which her work, primarily her systematic removal of corpses from public view, assuages the climate of fear around her. As Kristeva explains, the corpse is highly unsettling to a subject because it is indivisible from its objects and that which must be “permanently thrust aside in order to live” (*Powers* 3). It is thus evocative of the maternal state, where the subject was neither autonomous and distinct nor a part of the Symbolic. The fact that Ardell has died in childbirth highlights this ambivalence by positing the maternal body as pure object. Kerr further highlights this idea by creating a parallel between the maternal body, “*the [Kristevan] ‘object’ of primal repression*” (*Powers* 12), and the mortuary space, which houses Unity’s corpses. The mortuary has an earthly, grotto-like quality, suggested by its windowless structure (40), its “*dripping sound*” (57), and its “[s]our milk” smell (83). Within this “abject,” threshold space, closed to the citizens of Unity, Sunna performs her

duties, which as she explains, prevent “the bod[ies] from rotting” and from later “stinking up the church” (45)—that is, they shroud the human body/corpse from its condition as decaying matter. Kerr illustrates the way in which Sunna undertakes this process not only with Ardell but also with Alfred Spooner, who “[f]ell in front of the mower” (64). Sunna reconstitutes his decapitated corpse (65), so that it resembles a “clean and proper body” and so that “his mother can look at him” (65). By dramatizing the inner workings of the mortuary space where corpses are concealed and/or made less anxiety-provoking, Kerr disturbs the history of home in wartime, gesturing to the processes which initially enabled its erasure.

Though both the corpses and the influenza virus are unsettling to the citizens of Unity, the influenza is to a greater degree, namely because it is neither containable nor easily detectable. Unlike the corpse, it resists “abjection” and remains an unrelenting source of unease. As Bea explains, the rampant influenza spread to Canada leaves “[everyone] scared,” especially after it “*hit[s]* Regina” (emphasis added 49). Bea’s evocation of images of aerial attack suggests her conflation of the influenza virus with the German enemy. This imagery also reflects the way in which Bea assimilates the unknown and makes tangible the invisible and unexplainable threat within her midst. By also identifying the town’s inhabitants as “Canadians,” in opposition to the Germ(an) threat, Bea further secures a sense of empowerment in the face of the unknown. To comfort the anxiety-ridden Mary, for example, Bea reads from “More Tales of Canadian Bravery,” which features the narrative of a Canadian captain who successfully surmounts his wartime fears:

A captain of a mounted rifle battalion, when his men were being decimated by

machine gun fire, although wounded in the head and gassed, dashed forward alone into an enemy machine gun nest and armed only with rifle and bayonet, killed four and took eight prisoners. His magnificent bravery turned imminent defeat into victory. (49-50)

Bea encourages Mary to similarly “[turn] . . . defeat into victory” and to engage in her own act of “Canadian Bravery” (49). She rallies Mary, saying, “we just have to be brave like a soldier” (50).

The adoption of this type of martial language at home eventually leads to the normalization of military practices, which isolate the “healthy” core Unity/Canadian community from the “infected.” Within this martial climate, a law is passed, designating the influenza as a “‘reportable’ disease” (51). This law, as Doris explains, “means you have to report / occurrences of . . . [the influenza] to the health authorities” (51). It also supports the use of placards to designate the “infected” and to enforce their quarantine (51). Mrs McNulty, who questions Doris about the disease-control policies, considers “why you’d report the flu in your house if it means that suddenly everyone avoids you like you have the plague” (52). This line of reasoning would have been of central concern to German Canadians on home terrain during the First World War. Many, instead of reporting to officials as Germans, changed their names and ethnic identities in order to secure their place within the core Canadian community imagined in the War. For Doris, however, denial of an “infected” state suggests social irresponsibility. As she explains, it remains a citizen’s “duty” to report such insubordinate behaviour (52). “Duty” at home thus evokes martial service overseas where Canadians actively war against an external “enemy,” yet it also includes monitoring and reporting signs of treason, disobedience,

and enemy presence within.

Unity's martial climate and fear of Germ(an) invasion intensify after reports of nearby "towns decimated by the disease" with "[s]o many deaths" and "[s]o many sick and unable to work" (72). Unity adopts more significant security measures, and these measures, as Kerr illustrates, suggest a vestige of a "garrison mentality" still present within the community's psyche. Like the early small and isolated Canadian garrison communities, who erected physical and psychological barriers against the threat of a menacing force (Frye 14), Unity ensures the protection of its insular community by similar means. As Bea explains, "[t]he town has been quarantined. Not because of illness, but because of fear of illness. No one is allowed to enter or leave. . . . Trains have been ordered not to stop. No pick ups or deliveries. The mail is piled outside of town and will be burned later" (72). Community members enforce these restrictions, believing that "*Unity* will not be victim to this disease" (emphasis added 72). However, as the inhabitants recognize, the invisible "enemy" may already be located within, thus they heighten internal surveillance as a means to further ensure bodily and community unity. They encourage one another to "[k]now the enemy" (73) and to remain on guard for potential signs of "infection" within. Their "garrison mentality" thus manifests as intra-communal suspicion, and, though it offers them a means to cope with fears of contamination and disintegration, it also ruptures the social harmony of the community.

The "enemy," however, undermines all defensive strategies by locating itself within Michael. As Bea explains, "[h]ow it was that Michael caught the flu I guess we'll never know. But when he did he spoiled the whole reason for a town quarantine. The enemy was in our midst" (77). This invisible "enemy," as Bea recounts, affirms its presence by

violently striking Michael down:

It was in the middle of the field...mid-pitch. That stook hit the thresher side on, jammed the whole works and it ground to a halt. It even snapped a belt which whipped back and sliced Mickey Clark's face from ear to chin—lucky it didn't kill him. And everyone froze and looked at Michael. And Michael stared at that side-on stook, just reached towards it. Took one step. And in the gentle breeze he fell and lay silent as the frozen thresher. (77)

The thresher again bridges the world of warfare with that of Unity. Michael's sudden collapse in a "field" (77) alongside this deadly piece of machinery, for example, parallels that of a wounded soldier overseas, falling in battle. However, unlike a wounded soldier, his injury results in his exclusion from the Canadian corps/core. Despite having been "everyone's favorite son" (77), his status as a non-local (78) compounds with his infectious state and renders him an "abject," contaminating presence within Unity. The town's inhabitants thus expel him, and he comes to occupy a liminal space on the train's trajectory between Yorkton, where his family lies "dead from the flu" (78), and Unity, a living, but closed community. As Sissy explains, he is literally treated like "rubbish" (104), finally "dropped off [in Unity]. Rolled in a gray blanket and dead" (78) and immediately claimed by Sunna who repositions him within the mortuary space.

Though Michael's collapse initiates a heightened sense of fear in Unity, even prior to Michael's death, Unity was a menacing place. Earlier in the play, when Sissy and Michael "*crawl into the bushes*" (75), attempting to be the "thing" that the community members are "scared of" (74), they discover that the external, public world is more uncanny than the one which they momentarily inhabit. From their secluded vantage point,

they observe a macabre tableau: “[i]n the distance the haunting Ukrainian funeral song is heard. MARY passes by alone dressed in mourning. Then STAN passes by pushing his empty wheelbarrow. Then DORIS scurries by holding a telegram” (76). Mary, Stan, and Doris, as Michael notes, resemble “ghosts” (76), but even more haunting are the absent-presences of the deceased within the tableau. On stage, as theatre critics Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins explain, “the absent body occupies dramatic, if not always actual, space. It follows, then, that the audience experiences absences as palpable, ‘embodied’ presence,” and this “absence can be extremely unsettling for the viewer” (230). Mary’s mourning clothes stand in for Richard, who died of influenza overseas; the vacant wheelbarrow represents Ardell, who died in childbirth; and, the telegram suggests the death of a soldier overseas. Though the “*empty wheelbarrow*” (76) and the ghostly people undercut the mythic conception of the prairies, the absent-presence of the town’s soldiers gestures to the way in which the War infects home with its grim, yet seemingly distant reality. Kerr expertly uses the “Spanish” influenza to further dramatize this uncanny absence/presence of the War since it is a threat that is invisible and therefore appears absent, thus making it all the more terrifying. The “enemy that we know” is transformed, on the home front, into the “enemy we cannot see.”

Few of the Unity inhabitants recognize this dimension of the home front prior to the influenza’s occupation, which transforms Unity into an invaded territory and exposes its distinctly “uncanny” nature. Though the town of Unity remains virtually unchanged, the spectral “enemy” nevertheless lurks within the streets, infecting and claiming the town’s inhabitants. As the uninfected thus retreat into their homes, Unity comes to resemble a “ghost town” (84). The deserted public space suggests the extensive private

and public anxieties associated with the circulating “enemy,” which has undermined previous assumptions of home front isolation and security. Within the vacant streets of Unity, a character identified as Man 2 attempts to make sense of the sudden desolation around him by affixing blame on the “Germans”: “I read that this flu is uh...might be the Germans” (85). To this, Man 1 comically responds, “[i]s that right. I thought it might be the germs” (85). The second line, depending on an actor’s inflection, would suggest either agreement, with “germs” being a slang term for “Germans,” or opposition, with “germs” literally referring to a virus without origin. After “[a] little laugh,” Man 2 continues to seek a traditional, reassuring form of compartmentalization: “[n]o really, though, some secret weapon they planted on the coast” (85). Similarly to Bea, who earlier conflated the influenza with the German enemy in order to make tangible the invisible threat in her midst, Man 2 scapegoats those of German ancestry, the logical choice in wartime, and holds them responsible for the suffering and deaths of “Canadians.”

However, the “German” was in no way responsible for the significant civilian deaths, thus these casualties faded from collective memory, unacknowledged as an important aspect of Great War history. As Kerr illustrates, deaths from a common, seasonal ailment and a natural cause in domestic spaces were not considered worthy of memorialisation, whereas deaths in the official spaces of the War were. To illustrate this point, Kerr stages two contrasting burial rites for the victims of the influenza: that of Richard, the Canadian soldier overseas, and that of an unnamed Unity civilian. The scene opens with the grieving Mary “*plac[ing] a small cross in the ground*” while “[i]n the background SUNNA is digging a grave. A body rests nearby” (87). Mary offers a memorial service for Richard, celebrating his achievements and contributions to the

nation's participation in the War overseas. She eulogizes, "[d]early beloved, we are gathered here today to pay respect to a brave soldier, a devoted son, and a dear friend who gave his life to protect us from the tyrant. . . . Richard died fighting for his country—the greatest sacrifice, the greatest love after the love of God" (87). The absence of Richard's infected corpse, as Sissy explains, makes for "a strange kind of funeral" (90); however, it also enables Richard to retain a romantic soldier persona, especially in opposition to the repellant, "rubbish"-like corpse near Sunna, which will be "stuffed underground with no one noticing or caring" (104).²⁹ Kerr suggests that Stan's unnamed, deceased infant, which Stan subsequently places alongside the unidentified corpse (91), will similarly receive a quick, standard burial. Though this particular death remains unacknowledged in Unity, its coincidence with the symbolic birth of the nation overseas certainly draws the audience/reader's attention to the high costs of the War and calls into consideration its assumed value as a nation forging event.

The Great War, as historian Jonathan Vance explains, was construed in such a way as to highlight the war's "utility" (9); thus, its narratives were "a complex mixture of fact, wishful thinking, half-truth, and outright invention" (3). Kerr's narrative, however, complicates received assumptions about the symbolic value of the War and instead draws attention to its devastating consequences. It also interrogates the "half-truth[s]" about the War, especially in relation to the "idealized" image of the Canadian soldier (Vance 147). In particular, Kerr problematizes the standard understanding of this figure as "[h]ealthy and vigorous" and as the personification of Canada with "his youthful vitality hint[ing] at

²⁹ Both the unnamed corpse and Michael are treated as abject "rubbish" (104). However, Sissy prevents Michael's continued treatment as such. She explains that she "won't have him stuffed underground with no one noticing or caring" (104).

[Canada's] immense potential in the coming decades" (136). Kerr's portrayal of the returned soldier, Hart, is most noteworthy in this respect, for Hart's transgressive corporeality (as a result of battlefield conditions, chemical warfare, and later influenza infection) subverts the "healthy" image of the soldier. Hart's feet, for example, "were always wet and got a little rotten" (61). His eyes, however, remain the most graphic example of the way in which the War has violated the integrity of the soldier's romanticized body. When Bea unveils Hart's eyes, she involuntarily "*recoils*" (94), and her subsequent failed attempts to anoint his eyes (94-95) suggest that Hart's gassed flesh is "[p]retty messy" (94), likely covered with large, open blisters. Hart's physical defects distort the boundary between the inside and outside of his body and permanently mark him as an "abject" figure within the community, "belonging to the impure, the non-separate, the non-symbolic, the non-holy" (Kristeva, *Powers* 102).

As such, Hart comes to occupy the mortuary, outside of the public world of Unity. Within this private space, Hart begins to reconfigure mainstream representations of soldiers and to unearth their actual experiences overseas. When Bea offers to read him "stories of Canadian bravery" (96), Hart refuses, overtly critiquing their fictive nature:

They're always some stupid story about some stupid guy who's run out of ammunition and wounded in every part of his body, who takes over command after his captain's been killed and somehow runs a mile into enemy territory where, with only a rock and comb, manages to kill seven hundred Germans and take an entire battalion prisoner, who he marches right across the English Channel while getting them all to sing God Save the King. (97)

This narrative primarily conceives of the soldier's undertakings in heroic terms, ignoring

the horrifying details of the soldier's significant, lasting wounds and the surrounding carnage. Hart, however, counters this highly edited tale of soldiering and offers his own narrative of "Canadian bravery," one evoking graphic images of feces and corpses:

[T]hey're never about the guy sitting in a trench with his lousy jammed up standard issue rifle that has only fired one shot before busting with his head between his knees and his pants full of his own shit because he's been there for three days in the same position between the corpses of a couple of guys who looked up when he said "Heads Down." (97)

In Hart's narrative, both the soldier and the trench transgress boundaries between subject and object, the human and non-human. The trench, reminiscent of an animal's burrow, becomes a site where the soldier "strays on the territories of *animal*" (Kristeva, *Powers* 12), and the corpses and feces, which litter this space, mark the ambiguous distinction between the living and non-living. What becomes apparent in Hart's telling of this unedited narrative is that he has not entirely extricated himself from the trench, despite his return to Canadian terrain. In Halifax, he encountered destruction, death, and disease in the aftermath of the explosion and the influenza outbreak, and, in Unity, he occupies the subterranean mortuary, alongside infected and/or deceased subjects of the town, some of whom are casualties of the influenza. His trajectory therefore suggests that the War in no way remained confined to battlefields overseas.

While Hart's trajectory illustrates the War's capacity to transcend spatial boundaries, the play's exploration of the influenza's continued, pervasive presence in Unity in peacetime demonstrates its ability to transcend temporal limits. What the play makes evident is that despite the declaration of armistice overseas, Unity remains in a

state of “war” and, in particular, of “dis-ease” (Coates, “Wish Me Luck” 251). Though Donna Coates uses this term to refer to the psychological and physical discomfort experienced by war brides in Canada (“Wish Me Luck” 251), it also lends itself to the post-war situation in Unity—where illness, fear, death, and warring continue despite public announcements of peace. “[V]ictory” initially produces a sense of camaraderie between the arguing Sissy, Stan, Rose, Sunna, and Bea (104): “*everybody cheers and hugs*” and even “*SISSY joins in the rejoicing and is included by all*” (104). However, this celebratory atmosphere is short-lived as the characters come to remember their continued state of “war” (92, 111, 118, 126). As the stage directions indicate, “[*t*]he group suddenly stops and there is silence except for a howling wind that has come up. Everyone slowly withdraws from each other and masks are produced and donned” (104-05).

These masks function in a similar manner to the gas masks of soldiers worn in the Great War, preventing the entry of threatening, foreign material into the subject’s body. The masks remain in place “at all times,” even throughout the entirety of Unity’s “Victory Day Dance” (105). Other restrictive measures affirm the continued state of “war” in Unity and ensure the safety of the dancers from the circulating “enemy” (and from those already unknowingly infected). A nameless choral figure repeatedly reminds the dancers, “[o]ne yard apart! . . . One yard apart” (106-07). These practices, however, do little to abate the spectral “enemy” who, unbeknownst to the community, occupies the body of the returned Glen, a most welcome presence at the V-Day dance. When Bea finally finds herself in conversation with her beloved, who ironically has married an English woman, he “*moves to hug*” her then “*suddenly sneezes*” (111). Bea thus receives the “contact” (37) she longs for, but in a most undesired form. Though the scene

maintains a highly comic tone, Glen's sneeze gestures to the ruinous effect of the Victory Day celebrations, which "reinvigorated the epidemic" throughout Saskatchewan and which contributed to approximately 2,500 November deaths in the province alone (Lux 9).³⁰

The Unity V-Day dance results in a mass, unprecedented scale of illness that fully initiates Bea into her role as town "nurse" (118),³¹ a role that Bea does not identify with, but rather envisions as a means to fight the "enemy" and "win the war" (118). Though traditional war stories centre on "the heroics or anti-heroics of young men" with "women, if they appear at all, . . . as auxiliaries" (Tylee 3), Kerr subversively employs Bea as the nursing/fighting war heroine engaged in the final days of battle against an influenza virus. Within Unity, domestic spaces become conquered/invaded territories, which Bea enters, risking "enemy" infection, in order to help other "Canadians" such as the Mitchells, the O'Haras, and the Dents (111). Her perilous caregiving thus comes to resemble the "Canadian bravery" of medics and soldiers overseas.

Bea's loyal companions, Sissy and Mary, though not engaged in such acts of heroism, nevertheless share in Bea's wartime experience; therefore, they function much

³⁰ It also reveals the "uncanny" quality of the V-Day dance and of the Canadian soldiers; a celebratory event is revealed to be one of mass infection and the protectors of the nation are, in actuality, contaminants.

³¹ Sunna identifies Bea as Unity's "nurse," and Bea corrects her, saying, "I'm not a nurse" (118). Sunna continues to identify Bea as such, explaining, "it's what you're doing" (118). This subtle dialogue gestures to the way in which the practice of nursing evolved from the time of the epidemic. As Lux explains, "[t]he epidemic . . . stimulated many women to seek change. Those who were expected to treat the sick without any training, experience, or knowledge of medicine were in the forefront of a movement to improve women's understanding of nursing" (11). This movement resulted in women's nurse training in isolated regions (11).

in the same way as a “band of brothers” would within a traditional war narrative.³² For this “band of *sisters*,” 1918 is initially an exciting, romantic time; however, the full manifestation of “war” in Unity forever changes their perspectives. After the V-Day dance, Sissy and Mary fall gravely ill, and Bea attempts to nurse them back to health. Though she succeeds in vanquishing Sissy’s “infection” and in restoring her to health, she witnesses Mary’s painful death. She “*sponges MARY’s head*,” attempting to control Mary’s fever (111), but the “enemy” nevertheless dehumanizes Mary, and she “*begins to convulse and choke*” (112). Mary’s deathly silence prompts Bea’s, who cannot speak of this death or write of it in her journal—though she attempts to do so: “November 18, 1918. P.S. (*pause*) P.S.” (112). Bea’s inarticulateness, coupled with her “cover[ing]” of Mary’s corpse “with a sheet” (112), speaks not only to her significant grief at the loss of a sister figure but also to the way in which influenza deaths came to be erased from collective memory. Like Hart’s macabre unwritten Great War remembrances, Bea’s painful experience remains unspoken and unwritten—not even recorded in the annals of her own Canadian war history. Sunna’s dressing of Mary’s corpse, “in white,” holding “wheat shafts” (120), also contributes to the erasure of “dis-ease” as it recalls Mary’s state prior to her “infection.”

Rather than essentializing women’s experience of wartime/peacetime and assuming the existence of a cohesive sisterhood at home, Kerr complements his “band of sisters” with Sunna, an outsider and anxiety-provoking presence in Unity. In Sissy’s highly fevered state, she identifies Sunna as the “angel of death” (115) and, in doing so,

³² The phrase “band of brothers” first appears in Shakespeare’s St. Crispin’s Day speech in *Henry V*. The term has been redeployed in England and in the Americas, most notably, in recent years, with the release of the HBO mini-series *Band of Brothers*.

articulates the repressed fears that Sunna arouses in her and, perhaps, in the community at large. Sissy's illness makes her particularly hostile to Sunna, whom she associates with the breakdown of subjectivity. Sissy, for example, conceives of the scythe Sunna carries as the grim reaper's staff, used in the collection of bodies (116). She explains to Bea, "[s]he's come for me" (116), then encourages her to take up arms, pleading, "[f]ight for me Bea!" (116). While highly comical, Sissy's faulty perception is also deeply revealing and suggestive of the significant individual and collective psychic anxieties provoked by the influenza "enemy" and those associated with it.

Though Sunna has always been an outsider in the community, the influenza outbreak further contributes to her status as such. Initially, Bea identifies Sunna as "strange" (14), partially as a result of her Icelandic cultural background and employment as the town mortician. However, Sunna's inability to self-identify as Canadian further divides her from Unity's "imagined community," connected by their shared wartime experience. Whereas the heroine Bea finds herself engaged in communal/national defence against a foreign "enemy" threatening to destroy the body politic, Sunna admits, "I don't have a war. Or an enemy" (118). This admittance stems partially from her desire to return "home" (119), which she identifies as "Iceland" (119). Though Sunna literally longs to return to her natal country, her confession and self-identification as a foreigner destabilizes the "Canadian" subjects around her, reminding them of their own tenuously constructed national identity.

Sissy certainly responds to Sunna with animosity, especially after hearing of her desire to return to Iceland. In a voice reminiscent of Canadian expansionist propaganda, she critiques Sunna's rejection of Canada and of Canadian identity: "[s]illy. People don't

go [back] to Iceland. They leave Iceland and come here” (119). Sunna, well aware of the government’s rhetoric, completes Sissy’s assumption, saying, “[b]ecause they think it will be better here” (119). Bea, like Sissy, accepts the truism, responding, “[m]aybe it is” (119), which is heavily ironic considering the mounting death toll and “uncanny” atmosphere of the Canadian homefront. Sunna recognizes that her parents, like Bea and Sissy, subscribe(d) to the government’s propaganda, and she concludes, “I think they meant well by sending me here” (119); however, she also acknowledges that the “here” they expected was an idyllic “New Iceland” (119). Though Sunna’s dislocation from Icelandic culture and language suggests the negation of her parents’ dream, the “war” (and its resulting closed-door policies, invocations of the rhetoric of a uniform national identity, and pervasive fear of foreigners) fully affirms the impossibility of an idyllic promised land in Unity/Canada.

* * *

In the closing scene of *Unity (1918)*, Sissy reads from the final entry in Bea’s diary, her personal Great War history, which concludes with the rather understated statement: “[w]e won the war, so quite a few people feel a little bit relieved about all of that” (126). What this diary extract reveals is that “war” continues to resonate on two levels, referring both to the First World War and to the influenza outbreak. This, ultimately, enables a rethinking of the influenza as a kind of traumatic warfare experienced by Canadians on home soil. Bea’s simple but direct statement highlights this conflation while also marking the “war’s” end and aptly capturing the subdued atmosphere that followed it. Throughout Canada, victory celebrations did not follow the influenza’s termination, and “there were few heroes, no medals, and no monuments to

glorify the dead” (Lux 12). The influenza outbreak thus quickly faded from collective memory and official records of the time. *Unity (1918)*, however, unearths this important, forgotten wartime history and points to the way in which war-related suffering was experienced on home soil. In doing so, it not only locates disease, suffering, death, and heroism at home in a manner that undermines previous beliefs about Canadian security and insulation but also suggests that war, like a foreign virus, has the power to devastate *all* means of border regulation—even those military in nature.

CHAPTER TWO

“Be a good soldier again”: Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *Dancock’s Dance*, Militarized Masculinity, and the War in the “Asylum”

Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *Dancock’s Dance* (1996) is a two-act play, which examines the Great War’s presence in 1918 in the Saskatchewan Hospital for the Insane in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. Initially, Vanderhaeghe “had thought to write a novel about the mental institution that is the setting of the play” (“Questions on *Dancock’s Dance*,” Message to the author, 29 April 2013). He conducted “research about it in the Saskatchewan Archives” and “stumbled across an Annual Report from the Department of Public Works that had material about deaths, etc. in the hospital during the Spanish flu outbreak.” This report contains “a very short acknowledgement . . . thanking the patients for their contributions in keeping the hospital running during the crisis,” which, as Vanderhaeghe explains, “became the germ” of his narrative (“Questions about *Dancock’s Dance*,” 29 April 2013).

Two factors motivated Vanderhaeghe’s decision to craft the material into play form: he “thought the narrative would profit from the visual elements (stylized, non-realistic) that a play could afford,” and the late director Bill Glassco, recognizing Vanderhaeghe’s “potential as a playwright,” “encouraged [him] to write another [play].” Glassco, as Vanderhaeghe explains, was seminal in the play’s development: Glassco “read several drafts and acted as a dramaturge, giving [Vanderhaeghe] feedback particularly about how it might most effectively be staged” (“Questions about *Dancock’s Dance*,” 29 April 2013). Vanderhaeghe points out that “[t]he historian in me was fighting with the writer of good tales—I wanted all the historic details to be complete and

accurate, and at times it got in the way of the story. Bill Glassco was a great help. For one thing, he made me cut a number of characters—it was just too complicated” (qtd. in Killing). Glassco “felt that [the play] should premiere in [Vanderhaeghe’s] home town”; thus he “contacted the artistic director to elicit his interest” (“Questions on *Dancock’s Dance*,” 29 April 2013). The play premiered in Saskatoon at Persephone Theatre in 1995, and it continues to be regularly produced in Canada.

In *Dancock’s Dance*, Vanderhaeghe undermines the belief that Canada was a refuge from the War by illustrating the various ways in which the War infiltrates a remote, isolated mental hospital.³³ Similarly to playwright Kevin Kerr, Vanderhaeghe uses infection and disease metaphors as a means to illustrate the War’s pervasive spread to Canadian terrain. The “Spanish” influenza, for example, silently infiltrates and invades the asylum, infecting employees and in-patients at an alarming rate. What is less evident, however, is the presence of the War on the home front in the form of martial masculinity. *Dancock’s Dance* explores the way in which the War and, in particular, the War effort, determined the margins of “healthy” (normative) masculinity and the way in which this masculinity was enforced—both overseas and at home. The play thus gestures to the War’s presence on Canadian terrain by examining instances of “diseased” masculinity

³³ This hospital, the first of its kind in Saskatchewan, was opened in 1914 and continues to stand three miles from North Battleford, a small city in west central Saskatchewan. Like many other early twentieth century mental institutions, the Saskatchewan Hospital was a space not only for those requiring medical assistance but also for those in need of social reform. See Connie Wilson, *Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford* (North Battleford: N.p., 1984); Dolores Kildaw, *Saskatchewan Hospital History Book* (Saskatoon: Prairie North Health Region, 1990-91); and Elizabeth Matheson, “The Perfect Home for the Imbalanced: Visual Culture and the Built Space of the Asylum in Early Twentieth Century and Post-War Saskatchewan,” Diss. University of Saskatchewan, 2010.

while also illustrating the connections between the War, normative masculinity, and national identity.

D) “Healthy” Masculinity and the Great War

Dancock’s Dance remembers the way in which the Great War problematically defined and policed the parameters of a normative masculinity that, for many, was either unattainable and, for others, unsustainable in and after the War. In the War years, “healthy” masculinity correlated with martial masculinity, and “the aesthetic of [martial] masculinity,” as historian George L. Mosse explains in *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, “was hard, stoic, and resolute” (111). The “warrior” displayed “[t]he ideals of courage, sacrifice, and camaraderie” (Mosse 108) and demonstrated psychological and physical “strength and self-control” (Mosse 109). As historian Ben Shephard explains in *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century*, “harsh physical training and carefully inculcated regimental spirit provided great internal cohesion and strength” (25) and served as a determinate of the soldierly man.³⁴ The “true” and/or “ideal” man also contained his emotion, as Mosse explains: “[p]assions had to be kept under control: a true man did not cry out in pain nor did he shed a tear even for a fallen comrade” (*The Image of Man* 111).³⁵ Certainly, as cultural critic Elaine Showalter explains, these characteristics (strength, resilience, and stoicism) defined the “British masculine ideal” (169). Showalter notes that “[c]hief among the

³⁴ Shephard notes that these associations were also present in Edwardian society (18-19).

³⁵ In “Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914,” historian Mike O’Brien echoes Mosse, noting that “[t]he qualities of aggressiveness, bravery, and loyalty which ‘make’ a soldier seem in many ways to define the very category of the ‘masculine’” (115).

values promoted within the male community of the war was the ability to tolerate the appalling filth and stink of the trenches, the relentless noise, and the constant threat of death with stoic good humor, and to allude to it in phlegmatic understatement. Indeed, emotional repression was an essential aspect of the British masculine ideal” (169).

What historian Graham Dawson makes evident in *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* is that the war front was the ideal place for men to demonstrate their “innate” masculinity. As he explains, many of “the natural and inherent qualities of manhood” such as “aggression, strength, courage and endurance” were “attainable only in battle” (1); thus, service provided a means to affirm normative masculinity. As Dawson notes, “[a] real ‘man’ would henceforth be defined and recognized as one who was prepared to fight (and, if necessary, to sacrifice his life) for Queen, Country and Empire” (1).³⁶ While this suggests the tenuous nature of inherent manhood, it also illustrates the way in which masculinity was socially constructed and solidified through historically specific “performances” and/or “practices.” Judith Butler points to the “performative” nature of gender (*Gender* 34), explaining that it “is the repeated stylization of the body” and “a set of repeated acts”—rather than a “being” (*Gender* 45). R.W. Connell’s seminal study *Masculinities* similarly undermines the notion of gender as a biologically determined and fixed category, arguing that it is a dynamic structure requiring “practices” (71). As Connell explains, “[m]asculinity, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender

³⁶ Dawson’s analysis does not solely focus on the First World War. His work examines the soldier hero as one of “the most durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions” and the soldier as “a quintessential figure of masculinity” (1).

relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (71).

While Dawson’s analysis calls attention to the “performative” nature of manhood and its “practices” in wartime, it also points to the relationship of “preferred forms of masculinity” to “nationalist endeavour[s]” (1). What Dawson makes clear is that masculinity is historically determined and that national needs often determine, regulate, and sustain the boundaries of appropriate masculine behaviour. As he explains, “forms of manliness that have proved efficacious for nationalist endeavour have been approvingly recognized and furthered with all the power at the disposal of the state, while other subversive or non-functional forms (notably the effeminate man or the homosexual) have met with disapprobation and repression in explicitly national terms” (1-2).³⁷ Historian Joanna Bourke echoes this point in *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain, and the Great War*, noting the way in which the non-martial man was denied symbolic membership within his national community. As she explains, “[m]en who refused to, or were incapable of, fighting were not deemed to be worthy of active membership in the wider body-politic” (77). This was certainly the case in Canada in the early 20th century, where, as historian Mike O’Brien explains, “military service was viewed by many Canadians . . . as a vital part of male citizenship” (115) and where men who threatened the War effort by opposing conscription and/or supporting pacifism³⁸ were denied a place in the “imagined [Canadian] community.”³⁹

³⁷ British women also enforced what they envisioned as appropriate masculinity by pinning white feathers (symbolic of cowardice) on civilian men.

³⁸ In “A Crisis of Masculinity: North American Mennonites and World War I,” historian Bruce Hiebert calls attention to the plight of Mennonite men in the War years. He notes that “[t]hose who believed war was wrong, as these Mennonites did, found themselves

What quickly became apparent in the War years, however, was that while enlistment enabled many men to affirm masculine roles and, consequently, their national citizenship, the horror of trench combat left many “shell-shocked” and exhibiting “diseased” masculinity. “Shell-shock” became “the [Great] war’s emblematic psychiatric disorder” (Young 50), in part because an unprecedented number of men suffered from it. In fact, there were 80,000 soldiers in the British army diagnosed as suffering from “shell-shock”-related symptoms (Bourke, “Shell Shock”)—and an immeasurable number of cases went unreported. The condition went by many names throughout and after the Great War, including “the burial-alive neurosis,’ ‘gas neurosis,’ ‘soldier’s heart,’ ‘hysterical sympathy with the enemy’” (Leed 163), and/or neurasthenia when it applied to officers (Reid 17).⁴⁰ Soldiers and officers, however, suffered many of the same

unable to fully comply with the demands of their respective governments. While some Mennonites signed up as combatant soldiers, most were restrained by the Mennonite doctrine of nonresistance and its pacifist consequences. Neither the American nor the Canadian governments were comfortable with these positions, despite their historic tolerance of these people. The demands of mass war and the popular support for the war were such that great pressure was put on Mennonites as individuals and communities to comply with government demands” (2). He also calls attention to the way in which the North American public castigated Mennonite men for their pacifism. As he explains, many pacifist Mennonite men were subject to social persecution: “[t]he verbal abuse they received, by the general public on the street, or from officers and soldiers within the training camps, commonly accused them of being cowards, an ‘unmanly’ characteristic” (4).

³⁹ In particular, in 1917 and 1918, Canada needed men to embrace their martial identities. After the 1917 Battle of the Somme, which resulted in approximately 24,000 Canadian casualties, Canada was much in need of manpower, thus the government reinvigorated recruitment campaigns; however, voluntary enlistment numbers remained low. The government thus invoked the Military Service Act in 1918, requiring all men between the ages of 20 and 45 to enlist. Much of the English-Canadian public backed this decision and encouraged men to display the characteristics of ideal masculinity by enlisting. The English-Canadian public largely supported conscription, antagonizing those (especially Quebecers) who refused to do their national duty.

⁴⁰ In *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-1930*, historian Fiona Reid explains that “[i]n much of the literature of shell shock, there is a key

symptoms, such as psychological breakdown; loss of movement; memory, sight and/or speech problems; sleep disturbances; and “hallucinations” (Holden 7; see also Jones & Wessely 23), many of which were symptomatic of “diseased” masculinity and antithetical to the self-controlled ideal, military man. At the onset of the War, these symptoms were closely associated with hysteria, then widely and wrongly considered a “female malady,” as Showalter has shown in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*, thus they were deeply destabilizing for the martial man.⁴¹

Though, in the War years, “shell shock” came to be better understood and treated “as a medical condition” (Holden 26) rather than as a manifestation of subversive masculinity, for many, it remained a deeply incomprehensible and stigmatizing experience and condition. This was, in part, because the condition remained little understood and connotatively associated not only with hysteria but also with cowardice, malingering, a predisposition to degeneracy, and/or genetic abnormalities. Thus, in many ways, “shell shock,” especially in the early War years, suggested innate gendered abnormality. Journalist and military historian Wendy Holden argues, for example, that “shell shock” “had always been confused with either cowardice or real madness, and in some quarters would always be” (26). As she explains, this is because displays of “shell shock” transgressed the unwritten codes of appropriate masculine behaviour:

Ignorant of the true horrors of the trenches, British official and public opinion held that any soldier who gave up the fight or otherwise behaved in an unmilitary

categorical distinction between neurasthenic officers and hysterical men, and the subtext is clear: the man suffering from neurasthenia is more respectable and more refined than the man suffering from the more vulgar, and more physical, hysteria” (17).

⁴¹ Historian Mark S. Micale also makes this point in *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness*.

manner was a coward and a disgrace. In the minds of the top brass, men were either wounded or well; there was no middle ground. Crucially, shell shock was not admissible as a plea in a court-martial for crimes of cowardice or desertion—for which the ultimate penalty was death. (26)

Those suffering from symptoms of “shell-shock” were also frequently accused of malingering—that is, of feigning illness in order to escape military service and their national, masculine duty (Bourke, “Effeminacy” 62-63; Bourke, *Dismembering* 94; Showalter 70; Jones & Wessely 47; Leed 172).

“Shell shock” could also be deeply stigmatizing, for it hinted at moral and inborn difference or disorder. This might be because many “shell shocked” soldiers were subjected to moral diagnoses and treatments, which left them with tainted reputations as social undesirables. Showalter notes that one of the theories explaining “the prevalence of shell shock was to blame it on hereditary taint, and on careless recruiting procedures that had not weeded out unsuitables” (170). In *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, historian Eric J. Leed also calls attention to the way in which “those who took a moral view of war neurosis” associated it with “biological or familial degeneracy,” “inherited abnormalities,” and “moral inferiority” (171). Certainly, at the War’s onset, the dominant “initial medico-military view was that the doctors would find that the men they examined probably represented the normal proportion of those who might have become mentally ill in civilian life” (Holden 15). Even after medical advances in the field of

psychology and dominant social views shifted, these associations remained difficult to mitigate.⁴²

Though many suffering soldiers did receive proper medical treatment in military hospitals, those who were not properly diagnosed, especially those who exhibited symptoms of “diseased” masculinity in combat, were assumed to be insubordinate and subject to martial punishment. Approximately 306 British and Commonwealth soldiers were shot at dawn for “cowardice,” and it was only in 2006 that these men were publicly assumed to have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and pardoned (Fenton).⁴³ Others were removed from the military and society and “silenced” in mental institutions, as historian Peter Barham illustrates in *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (5). The majority, however, were subject to medical and/or punitive measures, such as talk therapy, rest, massage, hypnotism, and/or electrical stimulation,⁴⁴ which would supposedly restore them to a socially appropriate state. Those experiencing “[e]motional disorders,” rather than “commotional disorders” (conditions resulting from a physical experience of warfare—such as a shell exploding), were subject to more punitive measures, as “[o]nly commotional disorders deserved the rights and privileges of disease” (Leed 171).⁴⁵ As

⁴² Consider, for example, that many contemporary medical professionals and military personnel consider the diagnosis of “post-traumatic stress disorder” stigmatizing and call for the term “disorder” to be changed to “injury.” See Greg Jaffe, “Military psychiatrists seek new name, and less stigma, for PTSD,” *Washington Post* 6 May 2012, Web, 20 June 2012.

⁴³ In an article in *The Telegram*, Defence Secretary Des Browne notes that “[a]lthough this is a historical matter, I am conscious of how the families of these men feel today. They have had to endure a stigma for decades” (qtd. in Fenton).

⁴⁴ Shephard notes that in England, “treatment varied from hospital to hospital” (74).

⁴⁵ Siegfried Sassoon’s account of treatment with Dr. William Rivers in the semi-autobiographical novel *Sherston’s Progress* has greatly informed the imagining of “shell shock”; however, as Shephard explains, it simplifies the actual experience of “shell shock” and its various treatments: “Sassoon’s wonderful account so dominates the lay

Leed explains, “[d]isciplinary treatment was based upon a traditional ethic of honor, duty, a view of the human personality as director of a will that could be put at the service of either moral or immoral ends” (175).

For Canadians, as Canadian historians Mark Osborne Humphries and Kellen Kurchinski argue in “Rest, Relax and Get Well: A Re-Conceptualisation of Great War Shell Shock Treatment,” punitive treatments were not standard (92, 110).⁴⁶ This should not suggest, however, that “shell shocked” Canadian men were a welcome presence on the war front or on the War-rallied home front—either during or after the War. Though little has been written on the experience of Canadian “shell shock,”⁴⁷ it is evident that “there were few treatment programs after the war for returned veterans who suffered from the mental trauma caused by war” (“Shellshock”). Furthermore, as Humphries explains in “War’s Long Shadow: Masculinity, Medicine, and the Gendered Politics of Trauma, 1914-1918,” within Canada, “[i]n wartime and in peace, men who came forward

literature of shell-shock, so completely shapes the modern idea of what the experience was like, that it seems almost churlish to point out that he was not a typical patient, any more than Rivers was a typical doctor or Craiglockhart a typical hospital. The majority of shell-shock patients were private soldiers, who . . . would be more likely to be lying neglected in a converted asylum in the depths of the country, or being given periodic baths and electric shock by a bored, unsympathetic hospital attendant” (Shephard 89). Certainly, this is the case in *Dancock’s Dance*, where orderly Kevin Kennealy (rather than the Superintendent) attends to in-patients, often in an impatient and cruel manner.⁴⁶ Historian Tom Brown suggests, however, that “[n]eurasthenia . . . was a condition confined almost exclusively to officers. . . . Neurasthenic officers . . . were most often put on . . . the Weir Mitchell ‘rest cure’—they were dispatched to a special convalescent home . . . , given plenty of bed rest, good food, mild exercise and diversion, massage, and hot baths . . . Hysterical patients, those in the ranks, on the other hand, were allowed neither time nor such pleasant surroundings” (318).

⁴⁷ There is no book-length study of the Canadian experience of “shell shock.” Articles centred on “shell shock” include Tom Brown, “Shell Shock in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918”; Mark Osborne Humphries and Kellen Kurchinski, “Rest, Relax, and Get Well”; and Mark Humphries, “War’s Long Shadow.” See also Mark Humphries’ dissertation, “The Treatment of Evacuated War Neuroses Casualties in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces, 1914-1919,” diss., Wilfrid Laurier University, 2005.

to seek treatment or compensation for psychological injuries were breaking unwritten codes that required men to be self-reliant, aggressive, and unemotional” (530). Therefore, to seek treatment and compensation was to transgress gender expectations and to risk identification as an “inferior” and “feminized” man (Humphries, “War’s Long Shadow” 503) unable to serve and protect his country. Many veterans thus chose to “suffer in isolation and silence” (Humphries, “War’s Long Shadow” 531).

II) *Dancock’s Dance*

i) Martial Masculinity in the “Asylum”: Veterans

Much of Guy Vanderhaeghe’s work explores conceptions of masculine identity and sexuality, particularly in relation to specific historical moments. In an interview with Vanderhaeghe on his historical novels, Herb Wyile points to Vanderhaeghe’s repeated attention to these topics, noting that Vanderhaeghe’s novels demonstrate “a preoccupation with masculinity” (28; see also 47). In “‘Guy Talk’: An Interview with Guy Vanderhaeghe,” Nicola A. Faieta similarly draws attention to Vanderhaeghe’s significant interest in masculinity, specifically in relation to *Dancock’s Dance*. He suggests that *Dancock’s Dance* “seems to be a study of performances of masculinity” (263), and Vanderhaeghe acknowledges this dimension of the play, noting that “the play recognizes older constructions of masculinity which revolve around physical courage, honour, chivalry, and what happens when those collide in incredibly stressful circumstances” (263). Thus, while masculinity is a central subject in much of Vanderhaeghe’s work, what makes *Dancock’s Dance* so unique is its exploration of the way in which the War produces and sustains a historically specific form of “[h]egemonic

masculinity”—that is, a “culturally exalted” and “currently accepted” form of manhood “generated in particular situations” (Connell 77, 81).

Dancock's Dance centres on a martial figure, Lieutenant John Carlyle Dancock, a Great War veteran, who once epitomized idealized wartime masculinity. What the play immediately establishes in its opening scene, however, is that Dancock no longer stands as a revered figure but as a representation of “diseased” masculinity. Though Dancock’s fashionable dress suggests his gentleman status (165), his mannerisms suggest he is far from an exemplary member of society, particularly of his class and military rank. The stage directions in the opening passage of the play immediately gesture to his inability to repress his emotions and to discipline his body as a man of his rank should. He is “uneasy” (165), and he demonstrates this sentiment by erratically “*scratch[ing] the back of his hands, his agitation and desperation mounting*” (165). This gesture suggests that he is under emotional duress, identifying him as the obverse of the “ideal” male, who keeps his “[p]assions . . . under control” (Mosse, *The Image of Man* 111). At the same time, it suggests that he is a threatening presence, for, as Mosse explains, in the War years, men who were “nervous” and “constantly in motion” “were thought to menace society’s norms”—as they were “in direct opposition to the ideal manhood” (Mosse, “Shell-shock as Social Disease” 102).

Dancock’s hand-scratching, which he repeats throughout the play (165, 170, 199), also evokes Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth, further destabilizing Dancock’s masculine image. Like Lady Macbeth, Dancock’s neurotic hand-wringing is a manifestation of guilt in response to an act of murder. Dancock, too, like his Shakespearean counterpart, is attempting to wash traces of blood from his hands. In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth attempts

to take on masculine attributes, particularly “cruelty” by calling for the “spirits” to “unsex” her (1:5:38-41).⁴⁸ Though her momentary “unsexing” does enable her to engage in murderous deeds, the play suggests that she cannot escape the traditional “feminine” characteristics of sensitivity and remorse. She descends into a guilt-driven madness, demonstrating her “feminine” remorse by incessantly wringing and scrubbing what she envisions as her blood-stained hands. As in-patient Rudy Braun observes in *Dancock’s Dance*, Dancock’s hands literally “bleed” (171) as a result of his constant scratching,⁴⁹ and, in doing so, they evoke not only Lady Macbeth’s hand-wringing but also her well-known sleep-walking scene. Vanderhaeghe thus appears, to a certain extent, to parallel Lady Macbeth’s blood-stained hands with Dancock’s as a means of illustrating the instability of traditional gender roles and the stigma that is attached to subversions of them.

From the outset, then, Dancock’s role is a deeply ambivalent one. On the one hand, he has been a respected member of the military; on the other, he is suffering from hysterical hallucinations in a Saskatchewan mental hospital. In Act Two, Scene Two, the Superintendent of the Saskatchewan Hospital for the Insane introduces Dancock, establishing the fact that though Dancock has been committed to a lunatic asylum, his past standing as a war hero is not to be ignored. He thus identifies his in-patient as “Lieutenant John Carlyle Dancock, formerly of the Fifth Battalion, Western Cavalry,” and he notes that he was “[t]wice decorated for conspicuous bravery, twice wounded” (165). He also specifies that Dancock has an exemplary “war record” (165), further

⁴⁸ Lady Macbeth says, “[c]ome, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty” (1:5:38-41).

⁴⁹ Dancock also draws attention to his bloodied hands, saying to in-patient Dorothea, “[m]y hands... are an ugly mess. They... bleed!” (188).

establishing his characterization as a fallen heroic figure. The Superintendent explains that Dancock's military service ended in January of 1917, when he was "invalided back to Canada" and "judged unfit for further service" with the diagnosis of "acute neurasthenia" (165), a term less stigmatizing than hysteria and/or "shell-shock." The Superintendent appears aware of this semantic difference, noting that "[i]n layman's language," Dancock suffers from "severe shellshock" (165).

The Superintendent's discussion of Dancock's symptoms suggests his internalization of the connotative associations of "shell shock," while it also conveys a respectful, "*scientific*" tone for he speaks in a "*strong, quiet, clinical manner*" (165). The Superintendent acknowledges that Dancock experiences "hysteria and melancholy" (165), conditions widely considered effeminate in the early 1900s; however, he does not characterize Dancock as innately "diseased," as would have been normative for many medical practitioners of the day. He draws upon Dancock's history, noting that he is "[a] man of good family, educated, obviously intelligent" (165); however, he ends his assessment by identifying Dancock as "...sensitive" (165). This final descriptor implies that Dancock might not have been as resilient as his war record suggested and that he might have been susceptible to "shell shock"—a somewhat common assumption at the time. While the Superintendent appears to understand that Dancock's "diseased" masculinity, in the form of neurasthenia, stems from his experiences in the War, his identification of Dancock as "sensitive" suggests that he is not immune from the gender and war discourse around him. What this also intimates is the War's presence, in the form of ideology, within the institution and the home front.

The play makes evident, however, that Dancock's institutionalization was not entirely predicated upon his traumatic experience of the War, his "sensitivity," or his need for medical treatment. Rather, he was institutionalized because he was a subversive presence on the Canadian home front and a threat to the War effort. Certainly, Dancock might have unsettled wartime gender boundaries with his hysteria-like neurasthenia symptoms, which include "melancholia" (165), unease (165), excessive hand scratching (165, 199) and "clawing" (170), depression (199), and suicidal thoughts/behaviours (193); however, he was threatening primarily because he directly critiqued and undermined recruitment efforts. Dancock was released from military service as a result of his neurasthenia, but it was his anti-War rants that led a court to declare him legally insane and to remove him from Canadian society. After Dancock "shouted down a sermon urging patriotic sacrifice" (165), he "was arrested"; however, "[b]ecause of [his] war record," he was "released with a warning" (165). What this discharge suggests is the way in which Canadians tolerated Dancock's "shell shock" in light of his distinguished military career. Dancock, however, reappeared in church "the next Sunday and poured blood in the collection plate" (165)—acts that directly called into question his support for the Church, the War, and the nation and that elicited severe disciplinary measures. This appears to be the main reason Dancock is "judged insane under the provision of the Insanity Act of 1906" and "[c]ommitted to the Saskatchewan Hospital for the Insane" (165). Dancock's removal from Canadian society and the symbolic loss of his national membership as a result of the declaration of his insanity, which was then a criminal charge in Saskatchewan, defines him as deviant and invalidates his voice, preventing the spread of anti-War discourse at home. Because courts legally deemed individuals insane

under The Dangerous Lunatics Act (also known as The Insanity Act), there was little social distinction between criminals and the mentally ill.

Dancock's readmission into Canadian society rests upon his ability to rehabilitate—that is, as the Superintendent explains, to “[b]e a good soldier again” (167). The Superintendent recognizes Dancock's subversive masculinity, his individuality, and his “talent for leadership,” and he considers it “dangerous” (167). He thus asks Dancock to embrace a more appropriate communal identity, saying “[b]e a good soldier again. Place yourself under [my] orders” (167), and he reminds him: “[y]ou were a good soldier once” (167). Dancock, however, is deeply suspicious of these institutionalized forms of “help,” especially at a time when recruits are needed and when national needs are privileged over those of the individual. He retorts, “[h]elp me? Like the magistrate who committed me here?” (167), ultimately calling into question why he was defined as a lunatic. When the Superintendent specifies that he is a “doctor” and “[n]ot a General” (167), Dancock points to the inseparability of medical and military institutions, identifying “doctors” as cogs in the machinery of the War (167). Dancock retorts, “[t]he hell you're not! Your only concern is for the big picture, strategy, the theory” (167). He thus refuses to embrace his civic duty—even though he recognizes that behaving like “a good soldier,” as he once did, would be equated with mental recovery. Instead, Dancock continues to hate “dishonest enemies” (166). As the Superintendent explains, Dancock defines these “enemies” as the “[m]anufacturers who shipped . . . rifles that jammed and lined their pockets with the profits. Politicians who promised the war would be over by Christmas, year after year after year” (166-67). While this critique destabilizes the category of enemy, it also points to the War's subtle, lurking presence within Canadian

industry and politics, identifying the First World War as a “total war”—that is, as a war involving the complete mobilization of Canadians.

Dancock, however, was once a “good soldier,” an aggressive, martial man, a supporter of the War effort, and an honoured member of Canadian society. Furthermore, like the magistrate who institutionalized him and the Superintendent who attempts to rehabilitate him, he enforced martial masculinity within his troops, punishing insubordination with death. In combat, Dancock demonstrated immense aggression, and he assassinated one of his own soldiers seemingly because he threatened to defeat “morale” (213) and to undermine the military mission. It is the ghost of this murdered soldier that stalks Dancock throughout the play, taunting him to face up to his actions. As both an embodiment of Dancock’s guilt and a figure of death (who is trying to lure Dancock to commit suicide), the soldier brings repressed war atrocities—most of which were censored from the Canadian public—into the home front. In a graphic scene in which Dancock and the soldier restage their traumatic encounter, Dancock and his victim are forced to relive, and reassess, the events that took place. Dancock recalls that when the soldier became immobilized, as did many soldiers who were shot for “cowardice,” he swore, yelled, and commanded the soldier to adopt a courageous role: “[p]ick up your fucking rifle!” (214). In a flashback, he replays this event, threatening the soldier with violence by putting a revolver to his head and ordering him to adopt hegemonic behaviour. What his language reveals is his inability (or refusal) to comprehend “shell-shock,” which he associates with cowardice: “[n]o more dodging, no more shirking” (214). Though far more aggressive and violent, this behaviour evokes that of the Superintendent—as both the Superintendent and Dancock attempt to make “good

soldiers” of the insubordinate men in their midst. Like the Superintendent, Dancock disciplines individuality and calls for the soldier to embrace and protect his national community and, in particular, his brothers in arms. He orders the soldier to display patriotic, normative masculinity, unaffected by the soldier’s actual psychological state: “[n]o more cheating your brothers in arms. Time to do your bit. Time to put your bloody shoulder to the wheel. Do as you’re told” (214).

What Dancock refuses to acknowledge is that the soldier could not properly perform his masculine role—despite his desire to. In a flashback, the soldier demonstrates traditional symptoms of “shell shock”; he “whimper[s]” and does not pick up his firearm (214). Dancock, however, interprets the soldier’s “whimper[ing]” as akin to that of a “pup” (214)—that is, as a youthful manifestation of weakness, innocence, and resistance. He also reads the soldier’s behaviour as “yellow” (214)—a racist term suggesting his Otherness to brave Canadian soldiers—for as masculine theorist Michael S. Kimmel explains, hegemonic manhood is defined “in opposition to a set of ‘others’—racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women” (120). The soldier recalls, “I couldn’t move” (214), and, as the flashback illustrates, Dancock interprets this as both blatant defiance and a manifestation of subversive masculinity, correcting his phrasing to say, “[w]ouldn’t move” (214). Dancock argues that the soldier continued to refuse to act, even after he cocked the hammer (214), though the soldier assures him, he “[c]ouldn’t” (214).

Long after the incident, Dancock refuses to accept accountability for his actions in killing the soldier—though he certainly appears to be traumatized by the event. This trauma materializes in the form of the soldier’s ghost, an hallucinatory figure who haunts

Dancock and refuses to let him escape the horror of trench warfare. The soldier, for example, evokes the macabre atmosphere of the War, as he reeks of “[t]he trenches. . . Mud. Blood. Shit. Rot” (174) so potently that it makes Dancock “[gag]” (173). The soldier is also visually grotesque—especially in the home front space—permanently “*caked in mud*” and “*soaked in blood*” (174), and he represents Dancock’s inability to disengage from the horror of the War. Though Dancock is in the hospital, he carries the War, in the form of the soldier, with him, and the War invades all aspects of his life, including his relationships. When Dancock attempts to court Dorothea, for example, the soldier graphically touches her: “[t]he SOLDIER steals up on DOROTHEA from behind and rests his hands on her shoulders. She feels something and reacts to the presence. . . . The SOLDIER begins to caress her cheek and neck” and “*fondle[s] her*” (186). Though Dancock attempts to protect Dorothea from this touch, saying, “STOP IT!” (186), the soldier continues “*caressing her triumphantly*” (186). What this suggests is that despite Dancock’s best efforts to protect those at home from the War, he nevertheless infects them with his wartime experiences, guilt, and memories.

Though Dancock’s conflicted state remains evident to the reader/audience, Dancock initially refuses to articulate any sense of remorse. In a discussion with the soldier, Dancock admits that he knew the symptoms of “shell shock” and that he recognized that the soldier “showed all the signs” and was “ready to break” (213), yet Dancock remains both convinced of the soldier’s “diseased” masculinity and disgusted by it. Dancock lashes out at him, calling him “a disgrace to the uniform!” (213) and “[t]he worst kind of soldier. A barrack’s thief! Malingerer! Defeatist! . . . Insolent! . . . Filthy coward!” (213)—all terms associated with the undiagnosed “shell shocked” soldier

as well as non-military men. Dancock's language thus defines the soldier as antithetical to the hegemonic ideal and as a "subordinate" member of the wartime male community worthy of being "expelled from the circle of [masculine] legitimacy" (Connell 79). This conditioned stigmatization of "diseased" men is ironic given that Dancock resides in a mental hospital and is considered one himself.

The fact that the soldier, a tangible manifestation of Dancock's subconscious, continues to reappear and haunt Dancock, however, suggests the extent of Dancock's emotional repression. Though Dancock has clearly been habituated by military discourse and his officer's training, his execution of the "shell shocked" soldier troubles him—perhaps because it undermined his sense of right. Dancock repeatedly justifies his actions: "I had a responsibility to my men. To safeguard morale. . . . We officers had been warned. Of mutinies in the French army, in British labour battalions. Stamp out insubordination, we were told. Refusal of an order on the field of battle is an offence punishable by death" (213-14). However, the soldier, in his seminal confrontation with Dancock, argues that Dancock's actions were also, in part, selfishly motivated; in the words of the soldier, they were "for the love of Dancock" (215). Just as Dancock accused those in military power (in particular, generals, the magistrate, and the Superintendent) of only considering "the big picture, strategy, the theory" (167), the soldier suggests that Dancock did not love his men nor envision them as equals (215), privileging his own military success over the needs of his men (215).⁵⁰ Though this is an extreme accusation,

⁵⁰ The soldier also accuses all officers, including Dancock, of "lov[ing] their men like they do their dogs: when they're devoted, when they come smartly to heel" (196), and he argues that "[t]here's always a little contempt mixed in [with the love]" (196).

as Dancock does appear to care for his men (certainly, as his guilt attests),⁵¹ when they refused to move forward into combat, he acted, in part, out of desperation, what Vanderhaeghe deems “emotional stress” (“Guy Talk” 264), rather than solely out of militaristic and/or moral duty.⁵² Ultimately, when faced with mutiny, danger, and a sense of failure as a leader, Dancock was overcome with fear, and violence (in the form of the assassination of the soldier) was his recourse, a means to safeguard both his mission and his military honour. Dancock recalls that prior to combat, he felt great pride in his men and in his leadership role. He remembers his men “[m]arching to the troop ships,” noting that he felt “[a] great wave of stupid happiness . . . [n]ot because they were cheering me, but because they were cheering my boys!” (197). He notes that his “boys looked good that day” and that they were “[s]ixty pairs of boots striking the road like one boot, a joyous animal with a single spine, a single brain, a single will” (197), and he interprets this order and unity as “a sign that they accepted [him], accepted [his] leadership” (197). What this reveals is that for Dancock, his men’s refusal to obey his order in combat, though largely a manifestation of fear, represented his failure as a leader. Therefore, when the Superintendent points out Dancock’s “talent for leadership” (166), Dancock replies, “[m]e, a leader? That I never was” (166). Dancock’s choice to lead with violence was thus deeply complex and human: the product of not only his wartime training, his ideas and performance of manhood, and his understanding of “shell shock” but also his pride and the stresses of trench combat. Thus, while the soldier condemns him, for the

⁵¹ Dancock points out that he “wrote letters home for the illiterate, gave characters for those brought up on charges,” and “saw that the quartermaster didn’t cheat them on rations and blankets” (195).

⁵² Vanderhaeghe notes that Dancock’s actions were “as much out of emotional stress as [out of] any sort of militaristic code” (“Guy Talk” 264).

reader/audience, it becomes apparent that Dancock is an empathetic figure, a product of his tense wartime circumstances.

It is only when Dancock acknowledges, by finally looking the soldier in the eye (216), that he acted, in part, out of fear and desperation, enforcing martial order by killing an innocent “shell-shocked” man, whom he should have sent for medical treatment, that he receives the “kiss of peace” (“Guy Talk” 264). As Vanderhaeghe explains,

Dancock has to acknowledge his own guilt and reconcile himself to it and has to, in Christian terms, get the kiss of peace. And this was something instinctual to me when I wrote it. For Dancock, it doesn't feel like a kiss of peace. But for him, facing the horrors of what he's done, that kiss can only be the kiss of peace.

(“Guy Talk” 264)

Dancock's painful confrontation with the past occurs in the play's climactic and most theatrical scene; “[t]he *SOLDIER* grips [Dancock] and passionately kisses his mouth,” and “*DANCOCK* is overcome with revulsion and shock,” as he “taste[s] . . . what [he] did” (216). While the kiss serves to destabilize the hegemonic masculinity that has plagued Dancock's military career, thereby contributing to the play's larger deconstruction of such gender norms, this scene uses the “taste” of the kiss to represent Dancock's painful memories of the War. As the spectral soldier explains, this bad “taste” is Dancock's “souvenir of France” (216)—a painful memory that he will seemingly retain forever. While the “taste” lingers, figuratively pointing to the way in which many veterans carried the War home, the soldier disappears. Though Dancock appears to experience a sense of peace, the lingering taste suggests that there is no real escape from the War.

ii) Martial Masculinity in the “Asylum”: Civilians

Dancock's Dance calls attention to the fact that the Canadian home front was not an idyllic refuge from the War, and Vanderhaeghe makes a pointed critique of this traditional notion by illustrating the “infection” not only of veterans with “shell shock” and haunting memories but also of civilian men with wartime ideology. Though civilian men experienced neither trench warfare nor physical and psychological injury as a result of combat, as the play illustrates, many were nonetheless subtly mobilized in “total war”—though few were aware of this mobilization. The Superintendent, for example, believes that the institution is an “island untouched by war” (168) and “a sanctuary from all that had bruised and broken them in the hard world outside” (198). For the reader/audience, this dialogue is deeply ironic, considering Dancock’s institutionalization, his diagnosis of “shellshock” (165), Dancock’s pointed critique of medico-military practices, and, most importantly, the spectral presence of the soldier within the asylum (both the institution and the home front). However, it is also ironic because the male hospital staff, in particular the Superintendent and orderly Kevin Kennealy, demonstrate deep suspicion and hostility toward people of German descent, regardless of their citizenship, whom they perceive as the enemy within their midst.

The Superintendent, for example, despite believing that “[t]he conduct of the war does not concern [him]” (168) and considering himself an objective, medical voice (167), envisions Canadian men, even those deemed legally insane, as antithetical to those of German descent. In a discussion with Dancock, he notes that he finds Dancock’s “friendship” with another patient Rudy Braun “curious” because Braun is a “German” (166). Braun, however, as Dancock corrects, is not a “German” but “[a]n immigrant from

Germany” (166) and thus a Canadian. What the Superintendent cannot understand, however, is why Dancock could befriend someone of German descent after he “spent the last three years killing Germans and watching [his] comrades be killed by Germans” (166). This subtly includes Dancock as a part of a national community, a group of “comrades” (166), while suggesting that Dancock’s friendship is traitorous, somewhat akin to collaboration and treason. What it also suggests is that appropriate friendships, especially friendships between Canadian soldiers, define and sustain normative masculine national identity.

Dancock’s Dance also illustrates, like *Shatter* and *Québec, Printemps 1918*, that violence towards the “enemy” functions as a means to affirm and express both masculine and national identity. In particular, it calls attention to the way in which civilian men on the home front, by imitating and/or adopting overseas military behaviour, affirmed both their hegemonic masculinity and their national alliance—perhaps as a means to protect themselves against the War-rallied public. As Kimmel explains, “[v]iolence is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight” (132); hegemonic masculinity thus necessitates an engagement with male cultures of violence. Certainly, this was the case in wartime Canada, where the refusal and/or inability to participate in combat represented innate deviance. Many unenlisted men, namely those between the ages of 20 and 45, were subject to social persecution, assumed to be medically unfit and/or cowardly and thus second-rate men and citizens. As Canadian historian Nic Clarke explains, at the onset of the War, many “rejected” men were socially stigmatized within Canada:

Men rejected for service on account of hidden or unrecognized impairments were often – those with identifying badges notwithstanding – subjected to condemnation from people who believed that they were shirking their responsibilities to king and country. Those men who attempted to defend themselves by drawing attention to their infirmities were either not believed, or were told they had not tried hard enough. (177)

He also points out that “[f]or those men with infirmities who were unable to join the ranks, the psychological toll exacted by accusing looks, derogatory comments, ostracism, and personal shame was often heavy. As a result, some rejected men cut themselves off from their communities in an attempt to escape their torments” (177).⁵³

Though it remains unclear why Kennealy has not enlisted, it is evident that Kennealy does not occupy a privileged position in Canadian society⁵⁴ and that the Superintendent values Dancock’s “word as an officer and a gentleman” (168) over Kennealy’s (179-80). For example, when Dancock advises the Superintendent “to keep an eye on Orderly Kennealy,” as Kennealy solicited “an old suit of [his]” (167), the Superintendent chooses to apprehend Kennealy (179), disciplining his behaviour and threatening him with dismissal—though Kennealy has been in service for four years

⁵³ Clarke notes that little has been written on “rejected” men: “[d]espite being a significant minority within Canada’s wartime population, rejected volunteers generally speaking are virtually non-existent in both Canada’s public and academic memories of the Great War. . . . That the history of rejected volunteers has not received more attention is unfortunate not only because these men made up a significant minority within Canada’s wartime population, but also because these men present an important means through which to further augment our understanding of the Canadian experience of the Great War” (162).

⁵⁴ The play does not provide information about Kennealy’s background; however, Kennealy does identify himself as “a poor working devil . . . who has no choice but to do the bidding of mucky-mucks and uppity-ups” (172).

(180). Kennealy's inferior position on the home front and in the hospital might explain why Kennealy feels such a strong need to affirm his "healthy" masculinity, especially by antagonizing "diseased" men within the hospital. Though he is not physically violent to Dancock, he refers to him as the enemy, namely as the "Red Bolshevik" (168)—that is, as a subversive, revolutionary figure, threatening to the Canadian (and asylum) society. As the Superintendent explains, this is largely because Dancock "rail[s] against the government and the war" in a treasonous manner (168). However, this identification of Dancock as the "Red Bolshevik" (168) also suggests the way in which Kennealy imitates martial behaviour as a means of self-identifying as a "healthy" Canadian man. It echoes Dancock's description of the soldier as "yellow" (214)—that is, as dangerous, lesser, and antithetical to the Canadian soldier—further pointing to the dichotomous nature of these men's wartime thinking.

Kennealy also repeatedly demonstrates disdain for the "German" in the asylum, whom he envisions not only as an enemy but also as lesser than in-patients of non-enemy descent. He identifies Braun as a "[d]aft bastard" (172), "the Hun" (179), a "[l]iar" (179), "the sauerkraut farter" (187), and "Fritz" (202), and he explains, "I'll be glad when this war's over and they can ship him back to Germany as an undesirable alien. Let their Dr. Franksteins have at him" (172).⁵⁵ In a graphic scene, Kennealy also perversely imitates a soldier's aggression, subjecting Braun to horrific episodes of verbal and physical violence: "[h]e grabs BRAUN by the hair and violently shakes his head from side to side" (181). He also verbally debases Braun, pointing to his permanently "diseased" state.

⁵⁵ This is somewhat anachronistic. Kennealy seems to be referencing German medical practitioners from the Second World War concentration camps, who performed criminal medical experiments on prisoners.

When Braun asks to be “let out of the [hydrotherapy] bath” as he is “clean now” (181), Kennealy reminds him of his “contaminating” presence, saying, “[f]ilth is what you are. Filth outside and in” (181). He forces him to remain in the hydrotherapy tub, repeating, “[n]ot clean. Filthy. You’re a filthy boy, Rudy” (182). He then “*slaps him*” twice before sexually assaulting him (182-83) and implicitly feminizing him by subjecting him to sexual violence. Though Kennealy is clearly a psychologically deranged and depraved individual, as is evident throughout the play, the scene, nevertheless, points to the troubling effects of the War’s presence at home in the form of affirmations of martial masculinity, patriotism, and xenophobia.

Kennealy’s violence also attests to the long-term, residual presence of the War in the form of prejudice and hatred, for Kennealy does not stop assaulting Braun in peacetime. After the armistice, Kennealy continues to envision himself as a martial man—despite the fact that he is not—and as part of the heroic allied force. He celebrates the allied victory as his own, using a boxing analogy, which positions himself as inherently male and all war-rallied Canadians as fighters:

By the suffering Jesus, didn’t *we* black old Kaiser Bill’s eyes for him but good and proper! Well, that’s life for you. Lesson number one. Everybody’s looking for a face to put a fist in. (*remembering the kaiser*) And how the mighty are brought low! The Hun, down for the count! Down for the count as of eleven o’clock, the eleventh day of this cold and frosty fucking eleventh month. A knockout blow! Here’s to *us* and piss on them! (emphasis added 201)

When Braun interrupts this monologue, a verbal affirmation of Kennealy’s normative masculinity and patriotism, Kennealy responds with violence, attesting to the fact that

despite the armistice, the War in the form of militaristic aggression persists. Kennealy continues to identify Braun by ethnicity, calling him a “German bastard” (202), and he “kicks him brutally” until “*BRAUN collapses under the assault*” (202). In doing so, Kennealy not only affirms his national identity but also performs (Butler, *Gender* 34) and “practices” (Connell 71) masculinity through violence (Kimmel 132).⁵⁶ While this violence attests to the performative nature of masculine and cultural identity, it also illustrates the devastating effects of the War. Ultimately, the scene undermines the concept of peace, illustrating that though overseas combat has ceased, practices of wartime hegemonic masculinity and patriotism continue on Canadian terrain, prolonging the War’s continued presence.

iii) The War in the “Asylum”: “War Fever” and the “Spanish” Influenza

Dancock’s Dance further points to the presence of the War on the home front by paralleling lingering hostilities, martial behaviour, and anti-German sentiment (“war fever”) with the “Spanish” influenza—that is, with a virus that literally sweeps and infects from overseas to the home front. Similar to Kevin Kerr’s *Unity (1918)*, *Dancock’s Dance* points to the devastating presence of this “war fever,” which infiltrates the asylum. In this way, the War can be seen to devastate *all* home front occupants regardless of their ethnic and national alliance. Initially, Vanderhaeghe employs the influenza as a means to highlight the fact that the War is uncontainable and unmanageable, especially once disseminated on the home front. The Superintendent reports “the spread of the Spanish

⁵⁶ Crime also functions as a means to affirm masculinity. As James W. Messerschmidt explains in *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory*, “crime by men is a form of social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity” (85).

influenza,” noting that there are “twenty million dead in Europe and Asia” and “twenty thousand cases in Montreal” (196), directly illustrating the War’s movement from overseas nations to Canada. The Superintendent also explains that the virus has reached isolated areas, seemingly removed from War’s horror. As he explains, “[y]ou will have heard rumours of isolated farmsteads in which the dead are found lying in every room of the house, and the survivors wander the fields, out of their minds with fever” (196).

What the Superintendent also points to is the way in which Canadians adopt militaristic defence strategies, guarding their borders and monitoring the spread of possible “contaminants.” He notes that “[i]n some towns, armed guards have been posted at the train station to prevent passengers from disembarking and spreading the infection” (197), and what this makes clear is that the War’s manifestation at home figures both as an infectious presence and as martial practices. These militaristic practices, however, quickly fail (197), and the virus proliferates throughout Canada. As the Superintendent recognizes, “[i]t is only a matter of time before the Spanish influenza reaches my hospital” (197). He becomes acutely aware that even his isolated asylum is at risk (197) and that “[h]undreds of [his] patients are certain to die” (197).

The influenza quickly infiltrates the institution, leaving “four [in-patient] women out of their heads with fever” (199), and though these women are literally consumed with illness, what this detail also suggests is that women are as susceptible to “war fever” as men (a theme that is developed in Wendy Lill’s *The Fighting Days*). Though the Superintendent adopts defensive strategies, attempting to defend the hospital by quarantining these infectious women from the public space (199), the virus continues to multiply, even infecting those who are not “diseased” (mentally ill) members of society.

As Kennealy reports, “two . . . cooks,” “three more orderlies and four more nurses came down with the flu. Those of us [staff members] who aren’t sick are dead on our feet” (204). While this firmly establishes the War’s place in the asylum, it also, once again, attests to the fact that the War knows no boundaries and that all Canadians are vulnerable to its presence. At the same time, it makes the War’s presence on Canadian terrain tangible, enabling the play’s audiences to witness its devastation.

Ultimately, the influenza collapses the war front/home front dichotomy, rendering the mental institution visually and aurally akin to a war-ravaged space. The infirmary is “full to overflowing” with casualties (204), and [v]ictims “[scream] day and night” as the “smell of fear” overtakes the hospital (204). Furthermore, as Kennealy reports, there are eleven in-patient deaths, “[a]nd there’ll be more today” (204). What Kennealy also points out is the increasing death-like atmosphere of the institution: illness proliferates (204) and “corpses [pile] up” with “nobody to bury them” (204). Dancock later echoes these macabre descriptions, noting that there are “[n]o nurses. No proper food. Toilets overflowing” (207) and that the death toll is so extensive that bodies are piled “like cordwood” (208).

While the play increasingly conflates the deathly war front and asylum space, it also complicates its critique of martial masculinity on the home front. Ultimately, it positions Dancock as a heroic, self-sacrificing soldier and the defender of all Canadians. Though Dancock is literally “ill himself” and considered a “diseased” man within wartime Canadian society—as the Superintendent points out (206), he nevertheless engages in chivalrous codes of conduct. He chooses to “take up arms” against the influenza, attesting to the fact that though he critiques the War and recruitment

propaganda (165-67), he still strives to protect Canadians from a deadly “enemy.” Despite risk of infection and death, he “volunteer[s] to empty bedpans, scrub floors, nurse the sick. . . . peel potatoes, bury the dead,” and to adopt a leadership role in order to rally other in-patients to service. As he explains, he will “[a]ssemble the patients still on the wards” and “speak to them” (207), encouraging them “[t]o work to save . . . lives” (208), similar to the way he would have rallied his troops overseas. His speech to the in-patients, rallying them to “[l]ife-and-death work” (208), as Dorothea explains, is “inspiring” and elicits voluntary enlistment (208).⁵⁷

Dancock also begins to exhibit great stamina and endurance, a characteristic he attributes to his military experience. Dorothea encourages him “to rest,” noting that he has not “slept in over forty-eight hours” (210), is “killing [him]self” (211), and is “on the point of collapse” (211). However, as he stoically notes, “[i]n the trenches you learn to live without sleep” (211), and what becomes increasingly evident is that he envisions the asylum as similar to No Man’s Land and that his fortitude comes from his need to assist the suffering. As he explains,

Out there, in No Man’s Land, at night the wounded used to cry for us to come out and save them. We didn’t dare. Flares open in the black sky, turning everything bright as day. Like dying on a stage, I used to think, in the limelight, before an audience of thousands. (*turning to the beds*) They’re still crying out to be saved. Listen. (211)

⁵⁷ Though he initially demonstrates wartime gendered thinking, refusing to let Dorothea volunteer because “[i]t is too dangerous” (208) and his “concern is for [her] safety” (209), he eventually concedes, seemingly recognizing that her service is necessary and that she is capable of heroic feats.

While this evocatively collapses the spaces of war front, home front, asylum, and theatre, as characters are dying on stage,⁵⁸ it also attests to the fact that Canadians and, in particular, Dancock did not escape the War's horror despite their location on Canadian terrain.

At the same time, the collapsed setting allows Dancock to relive—and re-do—his traumatic experience of the soldier's death and what he envisions as his murderous past. While the asylum setting repositions Dancock in his leadership role, which he demonstrates by rallying the in-patients to wage war against the influenza enemy, it also awakens his latent ability for violence. In highly aggressive, stereotypically male terms, he vows to Dorothea that he will “make [Kennealy] pay for what he did” (210)—that is, for his repeated victimization of Braun, whom he identifies as part of his community. Dorothea, however, does not applaud Dancock's murderous intentions, and she scolds him, saying, “[d]on't think such things! You are not a man who thinks such things!” (210). Dancock, however, vividly remembers his capability for violence, and he responds, “[h]ow do you know what I think? You know nothing about me” (210). While this points to Dancock's violent self-identification, it also illustrates the significant divide between veterans and civilians in regards to the actual conditions and experience of trench warfare and soldiering.

The soldier, however, remains aptly aware of Dancock's military experiences, and he recreates the tense atmosphere of the war front as a means to reactivate the “good

⁵⁸ This also evokes Dancock's earlier near-death experience (194-95) “on a stage” and “before an audience” (211). After refusing to eat for fifteen days (194), the Superintendent fears he will “lose” Dancock (194). Dancock thus approaches death both in the hospital and on the stage, while the Superintendent and the audience simultaneously stand witness.

soldier” dormant within Dancock. Approaching Dancock, the soldier offers him Kennealy, “[s]leeping like a baby” (211) and “weak as a baby” (212), impelling Dancock to violence by saying, “[y]ou have plans for him? . . . The bastard’s all yours” (211). He reminds Dancock of Kennealy’s dishonourable behaviour within the hospital, implicitly paralleling it with his own insubordination on the war front, and he entices Dancock to punish Kennealy with death. As the soldier points out, “[i]f I remember correctly, you don’t like that – people getting away with things. . . . Looks like it’s in *your hands* again. To make sure somebody doesn’t get away with something” (emphasis added 212). He thus suggests that Dancock’s responsibility, as a leader, is to further blood-stain his hands by eliminating the threatening figure within the war-ravaged hospital, just as he did on the battle front months earlier. In response, Dancock moves “*like an automaton*” (212), seemingly falling into his martial role. The soldier echoes Dancock’s own speech, verbally motivating Dancock to perform his masculine duty. He shouts, “[m]ake him pay! Make the bastard pay!” (212).

Dancock, however, as Dorothea rightly observed, is no longer a product of his military training or of the circumstances of horrific trench warfare; thus, he disengages from martial discourse. Though he has been “*shaking*” Kennealy in a “*frantic*” manner (212), he ignores the soldier’s order and “*pushes himself away from Kennealy*” (212), affirming that he is neither a “good” soldier nor a “murderer” (216), as the soldier assumes him to be. In doing so, Dancock demonstrates what Daniel Coleman identifies as a “retiring masculinity”—that is, a masculinity “which distances itself from prescribed rituals of aggressive masculine performance” (82) and which “declines various performances of domination” (83). Dancock’s “retirement” and/or retreat is thus not a

complete disavowal of masculine codes of conduct, rather it is a disengagement from martial aggression and a return to traditional soldiering in the form of chivalry and moral integrity. Dancock's behaviour is thus characteristic of what Vanderhaeghe deems "the traditional male code" and "'right conduct'" ("Guy Talk" 268). As he explains, "[p]art of the old traditional male code, which wasn't lived up to, is that you protected the weak – and those 'weak' could also be other males" (268). Dancock's selfless protection of the in-patients and his refusal to kill Kennealy therefore remain a gendered act; however, at the same time, it points to his extraction from military discourse and signals that he is no longer a product of the War. This disengagement becomes further evident at the final tea dance after Dorothea asks Dancock to remove his military gloves, the same gloves he has been wearing to cover his bleeding hands. She points out that "[a] lady does not dance with a gentleman wearing gloves such as those" (220), and Dancock literally and symbolically "*lays his gloves on a chair*" (220).

* * *

While *Dancock's Dance* suggests that Dancock's "shell shock" has lessened and that he has experienced a certain degree of emotional cleansing and healing, it also illustrates that martial men in the institution, namely the Superintendent and Dancock, remain permanently scarred and stained by their experiences of and in the War.⁵⁹ The Superintendent, for example, demonstrates remorse for having failed to understand the War's infinite boundaries and multiple (often invisible) manifestations. In his final discussion with Dancock, he calls attention to his "mistake" (218) in assuming that his

⁵⁹ Dancock repeatedly mutilates his hands throughout the play, thus it is likely that his hands are disfigured. Though Vanderhaeghe does not describe the appearance of Dancock's hands in the tea dance scene, a director/designer could draw attention to Dancock's physical and psychological scarring by making visible his disfigurement.

“island” (218) and his practices were untouched by the War. As he explains to Dancock,

We cannot control everything, can we? My mistake was to think I could.

Remember me saying that I had kept this hospital an island from war and rumours of war? Well, no one can set a boundary to war. Our soldiers brought it home with them in their lungs and in their blood. The four horsemen ride where they will. (218)

While this acknowledges the way in which veterans carried the War, in the form of trauma and influenza, to Canadian terrain (an assumed refuge), it also points to the way in which the War shaped civilian thinking, particularly in relation to “healthy” masculinity and patriotic duty. The Superintendent subtly apologizes to Dancock, acknowledging his own wartime indoctrination and wrongful attempt to make a “good soldier” out of Dancock, saying, “I want you to know this. Whatever I did, I did because I believed it was necessary. This does not excuse it. But it may explain it” (218).⁶⁰

Dancock appears to recognize the Superintendent as a by-product of the War and, in particular, of “good” soldiering, as defined within the context of the War, and he responds, “[w]hatever you did... (*starts again*) I could live with your mistakes” (218). He fails, however, to extend the same courtesy to himself. Dancock’s response suggests that despite his redemptive behaviour in the hospital, the soldier’s “kiss of peace” (Vanderhaeghe, “Guy Talk” 264), and the Superintendent’s acknowledgement of his significant sacrifice and heroism in the war against the influenza (217), he continues to

⁶⁰ The Superintendent also illustrates that he has reshaped his understanding of “diseased” masculinity. He attributes the hospital’s survival to Dancock, saying, “[y]ou saved this hospital” (217). In doing so, he not only acknowledges his wrongful misconceptions about “healthy” masculinity but also reinstates Dancock as a contributing member of society.

struggle with his “mistake.” What the play thus suggests is that Dancock has been permanently scarred by his “good” soldiering and that he maintains a Lady Macbeth-like conviction that “[a]ll the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten” (5:1:42-43) his blood-stained hands. *Dancock’s Dance* thus concludes by suggesting that while the War, in the form of overseas warfare, the “Spanish” influenza, and martial masculinity, ended in 1918, the residual effects of the War lingered long after, perhaps even into the present-day date of the play’s composition.

CHAPTER THREE

“Put anything into print and it’s true”:
Trina Davies’ *Shatter*, the Halifax Explosion, and the Dissemination of Information

Of all the contemporary Canadian plays about the First World War, Trina Davies’s *Shatter* (2003) most evocatively, vividly, and literally locates war on Canadian soil. This is primarily because *Shatter* focuses on the 1917 Halifax Explosion, dramatizing the traumatic physical and psychological effects as well as the intra-communal in-fighting and anti-German sentiment resulting from the disaster. The play, as Davies explains, was initially inspired by an image, that of an “unbroken pane of glass.” For many Haligonians, the homes of German Canadians with undamaged windows represented their misdeed and implication in the Explosion. Davies notes that this “starting image” led her to conduct research on Halifax in wartime and to discover “an anxiety-filled port city” and the little-known “German story” (“Questions on *Shatter*,” Message to the author, 13 April 2010). The lack of historical attention on the “German story” “caused her to dig deeper” and, namely, to consult and scan archived Halifax wartime newspapers “until [she] found what [she] was looking for” (Davies, “More Questions on *Shatter*,” Message to the author, 29 November 2010).

While Davies was particularly interested in recovering unearthed wartime history, she was also deeply influenced by the post-9/11 context. As she explains, she conducted her research “in the months following 9/11—when the UN was issuing reports of the racial backlash in the US that was not being widely reported (Sikhs being murdered by vigilantes who thought they were ‘terrorists’” (“Questions on *Shatter*,” 13 April 2010), and “[t]he [Halifax] Explosion became a backdrop for looking at racial profiling and how

we deal with tragedy” (Davies, “Playwrights Guild of Canada”). What this suggests is that her dramatization of the fear-invoked, traumatic, and often hysterical responses to the Explosion were informed not only by her research on 1917 Halifax but also by the post-9/11 context.

From her research, she wrote a scene, which was publicly read at the Alberta Theatre Projects playRites Festival in February of 2003. After several full-length readings of the play in 2004, it premiered at the Ship’s Company Theatre in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia, in 2005. Though Davies has been contacted by artistic directors in New York City, Czechoslovakia, and London (Davies, “Questions on Shatter,” 13 April 2010) since its premiere, the play has only been produced twice: at The Maggie Tree Company in Edmonton, Alberta (2010), and at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. As Davies explains, many artistic directors in Canada envision the play as too ““regional”” and “believe that [Davies] is from Nova Scotia”—though she has never resided there. Davies suggests that “it is easier for an international audience to see the more universal meaning and relevance of the piece” (“Questions on *Shatter*,” 13 April 2010).

The identification of play as “regional” appears to result from the play’s setting and, in particular, its focus on Halifax in wartime, the city’s intrinsic link to Great Britain, and its role as an essential cog in the machinery of war. The play immediately draws attention to Halifax’s character as a bustling port city, replete with local and international soldiers, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal British Navy, guarded military forts, army training facilities, and medical, relief, munitions, and cargo ships. This, however, functions as a means not only to enliven Halifax in wartime for readers and audiences but also to affirm the presence of the War on home soil and to undermine

notions of Canadian insulation from the War. The play illustrates that War, in the form of suffering and substantial loss of life, only comes to occupy Halifax after the accidental detonation of a French munitions ship in the Bedford Basin. The explosion mutilates the Halifax landscape and its inhabitants, leaving them physically, mentally, and economically wounded. The play thus, like many other plays about the Great War, problematizes assumptions about the home front by locating war violence on Canadian terrain.

Davies' return to the First World War is particularly unique, however, in that it not only situates the War on Canadian soil but also examines its "fog of war."⁶¹ Namely, *Shatter* draws attention to the way in which the "fog of war" at home prevents civilians from obtaining reliable, accurate information on the explosion. Their limited, incomplete and/or incorrect understanding of the situation, in turn, leads them to make misguided, faulty decisions. Davies illustrates this process in the aftermath of the explosion when a literal fog descends on the city, enveloping it in a thick smoke, which shrouds the sun from view (16). This fog, caused by the detonation and the extensive movement of debris, also resonates on a metaphorical level. Within the chaotic, devastated Halifax, the nature and cause of the explosion remains unknown and a matter of much speculation.

⁶¹ "Fog of war" is a metaphorical term, which has been continuously and widely circulated in war discourse since approximately 6th century BC. It appears to have been coined by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*. Tzu uses the term to refer to the state of confusion resulting from inconsistent, incomplete, or unclear information in war. Carl von Clausewitz also employs the "fog" metaphor in his celebrated martial treatise *On War*. Similarly to Tzu, Clausewitz utilizes this metaphor to designate the many ambiguities in war and to point to the way in which these uncertainties contribute to the unreliability of information in wartime (54). Since Clausewitz's time, as professor of military history Eugenia C. Kiesling explains, "[t]he so-called 'fog of war' [has been] one of the most pervasive and natural metaphors in the English language" (85). She notes that "the phrase is popular and widely used" (85).

Newspapers, the primary conduit of information in 1917, begin to circulate distorted, sensationalist information. This material capitalizes upon public hysteria, wartime fears, and rumours; it scapegoats the “German” (both the German enemy overseas and the German Canadian on home soil) for the disaster. It also rallies together a distinct, exclusionary group of Canadians of non-German descent and encourages members of this group to affirm their national identity by avenging the wrongs done to Canada. Though the newspaper content contains little objectivity or veracity, in devastated Halifax, it comes to be perceived and accepted as truth. What *Shatter* ultimately reveals is that this “truth,” as derived from the printed word in the throes of wartime, is highly ambiguous and dangerous. It not only leads to an inaccurate remembering of the explosion but also results in the erroneous blaming of “Germans” and, in particular, German Canadians for the disaster at home. By calling attention to the War’s presence at home, the “fog of war” on Canadian terrain, and the production of truth within this climate, Davies illustrates the dangerous nature of the written word in wartime. The printed word, as she demonstrates, has the power to stretch and shape truth, especially in a nation embroiled in the conflicts of war. For the traumatized inhabitants of war-torn Halifax, printed war truths come to be accepted as fact and, eventually, as official war history. Davies’ examination of this process and of the relationship of war, print, and truth enables her audience/reader to consider the context and factors that produced and legitimated official First World War narratives. The act of “scripting” the War that takes place within the newspaper accounts of the period is echoed in the subsequent memorializations of the War in Canadian culture and history. Davies is playing on both contexts in order to highlight the degree to which war mythology (both during and after the events) can be used for propagandistic

purposes. The audience/reader is thus forced to rethink his/her own passive acceptance of the past and to engage critically with the scripting and consumption of national war history.

I) Halifax in Wartime

Halifax was particularly vulnerable to false suggestions of enemy invasion, partially because of its historical relationship to Great Britain in wartime. “[S]ince its inception in 1749,” retired Canadian Forces officer and military historian John Griffith Armstrong explains, “Halifax had been a garrison town and naval base” and “a site of varying importance in the military security structure of the British Empire” (10).⁶² Until 1917, it remained a valuable English war resource largely because of its location as a gateway to North America and its natural harbour, which is shaped like “a lopsided keyhole carved into steep hills” (MacDonald 3). This shape prevents the harbour waters from freezing, therefore enabling year-long naval and commercial movements and shipping. It also conceals the Bedford Basin and the city of Halifax from ocean view (MacDonald 3-4) and from enemy surveillance. As historian Laura M. MacDonald explains, “the harbour appears to simply end at Tuft’s Cove. But the water does not end there. Instead, the Narrows open into a beautiful basin surrounded by hills so steep that the masts of hundreds of warships could hide out of sight of enemy ships patrolling the coast” (MacDonald 4). As a result of these invaluable resources, the British have

⁶² In 1749, Lord Edward Cornwallis “settled” Halifax “as a fort” (MacDonald 4), namely because he believed the Halifax landscape would enable him to achieve “naval dominance over the entire region” (MacDonald 5).

regularly deployed Halifax as a means of ensuring success in war.⁶³ Thus, by the advent of the First World War, Haligonians had become familiar with the presence of war on home soil, the experience of war, and the threats of enemy invasion.

When Great Britain declared war against Germany in 1914, Halifax was once again confirmed as an essential component of the allied War effort. The British Royal Navy returned to Canadian shores after an absence of almost a decade and resumed a position of authority, despite the fact that the Royal Canadian Navy was also actively stationed in Halifax (MacDonald 9). Convoys were assembled and repaired in Halifax, and Canadian soldiers who were either completing military training at the numerous facilities within the city and/or awaiting active service occupied the streets. During this time, Halifax enjoyed a period of great economic prosperity and rapid population growth, largely as a result of the high demand for war products in Europe. These were constructed in Halifax factories or transported to Halifax by railway from the various Canadian provinces before being shipped overseas.⁶⁴ The Halifax harbour was thus a major wartime shipment point, continuously overcrowded with cargo ships from neutral and allied countries loading supplies as well as medical ships delivering those wounded in the War.

⁶³ Britain's strategic position in Halifax in the Seven Years War contributed to their capture of Louisbourg, a French fortress in Cape Breton. This war, which was dubbed the "first world war" by Winston Churchill (qtd. in Bowen 7), partially as a result of its pervasive reach and all-encompassing nature, is one example of the way in which the English have utilized Nova Scotian shores to ensure war victory.

⁶⁴ In order to meet wartime demands, "Halifax's factories . . . required extra employees" (Kitz and Payzant 13). "[B]oarding house[s] in Richmond" thus came to be "filled with workers from different parts of Canada and even Europe" (Kitz and Payzant 13). This further stimulated population growth and the economy.

Though wartime activities greatly stimulated the Halifax economy, they also opened the way for potential enemy attacks and created a climate of fear within the city. Three thousand miles of Atlantic Ocean separated the Germans from Canadian shores; nevertheless, German U-boats came to be detected in the Western Atlantic, prompting full military vigilance within Halifax. As John Griffith Armstrong explains, the city came to be guarded by approximately “3,300 soldiers” (11), and “sea approaches to the harbour were shielded by a considerable network of coastal artillery and searchlights” (10). Submarine nets remained in place outside of the harbour at night, and “[e]very fort in the area was . . . fully staffed for the defence of the city and harbour” (Kitz and Payzant 11). Furthermore, a blackout system was strictly enforced and maintained in order to prevent German submarines from using city lights to navigate Canadian shores. These martial measures imbued Halifax with a garrison-like quality, one that Davies immediately captures in *Shatter*. Early in the play, Davies dramatizes the young Canadian soldier Brian’s strict enforcement of the blackout system (9) and offers a poetic description of the evening descent of the submarine nets in the harbour (12).⁶⁵

Though these martial measures ensured the protection of Haligonians from enemy attacks and invasions, Haligonians still experienced a massive state of disaster on home soil as a result of the movement of ships in the highly congested harbour. The Halifax Explosion of 1917, the largest man-made accidental detonation in history, took place at 8:40 a.m. on 6 December 1917 when the fully stocked French munitions ship, the *Mont Blanc*, and the Norwegian relief ship, the *Imo*, collided in the Narrows section of the Halifax Harbour. The *Mont Blanc* arrived from New York on the evening of December

⁶⁵ Choral characters 1/2/3/4 explain, “[t]he submarine net goes down / and the night is quiet / the ships left in port bob on the quiet waves / the city sleeps” (12).

5th and stationed outside of the Halifax Harbour, awaiting the morning lifting of the submarine nets.⁶⁶ Fearful of German attack, the *Mont Blanc* flew no flags of warning suggestive of its contents. Within the Bedford Basin, the *Imo* staff, Captain Haakon From and seasoned harbour pilot William Hayes, prepared for morning departure. The *Imo* was scheduled to travel to New York to collect emergency supplies for civilians in Belgium, thus it was marked with the sign “BELGIAN RELIEF.” On the morning of December 6th, the submarine nets were lifted and harbour movements began as usual. The *Mont Blanc* headed into the harbour while the *Imo*, exceeding the speed limit, travelled out of the crowded Bedford Basin and into the Narrows. The *Imo* soon met an American tramp steamer, which was aiming for the western edge of the Bedford Basin. Its pilot, Edward Renner, ignored harbour protocol, requiring ships to pass starboard to starboard.⁶⁷

Though Hayes requested that the American steamer change its course, so that the *Imo* could enter the Narrows in the correct channel, Renner refused and continued on his self-appointed course. He did, however, warn by megaphone of another ship behind him. The *Imo* encountered this ship, and they passed one another without collision. The *Imo* then met the tugboat *Stella Maris*, towing two barges. The *Stella Maris* moved out of its correct position to avoid the *Imo*, still travelling in the incorrect channel. The *Mont Blanc*, which followed the *Stella Maris*, signalled to the approaching *Imo*, encouraging it to shift into its designated path. The *Imo* quickly responded, explaining its plan to remain to the left of the *Mont Blanc*. The ships signalled back and forth with neither captain/pilot

⁶⁶ That evening experienced harbour pilot Francis MacKey joined the ship’s captain, Aimé Le Médec, on the *Mont Blanc*. Together, they navigated the ship into the harbour on the following morning.

⁶⁷ Though ships were encouraged to keep to the right, exceptions were often made. A captain or pilot signalled his intentions, and the oncoming ship generally adjusted its course and respected these wishes. Minor collisions were frequent.

yielding to the other's request. Fearing collision, the *Mont Blanc* veered to the left, and the *Imo* reversed its engines. The *Imo* collided with the *Mont Blanc*, causing sparks and igniting the benzol fuel and picric acid aboard the ship. The ship quickly caught fire and exploded.

The *Mont Blanc*'s forceful detonation caused a tsunami in the harbour and devastated three-hundred and twenty-five to five-hundred acres of Halifax. Historian Janet F. Kitz's description of the macabre atmosphere following the detonation subtly and evocatively parallels war-ravaged Europe with Halifax. She explains that "[i]n the immediate vicinity it was as if night had suddenly fallen. But the darkness was thick and oily, filled with a rain of soot and shrapnel. It stung, cut into flesh, and blackened whatever it touched" (25). The explosion reduced trees, buildings, piers, and homes near the shore to rubble and left nearly two thousand people dead and "nine thousand" people wounded (Kitz 25-26), three hundred of whom were permanently blinded. The physical and psychological wounds were extensive as was the carnage, which Kitz also graphically reconstructs: "[a]mong the ruins were corpses, many lying in unnatural positions, headless or with limbs missing. Sometimes their clothes had been ripped off. Survivors staggered aimlessly, bleeding and confused, not knowing what had happened or where to go. Flying shards of glass, sharp as daggers, had pierced vulnerable watching faces and eyes" (26).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ The Halifax Relief Commission, initially a group of volunteers, quickly came to the assistance of suffering Haligonians. They began extensive rescue duties, which included providing shelter for the 8,000 homeless Haligonians, identifying the deceased, finding health care for the wounded, and assessing the extent of building damage in Halifax. On 22 January 1918, they came to be officially appointed by a federal Order-in-Council. This enabled the Commission to formally oversee the twenty-one thousand dollars of

II) The Circulation of Information in the Aftermath of the Halifax Explosion

The Halifax Explosion's quick decimation of the city left most Halifaxians unable to explain or process the extensive disorder and carnage around them. Thus, as relief efforts took place so too did speculations as to the cause of the explosion. These speculations were primarily voiced in newspapers, the most highly circulated information medium in early 20th century Canada (and especially in Halifax in the aftermath of the explosion). Canadian historian Jeffrey A. Keshen explains that in the years leading up to the Great War, "the number of newspapers in the Dominion jumped from 46 to 138 . . . resulting in total daily circulation tripling to just over one million" (11). This popularity was partially "a result of rising literacy and urbanization rates" throughout the nation (Keshen xi). Historian Robert Stanley Prince, in his dissertation *The Mythology of War: How the Canadian Daily Newspapers Depicted the Great War*, also notes that newspaper circulation further increased throughout the War years. As he explains, "while at the turn of the century there averaged in circulation each day one daily newspaper for every nine people in Canada, through the war years there averaged more than one for every five"—a circulation rate which has never been exceeded (13). Though these newspapers largely produced "purple prose" with the intention "not only to advance certain positions, but also to build readership" (Keshen xiii), they nevertheless remained the most viable and popular means of information transmission in Canada, especially throughout the Great War. As Prince explains, "[t]he breaking of important stories," especially pertaining to war, "saw crowds of hundreds or even thousands flock outside newspaper offices" (13).

expenditure donated by the Canadian government, the British government, other governments, and the civilian population.

This preoccupation with war news makes its way into *Shatter* where news material and headlines abound. Newspapers are central props within the play and appear in several scenes (5, 43-44). Characters also discuss and read highly subjective newspaper material (6, 8-9, 13, 44, 56), and newspaper headlines materialize in on-stage projection screens (4,11,18, 28, 36, 41, 49, 63).

It is difficult to identify the extent to which the reading public interpreted news material pertaining to the Great War as truth or, as Prince notes, to evaluate “how much power the Canadian daily press possessed as an active agent of opinion, rather than simply as a passive conduit for rumours” (85). Certainly, in *Shatter*, Jennie MacLean and Elsie Shultz ridicule the sensationalist tone adopted in war news (8-9); however, as Davies reveals, this same material eventually comes to shape Jennie’s perceptions of the truth, despite her initial resistance to it (56). What Davies thus illustrates is the immense power of newspapers in wartime to control public views on the War. She thus echoes Keshen’s belief that Canadian wartime newspapers “held extraordinary and unprecedented power to produce and retain . . . opinions” (11), and Prince’s conclusion that “[t]here can be little doubt that in an era when most Canadians relied on their daily newspapers as primary sources of news, views, commerce and entertainment, the potential for the press to influence the public mind was considerable” (85).

Shatter considers various ways in which the press attempts to shape the public mind; however, it primarily focuses on the way in which newspapers mobilize civilians by interpellating them into “Canadian” subject positions. Davies thus suggests that wartime newspapers function as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), a term French theorist Louis Althusser employs to denote social mechanisms and institutions (such as

schools, families, legal courts, unions, political parties, and the media) that entice individuals to willingly accept subject positions and the majoritarian values of a given social order (“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”). Althusser’s theory suggests that media outlets transmit the dominant ideology to passive viewers/readers who internalize it and support it. This occurs because media outlets often position the reader/viewer in such a way so that this representation appears to be a reflection of reality. In Canada, wartime newspapers naturalized a particular image of the “Canadian” and the “German” in order to garner civilian support for the allied cause. They frequently utilized religious imagery and assumptions about the Great War, portraying the Canadian as a force of good engaged in virtuous battle against a deviant, inhuman German enemy (Keshen 12; Prince 126-27). The newspapers in *Shatter* are certainly replete with these “natural” images, which, as Davies reveals, identify Haligonian civilians of non-German descent as good “Canadians” in opposition to their demonic German and German-Canadian counterparts. This serves as a means to hail the civilian of non-German descent into the emergent wartime society and to engage them as viable components of the War effort.

Though many Haligonians in the play internalize the newspapers’ messages and identify themselves as Canadians, certain individuals within the Halifax community resist this wartime indoctrination. *Shatter* thus suggests a newspaper’s power to influence its readership without assuming that all readers are acquiescent recipients of its messages. In doing so, the play problematizes Althusser’s assumption of audience uniformity and passivity and instead draws attention to the numerous contextual factors contributing to the production and reception of meaning—in much the same way as cultural theorists

have done in recent years. Cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall, for example, argues in “Encoding/Decoding” that an audience is capable of reading/interpreting media texts in a variety of ways, which are often reflective of their unique contextual positions. He offers three frameworks for this process of “decoding.” In the “*dominant-hegemonic position*,” a viewer/reader accepts the material “full and straight” (59), whereas, in the “*oppositional code*,” the viewer/reader “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference” (61). The “*negotiated version*” involves both an acceptance of some elements and a rejection or opposition of others (60). Though Jennie and Elsie initially engage in “oppositional” readings, what Davies ultimately illustrates is that the state of war and suffering in Halifax decreases “oppositional” and even “negotiated” readings. Rather, it leads the majority of the population to engage in “full and straight” readings of material replete with anti-German sentiment.

Historically, these readings appear to have inspired civilian mobilization and the rampant hatred of the assumed German enemy within Canada. Though German Canadians had been forced to report to authorities prior to the explosion, in its aftermath, they came to be openly persecuted by civilians, who believed newspaper reports implicating “Germans” in the explosion. This persecution involved Canadians of non-German descent chasing and/or stoning German Canadians, some of whom “only a week earlier, had been friendly neighbours” (Bird 159-60). It also included the extensive looting and pillaging of German-Canadian homes (Bird 160). These acts of violence eventually culminated with the formal arrest of all German Canadians in Halifax by the Halifax Chief of Police on 10 December 1917 (Bird 160). Aside from Michael Bird’s

accounts, there is very little information on this subject, and what does remain in circulation downplays and whitewashes the anti-German activities that were occurring in Halifax at the time.⁶⁹ As Davies explains, “[b]ooks refer to the German situation, but tend to ‘make nice’ in their approach. Published works tend to spend one or two sentences talking about the persecution of German-born Canadians, then drop it as a ‘mistake’ that happened.” These limited, rose-colored depictions of the past motivated Davies to conduct detailed archival research on the subject (“More Questions on *Shatter*,” 29 Nov. 2010). It also inspired her graphic dramatization of German-Canadian persecution. Davies includes all of the violent acts mentioned by Bird and demonstrates their physical and psychological effect on the innocent German-Canadian Elsie. Despite Elsie’s innocence, children stone her (28), officials arrest and imprison her (41), and civilians ravage her home (36, 45). By remembering this “not . . . pretty” German story (Davies, “Questions on *Shatter*,” 13 April 2010), Davies not only fills a historical void but also illustrates the troubling effects of war stress on civilians.

She also questions the extent to which newspapers were responsible for the extensive xenophobia and warring on home soil. Though the degree of culpability remains indeterminate, it is apparent that the newspapers did little to abate the state of warmongering in Halifax. Davies, in the “Historical Notes” prefacing *Shatter*, contends that “newspapers fanned the flames of wartime hatred, and incited the locals to target those of German birth in the community.” Bird supports this assumption, arguing that newspapers achieved this end by affixing blame upon people of Germans ancestry for the

⁶⁹ In a 29 November 2010 email to me, Davies noted that Bird’s *The Town That Died* was one of the sources she found most useful (“More Questions on *Shatter*”).

explosion. This quelled reader doubts about German-Canadian innocence and authorized the war against “Germans” on Canadian soil. As he explains, “[a]nyone who may have questioned the necessity for [the] wholesale arrests or who doubted the Emperor’s guilt for the tragedy, with the connivance and complicity of his subjects in the town, had only to read the newspapers to be reassured” (160). The highly subjective content of the 12 December 1917 edition of the *Halifax Herald* certainly testifies to this. It reads,

WE KNOW, TOO, THAT THE PRIME RESPONSIBILITY for [the Halifax Explosion], as for every other catastrophe which has afflicted the peoples of the earth as a by-product of the war, rests with that close co-partner, with the arch fiend, the Emperor of the Germans; neither are we disposed to hold the German peoples entirely free of direct responsibility for this catastrophe; the cause is obscure; but IT IS CERTAIN THAT THERE ARE IN HALIFAX TODAY CERTAIN PEOPLE OF GERMAN EXTRACTION AND BIRTH whose citizenship in the Dominion has been respected since the war began, who have been allowed full freedom in our community to buy and sell, and to pursue their normal occupations, WHO HAVE REPAID US WITHIN THE PAST FEW DAYS BY LAUGHING OPENLY AT OUR DISTRESS AND MOCKING OUR SORROWS. (“Thrilling Story” 4)

This article not only essentializes all “people of German extraction and birth” and attributes blame to this generic group for the explosion but also identifies the German Canadian as a significant, persistent threat to the emergent Canadians community in Halifax. It notes, for example, that there continue to be “strange things afoot” (“Thrilling Story” 4). Though it considers the possibility that these “strange things” (“a ship

suddenly sunken in the harbour for possibly dark design” and “signals from housetops at night”) may be “rumors” (“Thrilling Story” 4), it nevertheless casts doubt upon the trustworthiness of German-Canadian citizens. It is the last line of the article, however, that fully exemplifies Davies’ conjecture about the relationship of newspapers to “wartime hatred” in Canada. The article ends with an open profession of Germanophobia, which calls for the public remembrance of the “German” as an object of revulsion. It concludes, “[s]o long as there are people in Halifax who remember this past week or whose children remember it, so long will the name of German be a name for loathing and disgust” (“Thrilling Story” 4; qtd. in *Shatter* 36).

This highly xenophobic line appears on stage in *Shatter* just after Anna, Brian, and other vigilantes loot and destroy Elsie’s home (36). Davies’ inclusion of this particular line at a seminal moment in the play, when Anna accepts and embraces her wartime identity by violently destroying Elsie’s property, gestures to the way in which the news media contributes to the pervasive hatred of German Canadians in Halifax. The line’s juxtaposition with Anna’s taking up of arms against Elsie also suggests the way in which the news has successfully indoctrinated her and contributed to her identification as a “Canadian” subject in relation to the “German” object of disdain. By calling attention to this conflict between the “Canadian” Anna and the German-Canadian Elsie, Davies acknowledges a history of warring on home soil. The examination of this conflict also enables her to reveal the way in which the news capitalized upon the distress of Haligonians and the “fog of war” in Halifax in order to aggravate social tensions between Canadian citizens of various descents, all of whom should have been considered Canadians throughout the First World War.

III) *Shatter*

Initially, *Shatter* characterizes Halifax as a city visibly devoid of war conflicts and suffering. The play opens with a vibrant portrayal of Halifax, a city thriving as a result of the War overseas. It is very early December of 1917, and four unnamed choral characters extol the virtues of war,⁷⁰ noting how it has spurred Halifax's economy. The "war machine," as they explain, requires "[m]ore food . . . More horses . . . More men" (3). Haligonians, primary suppliers of these items, celebrate the War, as they expect to "make a fortune!" (4). This leads the choral characters to twice note, "[t]hings are good in Halifax" (3) and to enthusiastically exclaim, "[h]urrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" (4). At the scene's close, character 4 even declares, "I hope the war never ends" (4), an ironic and haunting line considering the violent state of war that soon overtakes the city. Ultimately, this short, celebratory opening scene serves to locate the positive aspects of the War at home, to undercut notions of Canadian insulation from the War, and to reveal Halifax's role as an integral, thriving component of the War machine.

Davies quickly reveals, however, that though the majority of Haligonians support the First World War and its benefits for Canada, many individuals within the nation oppose it. Resistance to the First World War had existed since its advent, and dissent increased after Prime Minister Borden imposed the Military Service Act in August of 1917. This Act, which made enlistment for single Canadian men of military age compulsory, was rejected by all French-speaking Canadian MPs and championed by all

⁷⁰ The choral figures in *Shatter* function in much the same way as a traditional Greek chorus, articulating the dominant opinions of the social collective.

English-speaking MPs. It thus proved highly divisive within the nation.⁷¹ Quebeckers, already hesitant in their support of the First World War, strongly revolted against this Act—as is evident in *Québec, Printemps 1918*.⁷² Violent riots erupted in Quebec as a result of forced conscription, and these lasted until near the War’s end.⁷³ *Shatter*’s 1917 setting captures this extensive dissent and illustrates how the *Halifax Herald* attempts to counter it by featuring vilified images of Quebec and its residents. An early December 1917 *Halifax Herald* headline is projected on stage, announcing that there is “[t]error” and “[m]ob violence in Quebec!” (4). It also reports anti-conscription riots and an “[a]ttempted lynching!” (4). This not only creates a contrast between peaceful, war-supporting Halifax, as dramatized in the opening scene, and violent, oppositional Quebec but also calls attention to the way in which the *Halifax Herald* frames Quebec within a distinct Anglo-nationalist paradigm as a site of unnecessary, unmitigated violence and hysteria.⁷⁴

Unlike most Haligonians, Jennie identifies with the rioting Quebecois population and opposes the Military Service Act. At a “war rally” in Halifax (4), she speaks out

⁷¹ The Act resulted in the registration of over 400,000 men; however, only approximately 24,000 men reached France before the War’s end, and many of these men did not engage in active service.

⁷² The fervent French-Canadian politician Henri Bourassa, for example, questioned the value of Canada’s role in an imperialist war. In a circulated leaflet, he warned, “[t]hose who disemboweled your father on the Plains of Abraham are asking you today to go and get killed for them” (qtd. in Donaldson 76).

⁷³ These riots escalated, and, in April of 1918, a massive protest took place, which left four Quebec civilians dead at the hands of the Canadian military. Jean Provencher and Gilles Lachance examine this event in their play *Québec, Printemps 1918*.

⁷⁴ One might have expected a newspaper such as Montreal’s *Le Devoir* to have offered an alternative representation of Quebec; however, by December of 1917, they had “tempered” their material (Keshen 77).

against conscription, echoing many of the anti-imperialist arguments in circulation in Quebec:

I do not believe that my son should get up this evening and leave his sickbed so that I can push him into some limping metal ship to be floated over to a land I've never seen. There he will most likely be dead before he's a man and I will be expected to smile and cry prettily and tell all the other ladies that he did it for the good of us all, that he was a hero that saved us. . . . Our world is full of pointless death, and I will not send more guns and blood into the fire. Be damned *your* conscription and be damned *your* war. It is not my war. It is not my son's war.

Perhaps the Quebecers have it right. (emphasis added 4-5)

Though it is unclear to whom exactly Jennie believes “conscription” and the “war” belong, it is evident that she neither identifies as a member of this group nor believes that the continued means of war (the sacrifice of more Canadians) justify its ends (the imperial gains of Great Britain). Her declaration of identification with “Quebecers” and support for Quebec’s anti-War/conscription arguments shocks her audience—“[s]he looks at the shocked room” (5)—and highlights the marginality of her political position in a province primarily made up of people of British descent.

Though Jennie appears to be a harmless dissenting civilian, for the pro-War, rallied Canadian civilian population engaged in “total war,” her words register as treasonous. In “total war,” as military strategist Carl von Clausewitz explains, all national resources, including all human ones, are mobilized in an effort to win war. Civilians thus form an integral part of the war effort, namely through their provision of various forms of economic and moral support. Consequently, as seen in *Dancock's Dance*, the dissenting

civilian represents a real and significant threat to the national war effort and to a nation's likelihood of victory (*On War*). As "total war" historian Jörg Nagler explains,

In every modern war, the inclusion of the civilian population is essential for the war effort, and loyalty becomes the psychological touchstone on which to base national cohesiveness and the ability to motivate civilians to become soldiers, to leave their families, homes, friends, and communities, and to risk the ultimate sacrifice – death – for a cause, a nation, or both combined. Without the home front, loyal and committed to a cause, politicians in a democratic state hesitate to support a war, and ultimately the battle front collapses. The question of loyalty is intimately connected to patriotism, nationalism, and ideology. Disloyalty – or dissent – endangers the national consensus on the home front and is detrimental to the war effort. (329)

The final lines of Jennie's speech reveal that she is aptly aware of her place within a "total war" and that the rallied audience will receive her speech as an articulation of disloyalty. She nevertheless continues her rant, concluding with, "[d]o what you will, call me a traitor" (5), and willingly accepts the potential consequences of her treason.

Jennie fears neither the term "traitor" nor the social repercussions of this label; however, it provokes angst in her daughter Anna and her friend Elsie alike. Anna warns Jennie, saying, "they all talk" (5), and Elsie reprimands Jennie for speaking out, reminding her, "[y]ou are becoming very unpopular. It's not good to make trouble" (5). Jennie responds, however, by declaring, "I'm not 'making trouble' – I'm saying the *truth*" (emphasis added 5). Her "truth" not only critiques conscription and the participation of Canadians in what she perceives to be a British war (5) but also

undermines assumptions of “heroes and glory” and makes paramount narratives of “blood and death” (5). Ultimately, it problematizes romantic, heroic narratives of the First World War that evoke the public’s support of conscription. Romantic narratives concealing the brutal reality of trench warfare were widely circulated and believed in 1917 Canada. As Keshen explains, this was, in part, because of “pre-war jingoism and naivete, geographic isolation, along with press corps’ patriotism and relative tractability” (xvii), which “made it possible for romantic notions about combat to survive the butchery” (xvii-xviii). Certainly, these factors would have contributed to the rose-colored “fog” over Halifax, obscuring the actual horrific conditions of trench warfare from the rallied, patriotic Haligonians.

Throughout Jennie’s critique, she carries a newspaper, and the strategic inclusion of this prop enables Davies to implicitly suggest the press’ role in the production of war “truth.” Jennie not only mocks circulating narratives of Canadian Great War “heroes and glory” (5) but also specifically derides newspaper representations of people of German descent. Namely, she calls attention to the press’ production of a negative, essentialist understanding of the “German.” As she observes, “[s]eems all Germans are monsters these days, to read the papers” (6). This leads Anna to naively question, “[w]hy do people believe that, Mama?” (6). Jennie immediately answers, “[b]ecause they are told so. By people who have never met a German in their life” (6). This response indicates Jennie’s belief in the passivity of her community and in their inability to negotiate the blatant, pro-war propaganda in circulation. Elsie, however, is less quick to judge the reading public. She considers the public’s “full and straight” reading of anti-German messages to be a much more complex practice, shaped by their traumatic experience of the First World

War. She justifies their xenophobic readings, explaining, “[i]t is the war, Jennie. People have lost a lot” (6). The war-widowed Jennie, however, refuses to accept this as an excuse for acquiescence. She counters Elsie’s assumption, arguing, “I’ve lost a lot too, but I don’t believe it. My Frank didn’t believe it. . . . And he counted you a friend, German or not” (6-7). What Jennie’s rebuttal serves to illustrate is the potential of Canadians such as Jennie, Frank, Anna, and Elsie to detotalize the “preferred code” (Hall 137) of meaning despite their place within a war context.

Shatter, however, suggests that this is infrequently the case and illustrates the way in which the printed word is commonly and falsely perceived as authoritative truth. As the play reveals, the content of the December 5th newspaper in the MacLean home testifies to this. It features a sensationalist, fear-provoking story of German invasion, headlined as ““Huns land in Canada. Halifax, St. John, Ottawa in ruins. Quebec Besieged!”” (8). Jennie immediately critiques this report, sarcastically asking the rhetorical question, “[d]id you see the invading Germans while you were out shopping, Elsie?” and trenchantly responding, “[n]either did I” (8). However, *Shatter* once again gestures to the fact that Jennie’s reading is highly individualized and not the “preferred” one. When Elsie asks, “[d]o they [the Canadian reading public] truly believe that?” (8), Jennie pointedly replies, “Toronto was preparing for the attack to begin any minute. Put anything in print and it’s true” (9). Brian’s sudden interruption as a result of his “patrol” duties (9) more subtly answers Elsie’s inquiry and further affirms Jennie’s belief in the power of the press.

Though the play does not explicitly formulate a cause/effect relationship between the report of invasion and Brian’s military patrol, the juxtaposition of these elements

illustrates the way in which the false, alarmist headline reflects and reproduces real communal fears of enemy invasion. It also illustrates that Halifax, like Toronto, mitigates these media-induced fears by heavily fortifying and “preparing” for the external enemy’s attack (9). These defensive preparations transform Halifax into a garrison, insulating its inhabitants from the “German” threat. Not only does a “submarine net [go] down,” which guards the city from the potential entrance of foreign ships and submarines (12), but soldiers, like Brian, “patrol for blackout” (9), preventing the enemy from utilizing city lights for navigation into Canada. This particular security measure, as Brian explains to Elsie, Jennie, and Anna, is one means “to keep *us* [Canadians] safe from the Huns” (emphasis added 9).

The Canadian “us,” however, is far more complex than Brian assumes. By pointing to the plurality of this entity, Davies undermines Brian’s assumption of an imagined, homogenous citizenry (exclusive of people of German descent) as well as his heroic efforts to protect Canadians from “the Huns” (9). Jennie introduces the German-Canadian Elsie Schultz to Brian, subversively locating the “German” within her Canadian household. Brian interrogates, “Schultz?” and looks at Elsie “*a bit too sharply*” (9). Though Jennie introduces her in the same manner as the members of her family, Brian singles her out by her ethnic/hyphenated identity. This reaction was common in pre-explosion Halifax, where German Canadians remained ambiguous figures within the nation. Though German Canadians were not initially considered a significant wartime threat, they nevertheless were forced to report regularly to authorities and were often

treated with hostility.⁷⁵ Brian's animosity to Elsie, in part, reveals his understanding of the "German" in static terms and his misplaced attempt to protect "Canadians" from this indeterminate figure. As Davies reveals, his guarding of Canadian citizens and his persecution of "Germans"—in a manner reminiscent of Canadian soldiers overseas—are problematized by the Canadian context, where the "enemy" forms an integral part of the social fabric.⁷⁶

Davies not only complicates Brian's attempt to protect Canadians from "the Hun" but also illustrates the futility of all national border fortification endeavours. Despite the state of siege, the War infiltrates and firmly locates itself within city limits, violently transforming Halifax into a graphic site of carnage, rubble, and death. As the characters explain, the sun retreats, "smoke" fills the air, and "[b]lack oily tar" rains down (16). Though the soldier Brian remains planted on home soil, his experience resembles that of a soldier in a war-ravaged city overseas. He notices an "officer float up, dead" (16), and, as he walks to the "barracks," he finds himself surrounded by "people with no limbs" (17). Most horrific, however, are the images of suffering women and children, such as that of "a naked woman walking down the street" (16) and of a mother "carrying a baby with the top of his head gone" (17). These macabre images of

⁷⁵ See, for example, Jonathan Wagner, *A History of Migration from Germany to Canada, 1850-1939* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006) 160-161; Gerhard R. Bassler, *The German Canadian Mosaic Today and Yesterday: Identities, Roots and Heritage* (Ottawa: German-Canadian Congress, 1991) 4-5; Edward Schreyer, *The Role of German Canadian Settlers in Canada – Past and Present* (Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan German Council, 1990) 21-22; K.M. McLaughlin, *The Germans in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1985) 12-13.

⁷⁶ *Shatter* is similar to *Unity (1918)* in this respect. Both plays explore the complicated way in which Canadians attempt to identify and persecute the Germ(an) threat within their midst.

domesticity reveal the war front/home front conflation, illustrating the way in which the War has transformed the Canadian home space—from sanctuary to hellish battlefield.

Many Haligonians immediately assume that this horrific transformation following the explosion is the product of enemy invasion. Several characters speculate, “[i]t must be...” (17), and Brian confirms their suspicions, stating, “[t]he Germans. They’ve finally come to kill us all!” (17). However, as Davies reveals, it is not the enemy, which finds Canadians to kill, but the War itself. Ironically, though Jennie kept her “sick” son Alfie at home (12-13), partially as a means to prevent his enlistment and death in the War, the War nevertheless finds him on Canadian terrain and takes his life. His death in the explosion leads Jennie to regret her decision and to lament, “[i]f only I’d done something. Something different. Maybe I should have let him go. Let him sign up, then maybe he’d have been over[seas]” (51). Considering the high death toll of Canadians in armed conflict, Jennie’s assumption is highly naïve; however, it aptly reveals the inescapable nature of the War, which left no space neutral.⁷⁷ Davies also makes this evident in the immediate aftermath of Alfie’s disappearance when Anna searches for his body in “*a makeshift morgue*,” which Brian guards from looters (18). Within this space, Brian confides his similar experience of familial loss, confessing that his “older brother died overseas a few months ago” (21). The juxtaposition of the deaths of “brothers,” often a metaphorical term for soldiers, one in armed conflict and one at home, suggests their common experience of the War as well as their shared susceptibility to its violence.⁷⁸ What differs, however, is that Alfie’s death *in war* was unanticipated and unforeseen.

⁷⁷ See Clausewitz 46.

⁷⁸ Though Alfie remains bedridden, he is engaged in the War effort, namely as a result of his unequivocal support for it (9, 13).

Whereas soldiers overseas expected to encounter the War in its aggressive, physical form, civilians on the Canadian home front presumed a certain degree of immunity from it. Its sudden, unexpected, and unwelcome arrival therefore leaves civilians dislocated and disoriented within their once-familiar home space. When the detonation ravages the environment around Anna, for example, she immediately expresses a sense of alienation, confessing, “I don’t know if this is my street” (17). In the aftermath of the explosion, Anna also finds that the War has literally and metaphorically uprooted her from home. She attempts to return to her family house and its assumed domestic comforts; however, she encounters a cart “full of dead people” with “arms and legs dangling over the sides” (27) as well as an uninhabitable house (23).

This house parallels the greater Halifax region, which has also become inhospitable and unrecognizable both as a result of the explosion and the heavy snowfall that follows it. Choral characters evocatively describe this transformation:

It starts to snow.
 the white flakes float down/
 sixteen inches of snow/
 cover the blood and the body parts
 blow through the holes left by broken glass (22)

Within this macabre winter landscape, choral character 2 questions, “[w]here am I?” (22), and this inquiry suggests the character’s profound sense of dislocation. Davies’ projection of a pen and ink sketch, entitled ““Help the Halifax Blind”” (23), at the close of this scene, however, makes ambiguous the roots of this disorientation, which could be either the product of the transformed home space or the result of an ocular injury. The sketch

“featur[es] a young girl and her mother with blindfolds looking regal and lost, and the text ‘Help the Hundreds of Halifax Blind! Please Donate Generously!’” (23). It captures their significant struggle, as they attempt to blindly navigate through the extensive rubble.

Arthur Lismer, an artist who resided in Halifax from 1916 to 1919 and who later became a prominent member of the Group of Seven, sketched “Help the Halifax Blind” and other evocative images of the explosion.⁷⁹ These images call attention to the significantly changed cityscape and to the extensive wounding of civilians within this space.⁸⁰ The *Canadian Courier* printed eight of these sketches in its 29 December 1917 edition under the headline “When War Came to Halifax . . . As Seen by the Artist” (10-11).⁸¹ It published the sketch “Help the Halifax Blind” in the 16 February 1918 edition of the *Canadian Courier* alongside an appeal for funds for the School for the Blind in Halifax (3,11). This spread also includes a painful personal recollection of the 6th of December by Sir Frederick Fraser, the head of the school. This two-page remembrance complements the sketch by calling attention to the approximately two-hundred and fifty Haligonians “who . . . lost their sight” as a result of “a blizzard of splintered glass” and

⁷⁹ In recent years, many reproductions of his sketches have been recovered and archived. Approximately thirteen reproductions were found in the newspaper *Canadian Courier* (1917-1918) and eleven in the book *Drama of a City: The Story of Stricken Halifax* (1918). For more information, see Alan Ruffman, interview by Peter Gzowski, “Arthur Lismer and the Halifax Explosion,” *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, CBC, 6 December 1990, Web, 1 September 2010 and Alan Ruffman, interview by Valerie Pringle, “Halifax Explosion: Arthur Lismer’s *Sorrow* painting is found,” *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, CBC, 2 December 1992, Web, 1 September 2010.

⁸⁰ Lismer officially became a war artist in 1918 when Lord Beaverbrook commissioned him to paint military activity in Halifax for the Canadian War Memorials program. Other members of the Group of Seven were also involved in this program.

⁸¹ Though none of these sketches affixes blame upon the “Germans” for the disaster, they nevertheless did little to abate the pervasive sense of anxiety and anti-German sentiment in Halifax (Kelly 19). The headline and images implied the War’s arrival, and the public misread this information as a report of enemy invasion, possibly coordinated by German Canadians. This interpretation led to further intra-communal in-fighting and suspicion.

“flying shrapnel” (11). The article and sketch testify to the horrific experience of the War at home, where blind civilians suffered in a manner reminiscent of gassed soldiers overseas.

Following the projection of Lismer’s drawing, Davies echoes this image on stage. Anna leads a “*blindfolded*” and “*despondent*” Jennie into their new family home, “a boxcar” (23). The theatrical emulation of Lismer’s static sketch enables Davies to call attention to Jennie’s physical wounds and their relationship to her significant psychological ones. In the explosion, Jennie was not only blinded but also rendered “*unconscious*” (17), and these traumatic events had a profound effect upon her psychological health. As Davies explains, “Jennie suffers the effects of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),” a disease “not recognized in 1917” (“Play and Casting Notes” 2). Jennie’s symptoms manifest themselves in various forms, ranging from traumatic recollections of the event, to catatonia, to violent emotional outbursts. She evocatively and painfully recalls her sightless experience of the explosion, graphically noting that, “[i]t smelled like roast. . . . Not quite, kind of sickly sweet, something wrong about it. There was no up, no down... nothing. There was nothing. And then I was buried under all of this...” (30). At other times, she does not speak of her experience but becomes suddenly embittered and violent. When Anna, for example, brings her a glass of water, “*JENNIE takes the cup, then throws it across the room violently. . . . JENNIE lays [sic] down on the cot, fetal*” (24). She also experiences periods of catatonia when she declines to respond to those who address her (24, 29). When Jennie does not register Elsie’s voice, Anna explains, “[s]he can hear fine. She just... sometimes she just doesn’t want to. She gets quiet like this. She’ll just come out all angry and yell and shout. Then she gets quiet”

(29).

Jennie, however, experiences moments of lucidity, which make apparent the metaphorical blindness of the War-fevered civilians around her. Within the play, blindness thus operates on a literal and metaphorical level in much the same way as fog.⁸² Though Jennie suffers from ocular trauma, she retains the ability to “see”—that is, to discern and deduce objectively. As *Shatter* illustrates, it is the physically uninjured Brian who has lost this faculty. In the post-explosion climate, he is completely unable to read German attributes (names, accents, language) as anything but signifiers of the enemy. He critiques Anna’s association with Elsie, discounting Elsie’s Canadian citizenship and rationalizing his blind hatred with the oversimplified explanation, “[s]he’s... she’s a German” (31). When Anna corrects Brian, saying, “[s]he’s a friend” (31), he asks her to reconsider this assumption (31). Later, he argues that evil is “bred in their bones” (32). Jennie refuses to accept any part of Brian’s biased, one-dimensional analysis of Elsie, and she asks him “to apologize . . . or to leave” (32). Brian attributes this slight to Jennie’s blindness and responds, “I’ll forgive you that, because . . . you can’t see what’s happened to this city in the last few days. If you did, you would know who the enemy is, and what they’re capable of” (32). Ultimately, Brian suggests that Jennie’s inability to “see” the war-ravaged space around her prevents her from understanding that Halifax has been subject to an enemy attack. Jennie, however, believes that she has retained the ability to “see who [her] friends are” (32) despite the explosion and that it is Brian who has become short-sighted.

Unlike Brian, Anna does not immediately demonize all German Canadians—

⁸² Davies employs the blindness motif in a similar manner to Sophocles in *Oedipus the King* and Shakespeare in *King Lear*.

though she retains the physical ability to see the extensive devastation in Halifax. Her neutrality, however, clashes with her romantic aspirations, eventually rendering her susceptible to Brian's influence and advances.⁸³ Brian romances Anna in a traditional wartime manner, offering to avenge her and her family for the wrongs done to them by the "Huns." As he explains, "I'll go [overseas] and kill some of those Huns just for you. For you and your family" (27). When Anna does not immediately understand this logic, Brian explains, "[c]'mon Anna, everybody know that there are German spies in Halifax that passed the information to cause the explosion" (27). His interpellative "[c]'mon" invites her join him and the pro-War patriotic community in sharing this view. Throughout this conversation, Anna holds a gift from Brian, "*an odd-shaped homemade rose made out of newspaper*" (24), and this object subtly calls attention to the way in which Brian's language imitates that of the newspapers. It also suggests the way in which her acceptance of Brian's offer and the anti-German ideology will enable her to acquire a wartime romance and community. Her final comment, "[t]hanks for the flower. It's nice" (28), implies Anna's tentative acceptance of Brian's suggestion and her disengagement from the "truth." It is only when Anna risks losing Brian completely, however, that she fully embraces Brian's jingoistic conception of a homogenous community (33).

Most members of this symbolic group require far less inducement than Anna and openly engage in warring against German Canadians. Sensationalist news continues to circulate, justifying xenophobic acts and spurring further wartime hatred. Davies makes this connection evident by complementing a projected news headline, "'Halifax Herald: *The Thrilling Story of the Awful Disaster that the Huns Brought to Halifax and to all of*

⁸³ Early in *Shatter*, for Anna, 1917 is a wonderful, romantic time, involving daydreams of war romances (5,8,10-11).

Nova Scotia!” (28), with a scene of violence. A group of children of non-enemy descent hurl obscenities at Elsie:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1/2/3/4 | Baby killers. |
| 1 | Evil Hun! |
| 2 | Get Out! |
| 3 | Go Back! |
| 4 | Go back where you came from! |
| 1 | Kaiser-lover! |
| 2 | Think you can do that to <i>us</i> ! |
| 1/2/3/4 | See what <i>we</i> do to you! (emphasis added 28) |

The scene closes as “[*a*]ll four take back their hands as if they are about to hurl stones forward” (28). This suggested act of violence is particularly disturbing because it is committed against an innocent Canadian of German-descent by Canadian children who have internalized the language of the War. Their mob mentality and jingoism, expressed by their use of the words “us” and “we,” also illustrate the way in which this shared violence functions as an act of consolidation that enables them to feel empowered after having been the victims of unfathomable destruction.

Group acts of violence also offer adult Haligonians of non-German descent a means of empowerment in the aftermath of the explosion. The choral characters detail this experience as they gather in the street, preparing to ravage a German-Canadian home. Choral characters 2/3/4 explain, “we gather quietly in the street. . . . And we start to close in, form one round group, no beginning, no end, absorbing others as they arrive, growing outward to swallow them all in, we become bigger and bigger. . . we become

one” (34). This homogenous “one” rushes forward “[l]ike a cavalry charge!” (34), calling out the German Canadians. 2/3/4 demand, “[c]ome out, you bastards. You traitors. You sons of German whores! We know what you’ve been doing. We know what you’ve done” (34-35). The dichotomous language of “you” and “we” not only affirms the “imagined community” of Haligonians but also provides them with a visible means to scapegoat. The aggressors feel self-empowered as they make tangible the threat within their midst and minimize this menacing presence with violence. Characters 2/3/4 justify this practice, reasoning, “[w]e know what [they’ll] do if we don’t stop [them]” (35). Ironically, they fail to recognize the way in which the brutality they commit against innocent civilians mimics that of the mythic Hun overseas.

Anna most vividly articulates the sense of empowerment acquired from the act of scapegoating. When she throws bricks at a German-Canadian home, she explains that “it feels . . . really good. . . . it feel like there is something electric, something electric sparking in each of our chests” (35). This electrifying sensation, however, is momentarily suspended when Anna arrives at Elsie’s home and watches as “[a]ll of her things. . . all of her things are being ripped and torn, smashed and splintered” (36), including “[t]he table where [Anna] ate cookies and milk” (36). Here, Anna briefly remembers the humanity of the “enemy”; however, this recognition is short-lived and not sufficient to free her from the mob’s enticing pull. When another vigilante hands her a framed photo of Elsie and her husband, willing her to engage in the communal act of vengeance, Anna reaffirms her alliance with the mob by violently smashing it. This is made possible, in part, by her Othering of Elsie and her husband, whom she refers to in generic terms: “[y]ou-took-it-all! You took my friends! You took my family! You took my life, my future, my

everything” (36). For Anna, this initially “feels like... like being alive!” (36), an important sensation considering the extent of death around her. However, it eventually leads to feelings of guilt (39). She confesses to Brian, “I can’t really believe I did that” (39), and Brian reassures her, “[t]hey deserve what’s coming to them, that’s all. Read the papers” (39). This recourse to the wartime newspapers again affirms their authoritative resonance within Halifax. It also suggests the way in which newspapers exploit their authoritative position in order to rally the public and stimulate Germanophobia.

The *Halifax Herald*, in particular, offered its readership a highly skewed depiction of the “German” and encouraged them to regard this figure as a threatening object of derision. On 12 December 1917, the *Halifax Herald* ran a particularly disturbing article, which concluded with a heated declaration: “[s]o long as there are people in Halifax who remember this past week or whose children remember it, so long will the name of German be a name for loathing and disgust” (“Thrilling Story” 4). Davies includes this line in *Shatter* before dramatizing the communal consequences of this dictum (36). As the “German” comes to be acknowledged as a figure of “loathing and disgust,” the explosion comes to be re-remembered as the product of “German” cruelty and misdeed. Choral character 4, for example, suddenly recalls, “[t]he last thing I saw before I was blind was the Germans coming up from the docks” (37). This character also recollects that, “before it happened, before... A man came up from the shore and asked me for a glass of water... in German...” (37). Others recount having seen “a German zeppelin!” (37). Though these recollections are clearly the product of suggestion, they nevertheless come to be perceived as objective accounts of history. Davies highlights the social authentication of this false, racist history by punctuating each Germanophobic affirmation with the choral

characters' exclamation of "[i]t's true!" (37).

The military and police in the play also validate this truth. However, unlike the newspapers, which invite individuals to accept this conception of reality, these regulatory forces operate "massively and predominantly *by repression*" (Althusser 145). They thus function as Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and maintain anti-German, pro-war sentiment through physical coercion and force. Namely, they confirm public suspicions about "German" implication in the explosion and silence potential voices of dissent by arresting all German Canadians in Halifax. By dramatizing these arrests, *Shatter* draws upon the history of 10 December 1917, when the military overseas dictated that the German Canadians in Halifax were a significant threat to the allied War effort and ordered their formal arrests. Brian warns Elsie that "[t]hey're arresting all the Germans today. You'd better report" (32), and Elsie soon finds herself in prison.

The *Halifax Herald* ensures the widespread knowledge of these arrests. It features the December 11th headline, "'Yesterday Commenced Whole-Sale Arrest of Germans. At least six sleep in city lock-up'" (qtd. in *Shatter* 41). This headline makes certain that the public at large (and the play's audience) is informed of these arrests, and the knowledge of these arrests validates and authenticates suspicions of German-Canadian deception. Anna certainly perceives the arrests to be concrete evidence of such. As she explains to Jennie, "Mama, why would they have arrested the Germans if they had nothing to do with it. . . . Think about it, Mama, they must know something, they wouldn't do it if there wasn't some reason behind it, would they?" (43).⁸⁴ Thus, though the police arrests aim to

⁸⁴ Davies again includes a newspaper in this scene, highlighting the inescapability of its voice. Elsie reads the newspaper headline aloud: "'[t]he arrest of the Germans went on yesterday and last night'" before she "*catches herself*" (44).

maintain power over the German Canadians through violence and force, these actions ideologically shape public perception at large.

Jennie initially refuses to interpret the arrests as evidence of German-Canadian treason; however, Anna's sustained attempt to impress the "truth" upon Jennie eventually impedes her reason. At a mass funeral for the unidentified dead, Jennie asks Anna to describe the procession. Anna finds this difficult in part because of the crowd of people of non-German descent and the heavy "fog" shrouding her view (47). It is within this exclusive, shared space of mourning and under the blanket of "fog" that Anna convinces Jennie to shift her thinking and to share in the dominant view of events. These conditions, like those in the "fog of war" overseas, impede Jennie from reliable information and a clear understanding of her wartime situation. They thus make her vulnerable to Anna's suggestions. Anna attempts to cast suspicion on Elsie, hinting that "Elsie wasn't at the factory when it collapsed" (48). Anna also reiterates Brian's arguments, explaining that "[t]here are rumours. People have been saying they've seen her. Seen her walking late at night with a lantern. Seen her writing letters. Secret letters sometimes at night" (48). This anecdote casts momentary doubt in Jennie's mind, and Anna capitalizes upon this, reminding Jennie of Elsie's arrest and that "she had to have been arrested for something" (48).

Jennie, however, only reveals the extent to which she has internalized Anna's words after she hears of Alfie's death (50-51). In this moment of turmoil, she identifies with the mourning community at the mass funeral and lashes out at Elsie: "[y]ou don't know what this is like. You can't. You haven't lost anyone at all, and you sneak out for walks late at night..." (51). She also echoes Anna's earlier accusations, revealing that she

doubts Elsie's integrity: "[y]ou won't go outside in the day. And they arrested you. For what, Elsie? Why did they?" (51). When she finds Elsie writing a letter, in what she rightly assumes is German, she subjects herself to the wartime order and engages in the defence of her family and country. She seizes the letter and demands to know its contents (56). When Elsie refuses to divulge the letter's meaning, Jennie subtly accuses her of treason, hinting, "[t]he newspapers say there are spies around, you know" (56). Elsie, surprised by Jennie's invocation of the newspapers, retorts, "I thought you did not believe in newspapers" (56). Though Jennie confesses, "I don't believe in anything!" (56), her behaviour makes evident that Alfie's death has made her highly susceptible to the pervasive public discourse of fear in Halifax, which encourages suspicion and proactive civilian action.

The pain of Jennie's loss crystallizes into a deep-seated, misguided hatred of the "Germans," whom she unconsciously blames for Alfie's death. The sound of Elsie's spoken German within her home thus provokes a highly hostile response:

Jennie Don't speak to me that way!

Elsie What way?

Jennie In that...that...

Elsie That what, Jennie?

Jennie That language! (57)

What quickly becomes evident is that Jennie is not angered by her inability to understand the meaning of Elsie's words, the foreign German language, but by the sound of what she perceives to be enemy language within her home. To Jennie, Elsie's choice to speak this language, especially in a time of mourning, suggests an affinity with the enemy and a

profound act of cruelty and disrespect. This response, in turn, points to the ease with which a minority language in Canada can shift in meaning as a result of the wartime context.

It also suggests the dangerous consequences of this shift. Jennie, for example, perceives Elsie as the enemy because of her German communications and expels her from the boxcar. This spatial expulsion also resonates on a metaphorical level as it marks Elsie's larger eviction from the national community. As a member of this symbolic group, Jennie enforces this dismissal and expels the threat from within her midst. She then rationalizes this choice, explaining, "[I]eave. If I can't trust you, I can't have you here. . . . I'll do what I have to. For my family" (57). This reasoning echoes Brian's earlier promise to Anna, "I'll go and kill some of those Huns just for you. For you and your family" (27), and draws a haunting parallel between the characters' similar engagement in the protection of Anna, family, and "home"—that is, of the domestic residence and of Canadian home space. Like Brian, Jennie also chooses to engage in acts of violence to prevent the possibility of future attacks. Thus, when Elsie attempts to retrieve her letter, Jennie violently guards it from her:

ELSIE lunges at JENNIE and tries to pull the paper away. The paper gets ripped and the pieces fall to the floor. . . . JENNIE and ELSIE struggle, JENNIE is becoming violent. ELSIE moves back to protect herself. . . . JENNIE hits ELSIE in the head. (57)

Though Jennie's violence erupts partially as a result of her PTSD, it also reflects her significant fear of a second enemy-induced disaster on home terrain. As Jennie explains to Anna, "[h]er family are all in Germany, and there is no post. And she was arrested. . . .

For you and Alfie. I had to” (59-60). However, for Elsie, Jennie’s betrayal is simply the product of the “fog of war.” After Jennie hits Elsie, Elsie justifies this misplaced violence, recognizing, “[y]ou are blind” (57). Elsie, as she earlier articulated (6), understands that Jennie’s “blindness” stems from her extensive social, physical, and economic losses and her place within a war climate that encourages empowerment through the scapegoating of the German Canadian.

Anna also blindly reads the letter and perceives it to be threatening in nature. Though the letter is “in German” and scattered “[i]n pieces” throughout the boxcar (60), Anna nevertheless deciphers its contents within a specific set of prejudiced, wartime parameters. This reading of the German language solely as enemy language leads her to report Elsie as a subversive, suspect figure within the community. Anna presents the letter to the authorities, explaining, “I thought that this might be important. I’m not sure what it says, it’s in German. I thought that this might be something that you should know about...” (61). This letter, however, is in no way relevant to the allied War effort and to home-front security; rather, as the authorities reveal, it is an unfinished love letter from Elsie to her late husband (62). Upon the letter’s return to Anna, she recognizes her mistake and attributes it to her role in the War effort. She justifies her misreading and betrayal of Elsie, saying, “[o]h. Yes, we all try to do our part” (63). It is evident, however, that this contribution to the allied cause has cost her Elsie’s friendship and has done little to protect Canadians.

Anna’s tragic realization of her blind reading coincides with the widespread public recognition of German and German Canadian innocence. After an official ruling declares the accidental nature of the explosion, “Germans” are absolved of responsibility for the

disaster. This, however, abates neither the state of anxiety in Halifax nor the warring on home soil. Rather, it leads to further divisions within the community and nation as Haligonians blindly project their fears onto a new visible, internal enemy. Davies highlights this continued state of blindness by costuming choral characters 2/3/4 in “*blindfolds*” (62).⁸⁵ Character 2 exonerates the “Germans,” arguing, “[f]orget the Germans!” (62), and characters 2/3/4 affix blame upon “the French” (62). This identifying term, as Davies illustrates, lends itself to the French in France as well as to the French Canadians in Quebec; however, it more forcefully targets the anti-War “French” in Canada. Though character 2 acknowledges that “[t]he *Mont Blanc* was a French ship!” (63), the implication is that Quebec was involved in its detonation. Character 3 argues, “[t]he Quebecers devised a dastardly plan!” (63), and character 2 supports this assumption, adding, “[t]o get back at the Canadian government for conscription!” (63). These statements echo and reproduce the pre-explosion *Halifax Herald* representations of Quebec, which suggested an oppositional relationship between the anti-conscription French Canadians in Quebec and the pro-War/conscription “Canadians” in Halifax. They also suggest the way in which civilians engaged in “total war” defined those who impede the War effort as the enemies of Canada. Though the choral characters’ beliefs are evidently fictive, they are thrice punctuated with the statement “[i]t’s true!” (63). This ironic repetition enables Davies to illustrate the way in which war conditions (namely

⁸⁵ It is interesting to think of this scene in connection with that of the V-Day Dance in *Unity (1918)*. In *Unity (1918)*, the characters gathered at a celebratory dance are all wearing facemasks. In both plays, the prop (facemask/blindfold) functions as a symbolic barrier against infection: in *Unity (1918)* against the various levels of invasion that are threatening from within; in *Shatter* against the insight that would reveal the truth of the community’s fabrication of a false enemy. In both cases, the playwrights delineate war-time anxieties about internal (national, communal, individual, and physical) invasion.

fear, the news media, and the state of “total war”) contribute to the production of a highly dangerous, exclusionary version of the truth.

* * *

Davies’ play returns to the Halifax Explosion of 1917 and examines the way in which this seminal event “shattered” Haligonians and Halifax in multiple ways. Much of this is literally and physically enacted as the War (in its most violent state) locates itself in Halifax. It not only destroys the bodies of Halifax inhabitants but also literally devastates the cityscape and surrounding area. Most importantly, however, it ruptures notions of insulation from the War and violates home front security. This, in turn, leads to the breakdown of the Halifax social dynamic as Haligonians come to seek a scapegoat in their midst for the extensive and inexplicable suffering, devastation, and carnage around them.

Ironically, the initial inspiration for *Shatter* was not an image of destruction, but an “unbroken pane of glass” (“Questions on *Shatter*,” 13 April 2010). Though this image counters the connotative resonance of the word “*Shatter*,” it nevertheless gestures to one of the many sources instigating intra-communal infighting and suspicion. Within the “fog of war,” the untouched and unharmed windows of German Canadians came to represent evidence of implication in the explosion. The unbroken windowpanes falsely testified to German-Canadian guilt and validated their widespread persecution. What makes *Shatter* particularly evocative, however, is not only this exploration of the physical and ideological warring on home soil, which “shattered” lives and communal relations, but its merging with Davies’ own fracturing of popular myths and assumptions about the First World War. Davies not only undermines “truths” produced by 1917 newspapers but also

interrogates contemporary beliefs about the Great War. Not only does Davies “shatter” the widespread assumption that First World War destruction and trauma occurred overseas, but she holds up to question its memorialization as a just war through her exploration of intolerance and racism taking place on home soil. The two discursive contexts (newspaper reports and subsequent Great War mythology) thus function as parallel texts, which, once opened up to perusal, reveal the often fabricated nature of conceptions of enemy and ally, outside and in, front lines and home.

CHAPTER FOUR

“They were Canadiens”: Reframing the War in *Québec, Printemps 1918*

Few events revealed the fragility of Canadian unity so dramatically as the conscription crisis of 1917.

—Carl Berger, Introduction, *Conscription 1917*

The destiny of the four civilians killed seemed to me very absurd. For being opposed to war, they were killed in the “war” in the streets of Quebec.

—Jean Provencher, Preface, *Québec, Spring 1918*

Within English-Canadian collective memory, 1918 represents a victorious time when the allied soldiers heroically defeated the Central Powers and returned to Canadian soil. For the first time, Canadians rallied together, celebrating wartime achievements and peacetime as a unified nation. Quebec’s collective memory of 1918, however, is decidedly different.⁸⁶ In early 1918, the federal government invoked the War Measures Act and, on Easter weekend, Canadian troops invaded Quebec in order to quell anti-conscription riots. After reading the Riot Act, soldiers fired upon Quebec protestors, injuring and killing several civilians in the process. This chapter focuses on the representation of these events in Jean Provencher and Gilles Lachance’s play *Québec*,

⁸⁶ Consider, for example, the difference in literary responses to the First World War. In English Canada, there is a wealth of literature centring on the symbolic narrative of Canada and the War. In Quebec, however, little fiction exists on the subject. As critic Victor-Laurent Tremblay notes, “la Première Guerre n’a pas laissé de traces perceptibles dans le romanesque québécois [the First World War did not leave visible traces in Quebecois novels]” (59). The situation is significantly different in English Canada where *Barometer Rising* and *The Wars* remain two of the most-read Canadian novels. For more information on English-Canadian Great War fiction, see Peter Webb, *Occupants of Memory: War in Twentieth-Century Canadian Fiction*, Diss. U of Ottawa, 2007 and Dagmar Novak, *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

Printemps 1918, adapted and translated as *Quebec, Spring 1918* by American playwright Leo Skir.

Québec, Printemps 1918 is a documentary-style courtroom drama, which centres on a coroner's inquiry that took place days after the Easter Riots to determine responsibility for the numerous casualties. The play, like the investigative report, recounts the events leading up to the Easter Massacre from the perspective of civilians and military alike. In doing so, it illustrates the way in which the government's invocation of the War Measures Act and the military's reading of the Riot Act framed anti-conscription rioters as the enemies of the state and cast an aura of criminality around them. This framing was particularly easy to achieve, considering the significant animosity already present in War-rallied English Canada as a result of Quebec's low enlistment numbers and anti-conscription stance. The play thus illustrates how Quebec, defined in pre-War Canada as a founding, integral component of Canada, came to be perceived as the enemy, a significant threat to the War effort and, consequently, to the conception of national harmony. It also demonstrates how this legitimated the military's use of force to quell unrest and to end anti-conscription protests. The play critically engages with this process of legitimization—as does the coroner's report—and undermines it; it not only implies that the gatherings in Quebec were not large enough in scale to necessitate military violence but also questions the actual motives for this brutality, ultimately inquiring whether the government-sanctioned violence was simply a means of suppressing political opposition to conscription. At the same time, this return to 1918 enables the playwrights to remember, reframe, and mourn the casualties of the “war” in Quebec, who have been neither publicly grieved nor acknowledged in Canada or

(until very recently) in Quebec.

I) Remembering Quebec's Experience of the First World War

What *Québec, Printemps 1918* makes evident is not only that the names and identities of the casualties have been erased from historical records but also that the details of Quebec's actual War experiences have faded from collective memory. These varied experiences remain little known, largely because they have been overshadowed by dominant English-Canadian remembrances. In Canada's symbolic narrative of the War, Quebecers have widely been figured as the Other, the cowardly, law violating conscription-dodgers. Since the late 1960s, however, Canadian historians have attempted to remedy this limited perspective by drawing attention to the complexities of Quebec's resistance and participation in the Great War. For one, they have noted that Quebec responded to the declaration of the War with enthusiasm and in a similar manner to English Canada. Canadian military historians J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, for example, attest that "[i]n the first few days of the war enthusiasm in Montreal and Quebec equalled that in Toronto or Vancouver. Crowds gathered to sign and cheer outside of newspaper offices, and there were spontaneous parades through the streets" (25). Other historians point out that even the Quebec nationalist political leader Henri Bourassa initially endorsed Canada's participation in war (E. Armstrong 77) and encouraged Canada to create French-Canadian battalions (Murrow 87).

Historians also draw extensive attention to the mistreatment of Quebec soldiers in the military and gesture to the way in which this dampened Quebec's interest in war service. The Canadian militia, as Granatstein and Hitsman explain, was "structured to be

unattractive to French-Canadians” (24), namely because it was an English operation (13). This remained the case almost until the War’s end, largely because of the discriminatory Minister of Militia and Defence Sam Hughes, who did little to accommodate French-speaking, Catholic soldiers. Granatstein and Hitsman note that during Hughes’ tenure, “[s]enior officers of *Canadien* extraction were retired or transferred to English-speaking areas of the country. And often Hughes, an Orangeman, forbade militia units in Quebec from participating in religious processions” (24-25).⁸⁷ Knowledge of these discriminatory practices quelled wartime excitement and prevented the enlistment of new Quebecois recruits. Ultimately, Quebecers felt unwelcome and unappreciated within the English-speaking Canadian military.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, Quebec civilians did enlist and approximately “32,000-35,000” soldiers from Quebec served overseas in various battalions (E. Armstrong 249). A French-speaking unit, the 22nd (French-Canadian) Infantry Battalion, CEF was eventually created, and this battalion served in France from September 1915 to the end of the Great War. The English-Canadian military could not properly pronounce “vingt-deux,” so the 22nd battalion came to be informally known as the “Van Doos.” Though other French-Canadian units were created,⁸⁹ most French-speaking recruits replaced deceased members

⁸⁷ Vern Thiessen’s *Vimy* features two French-Canadian soldiers overseas. These soldiers attempt to serve their country despite the hostility of their English-Canadian counterparts.

⁸⁸ There were many other reasons why enlistment numbers were low. Opposition to the War also stemmed, in part, from the introduction of Regulation 17 (1912), a bill disallowing French language instruction past grade two in Ontario schools. Quebecers perceived the bill as a means of eradicating French language from Ontario and Canada, and they became hesitant to support anything with imperialist aims (Granatstein and Hitsman 27; E. Armstrong 139).

⁸⁹ The 41st battalion was the second French-speaking authorized battalion. It soon earned a terrible reputation as a result of soldiers’ theft, disorderly conduct, and alcohol abuse.

of the 22nd. By the War's end, the battalion had suffered approximately 4,000 casualties and earned a heroic reputation—one that has often been overshadowed by anti-War sentiment in Quebec.

Even in the War years, the “Van Doos” did little to mitigate anti-Quebec sentiment, especially on the home front. English Canadians felt “Quebec was not doing its share,” and they questioned why more French Canadians were not on the front (Granatstein and Hitsman 26). As the War raged on, little attention was paid to the Quebecers who had enlisted, and “the English-speaking provinces [grew] ever more furious and indignant at Quebec” (Willms 10).⁹⁰ The English-Canadian press capitalized on this anger and further rallied English Canada against its French counterpart. Initially, the English press openly critiqued Quebecers' reticence to support the War then later vilified them for opposing conscription. The Canadian magazine *Saturday Night*, for example, called Quebec a “nest of traitors” (“How to Treat a Nest of Traitors” 1) and “a spoiled, pampered child” (“The Position of Quebec” 1). They also rallied the public to arms, arguing, “[t]hese people must be impressed with the necessity of keeping their traitorous opinions to themselves, or suffer the consequences” (“The Position of Quebec” 1).⁹¹ Thus, while the “Van Doos” battled the Central Powers overseas, alongside English-Canadian soldiers, English Canada attacked “traitorous” Quebec at home. This second

For more information, see Desmond P. Morton, “The Short Unhappy Life of the 41st Battalion, CEF,” *Queen's Quarterly*, LXXI (Spring 1974) 71.

⁹⁰ These complaints were somewhat justified. “[O]n 14 June 1917,” after the figures of “Sessional Paper 143B” were “laid before Parliament” and “interpreted,” the government concluded that “Quebec had not done its ‘share’ in the war and had not borne its burden of sacrifice” (Granatstein and Hitsman 28).

⁹¹ See also the following editions of *Saturday Night*: 11 August 1917: 1-2, 8 September 1917: 1, 1 December 1917: 1, and 26 January 1918: 26.

war, ideologically waged on the home front, overshadowed the heroic “Van Doos” and remained a seminal component of Canada’s War history.

Ultimately, it was the conscription crisis of 1917-1918 that brought this second war to its peak as it sharply divided pro-conscription English Canada and anti-conscription Quebec.⁹² The July 1916 Battle of the Somme left Canada in short supply of soldiers⁹³; thus, recruiting efforts were reinvigorated on the home front. These attempts, however, yielded few results. In the first few weeks of 1917, the government therefore implemented a registration process, and all eligible men completed a twenty-four-question registration card. Quebec did not resist the National Service registration but feared it was “a prelude to conscription” (E. Armstrong 162). Prime Minister Borden dismissed this fear, assuring the public that the registration cards were “not connected with Conscription.” As he explained, “the idea was to make an appeal for voluntary National Service which would render unnecessary any resort to compulsion” (qtd. in Granatstein and Hitsman 45). At the same time, he specified that if voluntary service did not take place, then conscription would become a viable option.

The registration project, as many civilians expected, produced only a small number of recruits; thus, the government returned to the issue of conscription. The issue became of paramount importance after Borden travelled to war-torn England and recognized the precarious position held by the Allies, who were in need of manpower and support. This recognition as well as “[p]ressure from the press, and the articulate public opinion created and moulded by it, demands from groups such as the National Service

⁹² There were anti-conscription protests throughout English Canada; however, the majority of the population supported conscription.

⁹³ There were approximately 24,000 Canadian casualties.

League, and the continuing high casualties at the front, coupled with declining enlistments at home all combined to make the issue of compulsory service a live one” (Granatstein and Hitsman 60). On 17 May 1917, Borden met with his cabinet and announced his decision regarding conscription. Solicitor General Arthur Meighen drafted the Military Service Act of 1917, a conscription bill that resembled the Militia Act of 1868,⁹⁴ and the Act was introduced in Parliament on 11 June 1917—much to Quebec’s dismay.

Liberal leader Wilfrid Laurier immediately protested the Military Service Act, as did several French-Canadian Liberal members. As historian Wade Mason explains, many of these members spoke out for the first time; however, “[s]ince most of their speeches were in French, they were neither effective upon the majority of the House of the time, nor did they reach English readers of *Hansard* until some months later, when translations were published in the revised version” (742). These verbal objections and the votes of these French-speaking members of Parliament thus had little effect on the pro-conscription English-speaking majority in office. In the end, “[o]nly five French-speaking Canadians voted for the bill: two ministers, one M.P. from Saskatchewan, one from New Brunswick, and the recent Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons” (Granatstein and Hitsman 69).

Disappointed by this outcome, Laurier predicted the devastating consequences of this bill on national unity. He explained,

⁹⁴ The Militia Act required that all male inhabitants of Canada over eighteen enlist, whereas the Military Service Act was less all-inclusive and demanded only selective service.

We are face to face with a cleavage, which, unless it is checked, may rend and tear this Canada of ours down to the very roots. . . . I oppose this Bill because it has the seeds of discord and disunion; because it is an obstacle and a bar to that union of heart and soul without which it is impossible to hope that this Confederation will attain the aims and ends that were had in view when Confederation was effected. (qtd. in Borden 705)

When the Bill formally came into effect on 29 August 1917, Laurier's prediction of "discord and disunion" became a tangible reality. "War" immediately erupted in Quebec: a riot took place in Montreal, the Quebec press readily published anti-conscription material, and thousands of civilians flocked to public meetings in Quebec City on the injustices of conscription.

English Canada revolted, in turn, against Quebec, interpreting their dissent as evidence of treason and fearing that Quebec would compromise the sanctity of Canada's War effort and safety (Granatstein and Hitsman 69-70).⁹⁵ Borden's government operated in a similar manner and determined to enforce the Military Service Act despite Quebec's resistance. Borden deployed Dominion Police officers in Quebec, instructing them to identify, pursue, and arrest conscription dodgers. This occupation of the province by Canadian soldiers only furthered Quebec's hostility (Auger 508).

The anti-conscription/pro-conscription war, however, only fully erupted in the province on 28 April 1918 when two Dominion constables arrested Joseph Mercier (a central character in *Québec, Printemps 1918*) and roughly forced him into custody because he could not immediately produce his exemption papers. A crowd witnessed the

⁹⁵ *Shatter's* inclusion of anti-Quebec news articles from the *Halifax Herald* demonstrates the extent of this sentiment across Canada.

mistreatment of Mercier and revolted against it. Approximately two thousand angry civilians assaulted the St Roch District Police Station, attempting to find the Dominion Police constables who had wrongfully identified Mercier as a conscription dodger. In the process, “[t]he mob severely damaged the building’s interior and beat several police agents” (Auger 508-09). They also sang “O Canada” and the “Marseillaise” while sacking “the offices of the *Chronicle* and *L’Évènement*,” two pro-conscription newspapers (Wade 764). By the following evening, approximately 15,000 people had assembled in the streets of Quebec City; this group was made up of people of all ages, including children and the elderly.

By Saturday, the Borden administration invoked the War Measures Act, suspending *habeas corpus* and fully occupying the city with English-speaking troops, most of whom were conscripts.⁹⁶ As historian Martin F. Auger explains, “[t]he Canadian government’s decision to send English-speaking troops from outside Quebec to uphold law and order in Quebec City was largely prompted by its doubts about the loyalty of French-Canadian troops” (512). These English-Canadian troops “were . . . free to intervene at any time, anywhere in the city, without the approval of the civilian authorities, and to use whatever force necessary” (Auger 511). In order to quell the approximately two thousand protesting civilians in the streets, the soldiers charged crowds with fixed bayonets. They also “patrolled the streets on foot, horseback, and in motorized vehicles, and stood guard at strategic locations. Machine guns were placed at several locations around the city” (Auger 517). The “[c]avalry,” as Wade explains, also violently attempted to disperse “the crowd with improvised bludgeons made of axe-

⁹⁶ Wade notes that “the government tactlessly supplied [troops] in the form of a Toronto battalion” (764).

handles” (764). What this affirmed was that Quebec was the enemy of Canada and was embroiled in a war against its fellow countrymen.⁹⁷

Easter Monday 1918 ended in a bloody battle, which affirmed the strength of pro-conscription English Canada over Quebec. The military expected that the numerous placards in the city, articles in the newspapers, and religious sermons in Church urging the populace to remain safely within their homes, would quell unrest (E. Armstrong 228-29; Wade 764). Many Quebec civilians, however, disregarded these warnings and continued to assemble. The military, as Provencher recalls in his historical study of the Easter Riots, thus undertook drastic measures to finalize the conflict:

[L]es soldats, baïonnette au canon, refoulent les Québécois, les pressant de se disperser. On vide les salles de quilles, de billard et les clubs de la place. Petit à petit, la foule est repoussée dans les rues avoisinantes. Mais on ne se disperse guère et on n’entend pas entrer si tôt à domicile. C’est à ce moment qu’on fait intervenir la cavalerie, sabre au clair. Les chevaux s’engagent sur les trottoirs, n’hésitant pas à piétiner au passage quelque femme ou enfant qui n’avait pas eu le temps de se garer.

[The soldiers, bayonets in place, push back the Quebecers, pressing them to disperse. Bowling alleys, billiard rooms, and clubs are emptied. Little by little, the

⁹⁷ There were several reasons behind the government’s hasty, severe invocation of martial law in Quebec. Certainly, the government was resolute in its imposition of conscription and felt it imperative to quell any resistance to this measure (in Quebec and in other parts of Canada) (Auger 512-13). Martial law also enabled the government to secure and ensure the continued protection of provincial buildings, federal infrastructures, and military spaces, including “the Citadel” and “the nearby army camp at Valcartier.” It also ensured that troop transportation resources (such as railways, bridges, and ports) and war industries (rifle/cartridge factories and shipbuilding yards) remained unharmed (Auger 513).

crowd is pushed back into neighbouring streets. But the crowd doesn't disperse, and no one thinks of retiring home so early. It's at this moment that the cavalry intervenes, sabres in hand. Horses overrun the sidewalks, carelessly obstructing the passage of women and of children who don't have the time to move away].

(Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918 110)

Provencher continues, noting that this particular brutality provoked the Quebec population, inciting them to take up arms against the military. As he recounts, “[c]es gestes brutaux soulèvent la fureur populaire et les glaçons, les briques et les pierres se mettent à pleuvoir sur les soldats [These brutal gestures increase fury, and icicles, bricks, and stones begin to rain down on the soldiers]” (110). As Wade explains, the military retaliated to this ambush (764-65), firing back at civilians, and the “[c]avalry charged the mob with drawn swords, while infantry picked off the snipers” (Wade 765).⁹⁸ This and the ensuing violence at the hands of the military left four civilians dead and numerous people injured.⁹⁹ Fearing further bloodshed, Quebecers immediately ceased all forms of protest and submitted to the military.

The restoration of order, however, did not result in the end of the occupation of Quebec. Borden feared a potential civil war in Quebec; thus, he ordered troops to remain stationed throughout the city until the War's end—despite the fact that Quebec men were

⁹⁸ If a group of twelve or more people do not disband after a lawful authority reads the Riot Act, they are committing a criminal offence and are subject to violence and arrest. *Québec, Printemps 1918* and *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918* both suggest that the military did not properly issue the Riot Act before they fired on civilians. Both texts reveal that the military testified to having read the Act; they also both illustrate that few civilians heard this proclamation.

⁹⁹ Many civilians feared they would be arrested for having participated in the riots; thus, they did not seek medical care for their injuries.

following conscription laws and regularly reporting for overseas duty.¹⁰⁰ Borden also created “Order-in-Council PC 834” on 4 April 1918, which “legalize[d] the use of military force to quell civilian disorders . . . and declared that any civilian disobeying military orders would be tried and punished by court martial” (Auger 525). The terms of this Order “were immediately enforced in Quebec City. MD-5 authorities proclaimed martial law and declared it illegal for citizens to hold any public meetings, to gather in groups of more than two, or to possess or sell firearms or ammunition. A curfew was also set; anyone found in the streets could be stopped, searched, and arrested” (Auger 526). The Order ultimately ensured that Quebec remained an occupied enemy province until March of 1919.¹⁰¹

II) Reframing and Representing the War in Quebec

Québec, Printemps 1918 illustrates that this Order, along with the earlier Acts, “framed” Quebec civilians as criminals—that is, it offered the English-Canadian public a particular image of Quebec from a distinctly pro-conscription perspective. This, in turn, connoted that Quebecers were the enemy of Canada, unworthy of the same respect and

¹⁰⁰ Granatstein and Hitsman note the significant results of the Easter Massacre in Quebec: “[t]he Church began to throw its weight behind the upholding of law and order, and soon the universities began encouraging students to enlist. The Quebec riots and the uncompromising government response presumably had frightened everyone, and when, for example, an officer from Montreal headquarters toured Vaudreuil County he received only co-operation from clergy and political leaders, all of whom claimed to be encouraging the citizenry to obey the law” (94).

¹⁰¹ Auger notes that “[a]side from Jean Provencher’s *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918* . . . no studies of the Easter Riots or their aftermaths exist in both the English- and French-language literature” (505). Auger also notes that the limited knowledge of the Easter Riots “stems . . . from general studies of Canada’s conscription crisis” and that “the extent to which the Canadian government apprehended insurrection in Quebec remains unexplored” (505).

rights as Canadians in the rest of the country. The play thus functions similarly to Judith Butler's account in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, which explores the way in which a belligerent nation represents ("frames") the enemy for particular ends. Butler defines the "framing" process as "a strategy of containment," which "selectively produc[es] and enforc[es] what will count as reality" (xiii). She also notes that within this constructed depiction, specific individuals are "framed"—that is, "set up"—as criminals or enemies within the "frame of war," the delineated contours of the war image. As she explains,

[A] picture is framed, but so too is a criminal . . . or an innocent person . . . , so that to be framed is to be set up, or to have evidence planted against one that ultimately "proves" one's guilt. When a picture is framed, any number of ways of commenting on or extending the picture may be at stake. . . . This sense that the frame implicitly guides the interpretation has some resonance with the idea of the frame as a false accusation. If one is "framed," then a "frame" is constructed around one's deed such that one's guilty status becomes the viewer's inevitable conclusion. (8)

Ultimately, Butler calls for an awareness of the subjective process of "framing" events and people and for an overall interrogation of all "frames of war."

Butler also argues that a belligerent nation purposefully "frames" its enemy, not only legitimating war against this party but also justifying its annihilation (xix). This is achieved, in part, by defining certain people (most often, enemies) as "ungrievable" and by describing others as valuable, "grievable" subjects. Most often, the "ungrievable" are individuals perceived as threatening to the valuable lives and thus subject to repression,

violence, and/or death (31, 42). This belief enables the “grievable” to rally together as a unified community (40).

Much of Provencher’s work centres on Quebec’s “framing” in the First World War. This is true of his history of the Easter Riots, *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918* [Quebec under the War Measures Act 1918], and the book’s theatrical adaptation, *Québec, Printemps 1918*. Both texts call attention to the way in which the government perceived the English-Canadian soldiers stationed in Quebec as “grievable” and the Quebec anti-conscription protestors as “ungrievable.” They suggest that the government equated Quebec with the overseas enemy, that is, as threatening to Canada’s military project and, consequently, to Canadian life and security. They also demonstrate the way in which the government, through the invocation of the War Measures Act, the Riot Act, and Order-in-Council PC 834, cast an aura of criminality around Quebec. This, in turn, “framed” Quebecers as the enemies of Canada and erased the “ungrievable” casualties of the war at home from historical records, Remembrance Day celebrations, and Canada’s collective memory.

Provencher first began to unearth this history in 1968 when he read a five-hundred page coroner’s report that had been conducted in the aftermath of the Easter Riots (“[b]ecause people [had been] killed in such a dramatic circumstances”) and decided to edit the material into a book (Provencher, Preface). What was perhaps most interesting about this report was the fact that it attested to Quebec’s innocence and concluded that the government was responsible for the four civilian deaths. It also recommended that the families of the victims receive indemnity and suggested that Quebec had been wrongfully set-up as a threat to Canada. Despite this verdict, the

government rejected this official interpretation of events and refrained from any form of apology.¹⁰² In 1971, Provencher detailed this history in his book adaptation of the report, which he published as *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918*. This historical account continues to be the only book-length study of the Easter Riots, and, though it has not been translated into English, it has nevertheless continued to “reframe” many French readers’ understanding of Quebec, Canada, and the Great War.

This book also functions as an independence manifesto, a testimony and judgment on Canada’s relation to Quebec past and present. It returns not only to 1918 to recover history but also to comment upon the October Crisis of 1970, when the War Measures Act was, once again, invoked. Considering that the October Crisis took place only one year prior to the publication of *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918*, it is likely that Provencher’s experience of the Crisis shaped his perceptions of the war measures in 1918. Certainly, he had a strong interest in these events, as his 1974 historical treatise *La grande peur d’Octobre ’70* [The Great October ’70 Fear] attests. This book carefully details the chronology of the Crisis—in a structure similar to *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918*—from October 5 to 25.

The roots of the Crisis, however, date back to the 1960s when a coalition of revolutionary separatists formed the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ). This group sought independence from Canada as well as a means to end “200 years of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ violence against the Quebec people” (Torrance 35). Throughout the 1960s, the FLQ and the independence movement steadily gained momentum, and, in April of 1970,

¹⁰² *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918* concludes in the words of Léandre Demeule, brother of the deceased Georges Demeule. Demeule testifies, “[o]n n’a rien eu. Pas même une lettre de sympathie. Pas même un billet de char... [We never received anything. Not even a letter of sympathy. Not even a bus ticket...]” (140).

the Parti Québécois won seven seats in the Quebec National Assembly. For the FLQ, however, this was not a radical enough means to ensure Quebec's independence. Thus, on 5 October 1970, they abducted the British trade commissioner, James Cross, and Quebec's minister of labor and immigration, Pierre Laporte. Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government responded swiftly, and, on 7 October, the Dominion Police began conducting raids and making arrests (Bélanger, "Chronology"). Trudeau stationed the army in Ottawa in order to protect government officials (12 October), deployed soldiers in Quebec (15 October), and invoked the War Measures Act (16 October). By 18 October, government officials had arrested approximately five-hundred people (many in the middle of the night) and conducted numerous unsanctioned searches. Though government forces attempted to target nationalists and activists, all Quebecers were subject to abuse. Montreal political journalist Nick Auf der Maur recalls the "indiscriminate" nature of the arrests and notes that "[e]verybody was up for grabs" (113); he, for one, was arrested and detained. Certainly, the suspension of *habeus corpus* and other basic rights applied to all Quebec residents—in the same manner as it had in 1918. *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918*, published in 1971, thus "had a certain resounding importance" (Provencher, Preface) as it illustrated an early figuration of Quebec as the enemy of Canada—one that greatly paralleled that of 1970.

Artistic director Paul Hébert recognized that the 1918 material on the War Measures Act would resonate with audience members at the Théâtre Le Trident in Quebec, many of whom had experienced the October Crisis first hand. His dream of "reproducing on stage the coroner's report" (Provencher, Preface) might also have been motivated by the province-wide interest in historical recovery, which was also happening

across Canada at this time. Consider, for example, that it was in 1978 when Quebec adopted the license plate slogan “Je me souviens” [I remember], a gesture affirming their commitment to recovering the past and retaining it within public consciousness. Hébert commissioned Lachance to work with Provencher, and they began adapting the coroner’s report into a courtroom drama. Provencher notes that in this process, “[i]t was necessary to remain faithful to the original text because the dossier was very complicated and the declarations often incredible. Also we knew that many of the characters involved had direct descendants who were still alive” (Preface). This choice also enabled the audience to hear the jury’s official, unedited verdict, rendering the government responsible for the unnecessary deaths of four civilians. In the end, what Provencher and Lachance created was a dramatic representation of Quebec, which clashed with the popular antagonistic image of Quebec in the Great War and “reframed” Quebecers as the government’s scapegoats. This subversive but authoritative representation reached an audience of approximately “1,700 people” in October and November of 1973 when it was premiered at Théâtre Le Trident in Quebec (Provencher, Preface). When Éditions L’aurore published the play in 1974, this “framing” of Quebec civilians became even more widely known—though perhaps only within French-speaking Quebec.¹⁰³

Le Soleil’s 1973 coverage of the play stressed its importance in Quebec and illustrated that it functioned as more than a means of theatrical entertainment. An article on the play, published before its premiere (29 Sept. 1973), noted that the play was a

¹⁰³ The play was produced on CBC in 1975 and “was chosen as the best dramatic program of the two networks (English and French) of Radio-Canada.” It “carried away the first prize awarded annually since that time by the Secretary of State. The Société Radio-Canada [also] chose the play for representation at the International Festival of Television in Venice in September, 1977” (Provencher, Preface).

“reconstitution d’un drame de l’histoire québécoise” [reconstitution of a dramatic moment in Quebecois history] and that it unearthed “des pages trop peu connues de notre histoire” [little-known pages of our history] (37). It also predicted the audience’s role in the production and, seemingly, in the future dissemination of history: “[c]’est le 11 octobre prochain que le public découvrira, lui, son rôle” [it’s on the upcoming 11 October that the public will discover its role] (37). After the production opened, an 11 October 1973 review celebrated it for commemorating the deceased: “[c]e soir débute au Trident la réhabilitation des victimes de 1918” [tonight at the Trident the rehabilitation of the 1918 victims begins] (52). The second review in *Le Soleil* (13 Oct. 1973) called attention to the play’s important recovery of unrecorded, forgotten history: “[c]ette histoire-là, on ne l’a pas encore écrite et trop de gens l’ont déjà oubliée” [this particular history, we haven’t yet written and too many people have already forgotten it] (36). What is most interesting about this review, however, is its suggestion of the way in which the recovered history resonated with the audience:

les dialogues entendus, les faits relatés, les événements reconstitués appartiennent eux, à la réalité, à un passé pas tellement éloigné, à l’histoire. Et parce que l’on peut toujours, 55 ans plus tard, reconnaître des répliques, comparer des climats qui ont conduit à un drame au cours duquel quatre hommes innocents sont tombés sous les balles des forces de l’ordre, on est embarrassé.

[the dialogue heard, the relayed facts, and the events reconstituted belong, to reality, to a past not that far away, to history. And because we can, 55 years later, recognize retorts/responses and compare the climates—one that led to a dramatic

moment whereby four innocent men were killed by gunfire as a result of the forces of order—we feel embarrassed/experience an emotional response]. (36)

While the material appears to have resonated with the Quebec audience as a result of the October Crisis, Leo Skir, an American who saw the play, requested permission to translate it, for he “saw many analogies with the incidents at Kent State University in 1970 when four students were killed by the national guard” (Provencher, Preface). On 4 May 1970, a protest at Kent State University against the American military’s invasion of Cambodia left several students wounded and dead. After troops from the Ohio Army National Guard (ARNG) failed to disperse the gathered students, they fired on the crowd, killing four students and wounding nine others.¹⁰⁴ Though the play was adapted into English to comment upon the Kent State Massacre, it nevertheless remained a faithful adaptation of Provencher and Lachance’s original script—in the sense that the historical context, setting, characters, and dialogue remained unchanged. Skir, however, did add a Prologue and an Epilogue, which Provencher affirms did “not deform the authenticity of the original text” but simply made the play’s style akin to “Greek theatre” (Preface).¹⁰⁵ *Canadian Theatre Review* published Skir’s adaptation in the Fall of 1980, presenting it for the first time to English-Canadian readers. Despite this prestigious publication at a controversial time (the year of the Referendum) in Quebecois and Canadian history, the play garnered little critical attention; thus, the extent of its influence remains unknown.¹⁰⁶

However, the play and its subversive depiction of the war at home did not fade

¹⁰⁴ Some of the casualties of the Easter Riots and the Kent State Massacre were simply passers-by.

¹⁰⁵ I have not been able to locate any information on the adaptation’s production. It is unclear whether the adaptation was ever produced.

¹⁰⁶ The English quotations in this chapter are from Skir’s translation; however, the chapter focuses solely on Provencher and Lachance’s original script.

into obscurity, and it remains of significant importance in Quebecois collective memory.¹⁰⁷ Certainly, the play, along with Provencher's book, influenced the representation of the Easter Riots in historical works and documentary films (Young 86-91, 93-104). Provencher and Lachance's work, however, also inspired the creation of two notable monuments in Quebec City. Chris Young notes that "[b]y the mid 1970s, a few years after Provencher published his two works, the *Société nationale des Québécois* led a movement to commemorate the riots," and "[o]n July 1st, 1978, . . . a group of Quebecers attended the unveiling of a small plaque in Quebec City's Lower Town," which listed the names of the deceased (106). In 1998, a larger, more attention-grabbing monument, bearing the title of the play, was erected at the intersection of Saint-Vallier, Saint-Joseph, and Bagot in Quebec City (where English-Canadian soldiers were stationed during the Easter Riots). This monument "reframes" Quebec in the Great War in much the same way as *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre 1918* and *Québec, Printemps 1918*— as its engraved history of the event makes abundantly clear.¹⁰⁸ In doing so, it

¹⁰⁷ The play was remounted in 2000 at the Palais Montcalm in Quebec City.

¹⁰⁸ The following is inscribed on the statue: "[a]u printemps 1918, des événements tragique marquent l'histoire de la ville de Québec. Le 28 mars de cette année-là et durant cinq jours consécutifs, des citoyens et des citoyennes manifestent leur opposition à la mobilisation obligatoire et aux méthodes prises par les autorités fédérales pour rabattre les conscrits. Le 1er avril, tout se gâte lorsque les autorités militaires donnent l'ordre aux 1200 soldats anglophones amenés expressément de l'Ontario et de l'Ouest canadien de disperser à la baïonnettes, les gens rassemblés au centre-ville. Les cavaliers chargent la foule. Celle-ci, rassemblée à l'angle des rues Saint-Vallier, Saint-Joseph et Bagot, réagit en lançant des pierres aux soldats. Après avoir lu, en anglais, l'ordre de dispersion, les soldats mitraillent la foule tuant quatre personnes et en blessant soixante-dix autres. Quatre-vingts ans plus tard, une fleur à pétales humains s'élève en ce lieu au sommet d'une sculpture monumentale. Elle symbolise la vie dont on retrouve la puissance dans le mouvement spontané d'un peuple qui se lève pour défendre ses convictions et qu'on découvre si fragile aussi quand la mort arrive de façon violente comme ce le fut, ce printemps-là pour quatre québécois." The inscription concludes with a list of the

dually remembers those wrongly “framed” within Canadian collective memory as well as those who first brought this knowledge to public attention. The sculpture remains important not only because of its commemorative function but also because it attests to the “grievability” of *all* the casualties of the Great War—in much the same way as *Québec, Printemps 1918*. This is made evident in the note inscribed on the sculpture, which explains that the flower symbolizes the continued respect Quebec citizens have for those killed on the streets of Quebec. The names of the deceased carved in the monument echo traditional war monuments and attest to the humanity of these particular “enemies” of Canada. The naming and honouring of the victims in the post-1998 context (eighty years after the Easter Riots) thus redefine the parameters of the “grievable” so that this category includes all Canadian casualties of war. This, in turn, opens up Quebec’s official “framing” within Canadian Great War history.¹⁰⁹

The monument, however, is also indicative of the playwrights’ (particularly Provencher’s) historical legacy in Quebec. Young concludes, after an interview with Louis Bélanger, the civil servant who petitioned for the monument and assembled its committee (which included Provencher), that “Provencher’s work . . . ultimately inspired this public remembrance” (85). The statue therefore suggests Provencher and Lachance’s function as “social agents,” a term historian Jay Winter employs to designate those “who do the work of remembrance” (*Remembering* 136). Winter notes that without these “social agents,” “collective memory would not exist” (136). Certainly, the statue’s

deceased and a final line: “[c]ette fleur, ainsi déposée, témoigne du respect qu’inspire aux vivants le souvenir de ceux qui laissèrent ici leur vie.”

¹⁰⁹ Tourists rarely see the statue because it is in a residential area of Quebec. Articles on and images of the monument, however, have recently appeared online, facilitating access to Martineau’s (and, consequently, Provencher and Lachance’s) work.

representation of Quebecers as innocent victims of English-Canadian wartime brutality appears to derive directly from Provencher and Lachance's work. What this suggests is that Provencher and Lachance's resuscitation of Quebecois history, especially of a history of English-Canadian oppression, contributed to a "fictive kinship" (Winter 137) between Quebecers in the past and present. "[F]ictive kin," as Winter also explains, are those who "share the imprint of history on their lives," and it is the people within these communities that "are the key agents of remembrance" (136). The statue thus reveals the way in which the play, in its recovery and representation of history (of both 1918 and 1970), defined and united members of a "fictive kinship" (Winter 137) who collectively share and remember a history of English-Canadian occupation, brutality, and oppression.

III) *Québec, Printemps 1918*

In *Québec, Printemps 1918*, Provencher and Lachance affirm Quebec's innocence and mistreatment by English Canada as well as its repeated, wrongful figuration as the enemy of the state. Provencher and Lachance look to the home front during the Great War, the first time the government took war measures against Quebecers. They unearth and dramatize testimonies from a coroner's report, which followed the Easter Riot, as a means of overturning the popular conception of Quebecers as rioters. At the same time, they also utilize this material as a means of characterizing Quebecers as peaceful Canadian citizens who adhere to the law. This not only points to the unjust nature of the war measures but also "frames" the English-Canadian powers as imperialist, unethical, and corrupt. Provencher and Lachance's return to 1918 thus adopts a favorable historical representation and remembering of Quebecers in the past (1918), one that mirrors the

playwrights' understanding of French-English politics and Quebecers' communal identity in their present (1970s).

i) The Representation of Quebecers

The play hinges on the testimony of Joseph Mercier, a young man from Quebec who was wrongfully and violently apprehended by the Dominion Police for failing to produce his exemption papers. Ultimately, the playwrights employ this testimony to affirm the law-abiding nature of Quebecers and to negate the popular representation of them in history as criminals. As such, Mercier becomes an Everyman with whom the audience can identify, and his testimony speaks for all misapprehended Quebecers, both in 1918 and at other points in Quebec history, including 1970. The courtroom setting in the play thus functions as a platform enabling his public defence and, to a certain extent, his acquittal. In his testimony, Mercier affirms that he had been legally excused from military duty (since 8 November 1918) and “knew it was dangerous to go out without [his exemption papers]”; however, on Easter Thursday, he failed to carry this documentation with him (62). He recalls that the Dominion Police officers immediately dismissed his explanation and denied him the right to make a telephone call, despite his docile manner and insistence it would yield his papers:

I told them, ‘Let me phone.’ But they wouldn’t. I said, ‘Look, you can go stand by the phone with me. I can’t get away.’ But they wouldn’t. And then they called soldiers to take me away. Five of them. They grabbed me. I couldn’t even touch the ground. . . . I couldn’t move. I wanted to tell them, ‘Let me go! I’m not a crook!’ . . . But I didn’t get a chance. They covered . . . my mouth. (62)

While this testimony represents Mercier (and, consequently, Quebecers) as law-abiding citizens and counters the “framing” of Quebecers as criminals, it also implicitly functions as a critique of the officers’ intelligence, particularly of their ability to discern actual and significant national threats. Considering that the English-Canadian military detained over 500 Quebecers on 16 October 1970, did not convict any of them (D. Smith xiii), and subjected many to bodily harm, Mercier’s testimony speaks to both the 1918 context and that of 1970. As such, the testimony of the Everyman not only overturns the “framing” of Quebecers but also repositions them as the victims of English-Canadian oppression.

Within the play, Provencher and Lachance extend this representation by emphasizing the police, the military, and the government’s incorrect identification of Quebecers as unlawful protestors. Ultimately, they extract material from the coroner’s report that undermines the designation of the Easter events as riots and of Quebecers as rioters. This designation is of particular importance because it determines whether or not the violence inflicted upon civilians was legally justified. The Riot Act, legislated in 1715 in England and later adopted by Canada, makes unlawful group civic disturbances, and it decrees that if twelve or more dissenters disturb the peace and do not disperse upon request, then their actions become felonious. At the trial, the investigation of whether or not Quebecers were or were not rioting was of paramount concern: if Quebecers were rioters who refused to disperse, then, by law, they were criminals; however, if they were engaged in non-threatening street activities, then the military’s shootings were cruel and unjust.

The playwrights use several testimonies to represent the Easter Riots as an event that “had a holiday air” (82),¹¹⁰ calling into question whether gathered civilians were actually worthy of being the targets of war.¹¹¹ The dialogue of Mayor of Quebec Henri-Edgar Lavigne certainly suggests that Quebecers should not have been apprehended as such. In his testimony, he notes that he witnessed “a simple demonstration” (71) and that he easily dispersed the gathered crowds (70). He notes that he informed them that “they had no cause to gather and had better break up and go home. . . . [a] small group began to protest and grumble but the crowd quickly dispersed calmly” (70). This suggests that the event was incorrectly ruled as a riot and that those involved were misinterpreted as rioters when, in fact, they were calm bystanders. The play also reinforces this idea with the testimony of Constable of the Municipal Police Sergeant Isidore Caouette. He echoes Lavigne’s description of the event, noting that on Easter Monday people were “yelling a little” and “[a]musing themselves” (115), seemingly unaware of the consequences of their actions.

The priest character, based on Père Isidore Evain, “an Oblate of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, resident at the rectory of the parish Saint-Sauveur” (99), also contributes to this alternative representation. His testimony depicts Quebec as a spiritual community, one that supports peace rather than war, especially within its own streets. He describes the citizens of his community as “the calmest people in the world” (104), and he notes that it was relatively easy “to convince them to [retreat]” on Easter Monday (100). This, as he explains, was largely because they were already “troubled and fearful,” unarmed,

¹¹⁰ Quebec Chief of Police Émile Trudel explains that the event was more akin to a “hostile demonstration” than to a “riot” (82).

¹¹¹ This questioning is also of paramount concern to Provencher in *La grande peur d’octobre ’70*.

and “seemed to be fleeing” from the military (100). This representation dismantles the “framing” of *all* Quebecers as rioters and the event as a riot, suggesting that many in the streets were simply “parishioners” witnessing the protests and then fleeing from the military (100). At the same time, it evokes images of persecuted martyrs (rather than rioters), fleeing from English aggressors.

Within the play, the English-Canadian forces, however, understand these martyr-like figures in reductive terms, simply as “ungrievable” military targets. The play includes detailed descriptions of civilians suffering and/or lying prostrate in the street (100), and these accounts attest to the English-Canadians’ undervaluation of their assumed Quebecois enemy. Provencher and Lachance, however, counter this understanding of Quebecers in the Great War, recasting Quebecers as “grievable” subjects, worthy of attention and mourning. They utilize Père Isidore Evain’s testimony, for example, to affirm the “grievability” of the casualties. In an elegiac and funereal tone, Evain recounts that soldiers shot Joseph-Édouard Tremblay and left him prostrate on the street. After navigating through crowds of fleeing civilians, Evain located Tremblay, who “was suffering a great deal and gave him the consolations of [his] ministry” (100). He also recovered the “lifeless” body of Alexandre Bussières and “administered conditional absolution” (100). These warlike images of maimed, suffering civilians not only memorialize Quebecers as victims but also powerfully emblemize the conflict as a war on home soil.

Provencher and Lachance devote a substantial portion of the play to the “grievability” of these “enemies.” In order to achieve this end, they privilege the public grievances of several mothers and spouses, voices rarely heard in war discourse. The

testimonies of these women not only affirm the moral quality of the deceased but also openly and publicly mourn them. The character representative of Madame Léandre Demeule, for example, attests to her son's good character, noting that he was a "quiet" teenager who worked long hours in a shoe factory and rarely "went out" (112).¹¹² Within the courtroom (and, consequently, within the theatre), this impression comes to destabilize the understanding of Demeule as a disturber of the peace. Madame Demeule's sadness, evident equally in her words, voice, and body language on stage, also serves to affirm the "grievability" of her son (the Quebecois enemy). She painfully recalls that at approximately 11:30 p.m., Georges' friends informed her that "Georges had been hit in the knees" and was in a neighbour's home (112). She explains, "[w]hen I got there I found him dead. He was there. He was dead" (112), before "[s]he bursts into tears" (112). Her significant grief contrasts with the historical record in which the assembled Quebecers, if remembered at all, are constructed as criminals.

The playwrights also include the testimonies of several widows in order to invert the military's demonization of Quebecers. The widows' sorrow, publicly staged in the courtroom, effectively interrogates unfavourable depictions of their husbands and affirms the significant value of their spouses' lives. The forty-six-year-old widow Madame

¹¹² Provencher and Lachance use the testimony of Tremblay's fiancée, Amélia Fortier, to achieve a similar end—the humanization of the victims. Fortier's testimony undermines the military's identification of Tremblay as a rioter and instead characterizes him as "a boy who didn't go out much" (113). As she explains, "[h]e was working hard because he wanted to finish his studies as soon as possible. He wanted to be a mechanic" (113). Her testimony not only affirms Tremblay's good character but also suggests that he had little intention of disturbing the peace. She explains that he did not possess a firearm (114) and that he had not participated in earlier riots (114). They did, however, attend Armand Lavergne's speech on Monday evening—despite their knowledge that public meetings were prohibited. As she explains, they did not expect the military would apprehend them for walking "two by two" and "not making any trouble" (114).

Honoré Bergeron, for example, “*is visibly grief-stricken*” as she begins her testimony, and she remains “*on the edge of tears*” throughout the proceedings (67), imbuing the courtroom with a funereal atmosphere. Defence attorney Major George Barclay, however, questions whether the public should join in Madame Bergeron’s sorrow. He asks, “[w]as your husband sober, Madame?” (67), hinting that Bergeron might not have been an upstanding citizen worthy of public and communal mourning. Madame Bergeron, however, retaliates by affirming her husband’s virtuous character. “*Visibly offended*,” she assures the court (and audience) that her husband “did not drink” and that he “was sober and in good health” (67). Her testimony comes to resemble a eulogy as she undermines the understanding of Bergeron as a protestor and represents him as a family man. As she recounts, he only left the house because he wanted to locate his children and bring them to safety (67). The courtroom setting thus offers Madame Bergeron a means to challenge the long-term “framing” of her husband as a disreputable drunk rioter who either wandered into the streets incoherently or set out to disturb the peace.

With this testimony, the play also critiques the military’s reductive understanding of Bergeron as a war target and not a human life. In *Frames of War*, Butler argues that certain lives, namely those “framed” as the enemy in war discourse, come to be conceived purely as threats to the valuable lives of a given citizenry. Their lives are “construed as instruments of war or pure vessels of attack,” and “they are already deprived of life before they are killed, transformed into inert matter or destructive instrumentalities” (xxix). In a sense, these “vessels of attack” are devoid of life because they are not “grievable”: “[o]nly under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear. Thus grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters. .

. . Without grievability there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life” (14-15). Because the military considered Bergeron as “ungrievable,” they did not recognize him as (having been) a living subject and did not report his death. As Madame Bergeron attests, he simply disappeared from existence:

[S]omeone came to tell me that my husband had been arrested by the spotters. I began to try to find him. The next day I went to Doctor Fiset to get his papers. I wanted to get him out. I was under the impression my husband was in the military prison. I did the same thing Wednesday but I didn’t get any news. It was Thursday, that afternoon, someone asked me to go to Monsieur Moisand, the keeper of the morgue. . . . There, I identified my husband. It was only then that I learnt he died. *She breaks into tears.* (67-68)

Whereas the military would have respectfully reported the death of a fallen soldier (either overseas or at home), this measure was not extended to the enemy’s family. What the play’s description of Bergeron’s death and disappearance in “war” thus confirms is that the military did not conceive of Bergeron as a real, valuable Canadian life—despite his obvious citizenship.¹¹³

The play further explores the English-Canadian military’s disregard for Quebecois life with the testimony of Regina Bussi eres, the twenty-two-year-old widow of Alexandre Bussi eres. Similarly to Madame Bergeron, she recounts the military’s dismissal of her husband’s life. Though her husband went missing on Monday, she only

¹¹³ This was also the case during the October Crisis when English-Canadian officials envisioned Quebecers’ humanity as unimportant. Historian Claude B elanger, for example, notes that “[i]t was difficult for family members to find out about those arrested and to get in touch with them. Sometimes, people were held incommunicado for days” (“Chronology”).

came to discover his possible location on Tuesday: “I was told he’d been arrested by the spotters. My father and my father-in-law tried to find out where he was. They went all over town, to the Manège Militaire, to the Citadel, to Carré Montcalm but they couldn’t find him” (69). After three days of searching, she finally “found out he had died” and “was asked to go identify him at the morgue” (69). Her extensive, unrelenting effort to find her husband contrasts with the military’s nonchalance towards him, illustrating the differing definitions of valuable Canadian life.

Madame Bussièrès’ testimony also echoes Madame Bergeron’s as it reframes the Quebecois “rioter” as a beloved husband (68-69). The courtroom/stage thus becomes a shared space for the remembering and mourning of these men. “*Madame Bergeron rises to meet* [Madame Bussièrès]” and “*helps her to her seat,*” and there is a profound “*silence*” in the courtroom (69). This affirms the assembly/audience’s awareness of the women’s profound sorrow as well as the significant social-domestic damage engendered by their losses. It also appears to function as a formal moment of silence, publicly acknowledging and commemorating the deceased as Canadians fallen in war. The combination of the grieving women’s testimonies and the psychological and physical contact of Madame Bussièrès and Bergeron coupled with the moment of silence creates a powerful and memorable theatrical statement on Quebecers’ memory/experience of Canada’s Great War.

This moment in the play, however, also functions on another level. Ultimately, it operates as a “site of memory” and, consequently, as a “site of mourning.” Winter argues in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* that after the War, “sites of memory” (and, in particular, “[w]ar memorials”) “were places

where people grieved both individually and collectively” (79). Because there were not a significant monument created until 1998,¹¹⁴ Quebecers (both those who experienced the Riots and those who carried its memory) might not have adequately found expression for their grief or engaged in a process of healing in the aftermath of the event. Though the trial afforded several of the bereaved to name and mourn those fallen in the “war,” communal healing after the Easter Riots (and in the immediate aftermath of the October Crisis) was not performed on a far-reaching public scale until the appearance of the play. This might explain why the play, a “site of memory” countering traditional, stigmatizing depictions of Quebecers, was widely attended in 1973 (Provencher, Preface).

ii) The Representation of English Canadians

The play also makes a statement about those employed by the English-Canadian government, vilifying them as brutish and inhumane—both prior to and after the invocation of the War Measures Act. Early in the play, Provencher and Lachance establish this representation by utilizing a religious allusion, which characterizes the Dominion Police officer Bélanger (a representation of English-Canadian presence) as morally depraved and Quebecers as the martyr-like victims of abuse. They employ the voices of both Lavergne and of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in order to achieve this end. According to Lavergne, Laurier stated that ““Bélanger is as well-known in Quebec as Barabbas in the Passion. He has the reputation of being a boxer, a bully, a braggart and a general disturber of the peace, always ready to deploy his muscular force”” (66). This is a

¹¹⁴ There is a yearly commemorative ceremony at the monument. For more information, see Marie-Josée Nantel, “Modeste commémoration de l'émeute sanglante de 1918,” *Le Soleil* 28 March 2010, Web, 10 June 2012.

particularly interesting and powerful allusion because Barabbas was not only a murderer (Mark 15:7) and a thief (John 18:40) but also a terrorist and a rioter (Mark 15:7).

Provencher and Lachance also utilize sections of Mercier's testimony to complete this understanding of the Dominion Police as Barabbas-like. "Spotters," such as Bélanger, as Mercier reveals, were known to arrest men not as a means of upholding the law but as a method of acquiring their "ten-dollar bonus" (61). He also suggests that they "[weren't] afraid to tear up exemption papers. And then accuse . . . guys of dodging" (63). Though Barclay immediately objects to these accusations, dismissing them as unsupported conjectures (62-63), they nevertheless call into question the integrity of the government officials.

Provencher and Lachance also include Lavergne's later call to the stand and testimony to echo and support Mercier's allegations. Ultimately, Lavergne holds the Dominion Police agents, whom he envisions as immoral and uncouth (123), and the government, who deployed these men in Quebec, responsible for the Easter Riots. He recalls that, on Easter Sunday, he explained this reasoning to Colonel Machin: "[a]ll this is due to the stupidity and heedlessness which the Federal government has shown in choosing these 'spotters' as agents in Quebec. The integrity of the 'spotters' is, at best, doubtful" (123). He also questions whether the "spotters" in other provinces were of the same moral character as those in Quebec. Of Barclay, he pointedly inquires,

Tell me, Major Barclay, in other provinces, who was engaged as Federal Police to have the law respected? Were they pugilists like Blackie Desjardins in Montreal or Whitey Bacon in Quebec? Were they bartenders like Bélanger, worried about losing their bonuses? This Blackie was an old offender. After the troubles in

Montreal, when he was trying to get out of prison, no one wanted to put up a bond for him. It was the Ministry of Justice of Canada which put up \$10,000 to set him at liberty. (126)

This rhetorical line of questioning enables the play to critique the government, suggesting that the government intentionally employed brutish, loutish men in Quebec as a means of punishing the province for its low recruitment numbers and its anti-conscription stance. It also suggests that the English-Canadian pro-War government and its officers envisioned Quebec civilians as a low form of life, worthy only of being governed by “pugilists,” “bartenders,” and “offender[s]” (126). This testimony therefore, woven together with that of Mercier, creates a vivid characterization (or “framing”) of the government and government agents as antagonistic and inhumane.

The representation of the military, who arrived after the invocation of the War Measures Act, however, most evocatively contributes to the play’s figuration of English Canadians. The play characterizes the military as ruthless, controversially implying that they poorly articulated the Riot Act in order to legitimate their ensuing martial attack. This is trenchantly conveyed by the character based on the Constable of the Municipal Police Sergeant Isidore Caouette, who testifies that despite having been on patrol on Easter Monday, he at no point heard the Riot Act read (116). Within the play, this assumption appears plausible, considering Captain Major George Robert Rodgers’ earlier testimony. Rodgers reveals that Captain Haughton recited the Riot Act “near Place Jacques-Cartier [Rue Saint-Joseph]. . . . [a] short time after nine” and that civilians dispersed. “Almost a half-mile distant and two hours later,” however, soldiers opened fire on Quebecers (96)—though the Act was not reread (98). These testimonies therefore

suggest that many of the gathered civilians would not have been cognisant that their presence on the streets (regardless of their intentions or actions) defined them as criminals and “framed” them as a military threat. All the more troubling is the implication of these testimonies: that the “war”-rallied military was either heedless or unnecessary cruel.

What the play convincingly illustrates, by including the testimony of Pathologist and Professor of Legal Medicine at Université Laval Albert Marois, is that the shootings were not inadvertent. Though Marois hesitates to make any final conclusions, his testimony demonstrates that Quebecers were subject to unnecessary, premeditated cruelty. From his examination of Honoré Bergeron, he dutifully testifies to the “following observation”:

I do not know the kind of bullet used by the soldiers. I make no absolute claim that they used explosive or malleable bullets. But the wound which I observed did not seem to me to have been made by the ordinary bullet used by the Army. . . .

An ordinary bullet could not have produced the wounds which I have described.

(104-05)

Marois’ suggestion is that Bergeron was shot with a bullet of “malleable texture”—that is, with a bullet typically reserved for “big game hunting” (105). This type of bullet, strictly forbidden in the army, opens to carve a large wound channel within the prey. Marois testifies that he also discovered wounds of this nature on the corpses of Demeule and Bussières, further confirming suspicions of foul intent. This discovery overtly vilifies the soldiers, suggesting they illegally tampered with military bullets, perhaps even prior

to their invasion.¹¹⁵

Though Marois cannot confirm whether or not Tremblay died of an explosive bullet wound, as he did with Bergeron, Demeule, and Bussières, he notes that the military could have prevented Tremblay's death. As Marois explains, Tremblay's "wounds were not mortal," and a simple ligature would have ensured his survival (105). Tremblay, however, received no medical assistance, as Père Evain attests, and "died of a hemorrhage [sic] caused by the rupture of the popliteal artery" (105). Marois also insists that the military misapprehended Tremblay, Bergeron, Demeule, and Bussières as the enemy. As he reveals, he "found no objects that might be considered offensive arms" (106) or indication that the deceased were engaged in any form of warfare. It also remains uncertain whether these men supported the anti-conscription movement or whether their deaths had any political purpose—other than affirming English Canada's dominance over Quebec. Demeule, for one, was only fourteen years old—old enough neither to vote nor to enlist. After being shot in his right lung and in his liver, he painfully haemorrhaged on home terrain with his death doing little to quell the riots, to encourage Quebecers to enlist, or to strengthen the Canadian War effort. Demeule thus appears to have died simply because he was a nameless, invaluable "head" in the street (the military were ordered to "fire at any head . . . in the street" [101]). All of this produces Provencher and Lachance's revisionary commemoration of the event: an account of an unjust "war" within the War, pitted against French Canadians on home soil.

¹¹⁵ Military doctor Georges Saint-Amand also suggests soldiers used explosive bullets. His duty was to treat all casualties of the Easter Riot; however, only two French Canadians were brought to his care. One of these patients, Ovide Blouin, arrived with his "leg . . . reduced to smithereens," and Saint-Amand amputated his leg. This injury, as he testifies, could not "have been produced by a single revolver bullet" (111).

Provencher and Lachance's commemoration, however, also aims to illustrate that the "war" involved the persecution of a tangible enemy (the Quebecer) as well as the French language. Provencher and Lachance point to this secondary dimension of the conflict by representing the military as an imperialist force, hostile to French-speakers, just as it was when the War Measures Act was invoked in 1970 following the kidnapping of Pierre Laporte. Ultimately, they gesture to language tensions in wartime Quebec, brought to the fore, in part, from Regulation 17, a 1912 law disallowing French language instruction after grade two in Ontario schools (Granatstein and Hitsman 27; E. Armstrong 139). Within the play, the testimony of Père Evain serves as a means to capture this tension, which was aggravated by the conscription crisis, while enabling Provencher and Lachance's representation of the military as a deadly, Anglo-centric force. Evain, for example, recalls that though the military was bilingual, they only issued warnings to French-speaking Quebecers in English, conscious that they would not be understood (102). They shouted "[h]ands up" (102), and, as Evain painfully recalls, the civilians "did not understand. They were Canadiens. . . . so—the policeman and I would cry out in French, telling them to get out and they would run" (102). This horrific depiction of events suggests that the military targeted Quebecers as well as Quebecois culture; in doing so, it figures the military as similar to the influenza in *Unity (1918)*—that is, as a threat to both embodied subjectivity and cultural homogeneity. This figuration would have resonated with many of the play's readers, considering that, in post-1960s Quebec, "the unifying component of the Quebec nation was the French language" (Bélanger, "Quebec Nationalism") and that during the October Crisis many experienced either bodily harm at the hands of the military or, at least, significant fear of it.

* * *

Québec, Printemps 1918 returns to the Easter Riots, a little-known time in Canadian history when the military shot four civilians on the streets of Quebec. It adapts and dramatizes an even lesser known coroner's report, which considers one of the government's first "framings" of Quebecers as rioters. This dramatic adaptation of the report ends with the coroner addressing the court and requesting the jury to deliver a verdict:

We have just heard the last witness. Members of the Jury, the time has come for you to render your verdict. For five days tragic events have overtaken Quebec, causing the death of four persons: Honoré Bergeron, Alexandre Bussières, Edouard Tremblay and Georges Demeule. The witnesses have brought before you the deeds and words of the people of the city and also responses of the civil authorities and the militia at the time. It is for you, now, to justly decide the responsibility that falls to each party in this matter. (126)

Because the audience witnesses all aspects of the trial (as a jury would), they, to a certain extent, become "Members of the Jury." However, unlike the play's actual jury, their appointed task, "to *justly* decide the responsibility that falls to each party in this matter" (emphasis added 126), extends past the boundaries of the courtroom setting and theatre. Ultimately, Provencher and Lachance ask their jury-audience to reflect upon their new knowledge and to reconsider popular figurations of Quebec in the Great War and, by extension, in the October Crisis.

The play, however, does not end here; instead, it interrupts this moment of reflection by reproducing the original 1918 jury's verdict, which found that the military

wrongly “framed” and killed innocent Quebec civilians. The jury officially state that they ““profoundly regret that the good reputation of the peaceful citizens of Saint-Roch and Saint-Sauveur, always law-abiding, has been placed in doubt by the acts and thoughtless youths and some ill-intentioned men who were probably strangers”” (127). They also “frame” English-Canadian authorities as antagonistic and riot provoking. They note that they are ““of the opinion that the rioting had its origin in the gross manner¹¹⁶ in which the Federal officers exercised their functions”” (127). By featuring this verdict, Provencher and Lachance unsettle the heroic resonance of the English Canadians in 1918 and the negative connotations associated with Quebecers in the Great War. Also of importance, however, is their inclusion of the jury’s call for redress, ““it is the duty of the Government to provide a reasonable indemnity to [the families of the deceased] and to those who suffered damages effected by the troubles”” (127), for it enables them to launch a pointed political critique of English-Canadian oppression and subjugation of French minorities, both during the War and long after. The play thus functions as an important refiguration of processes of national commemoration, overturning the extent to which the First World War has come to be embraced as a seminal event in the consolidation of Canadian national identity. According to Provencher and Lachance, this consolidation was founded on ethnic intolerance and the suppression of dissenting voices within the purportedly unified national community. Their text stands as a profound and riveting challenge to the foundational narrative of Canada’s coming of age in the Great War.

¹¹⁶ Provencher and Lachance use the term “*manière grossière*” (156), which more accurately translates to “inappropriate conduct” or “unethical treatment.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Wendy Lill's *The Fighting Days*: The Warring Factions of the Women's Movement

Neither *women* nor *war* is a self-evident category.
—Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War*

Wendy Lill's *The Fighting Days* is a two-act play, which examines the warring factions of the Women's Movement in Manitoba from 1910 to 1917.¹¹⁷ Lill conceived of this play in the early 1980s after Actors' Showcase¹¹⁸ hired her to recover Manitoba women's history and to develop this history into play form (McCaw 1; Coates, "Pot Shots" 171). Kim McCaw, the artistic director of Prairie Theatre Exchange, also approached Lill shortly after, seeking a "new documentary play" about Manitoba "women's political activity" for their upcoming season (McCaw 1). After deliberations, the play's development became a joint venture between Actors' Showcase and Prairie Theatre Exchange (McCaw 1). In 1983, the play premiered at the Manitoba Theatre Centre, and, as McCaw explains, "[s]ince that time *The Fighting Days* continues to live and prosper and has managed to be re-born in the form of a Manitoba provincial tour, a remount run in Winnipeg; and a tour to Toronto and Ottawa" (1). It remains widely produced, and it has been twice published since its first appearance in *Canadian Theatre*

¹¹⁷ *The Fighting Days* is an adaptation of Francis Marion Beynon's semi-autobiographical novel *Aleta Dey*. For a discussion of the play in relation to *Aleta Dey*, see Coates, "Pot Shots to Parting Shots: Wendy Lill's *The Fighting Days*" and Coates, "The Best Soldiers of All: Unsung Heroines in Canadian Women's Great War Fictions" 92.

¹¹⁸ The theatre company is now called Manitoba Theatre for Young People.

Review (1985): by Talonbooks in 1985 and in *War Plays by Women: An International Anthology* in 1999.¹¹⁹

The Fighting Days examines not only the views and practices of women's organizations in Manitoba prior to and during the War but also women's various responses to and engagements with the War. The play's first act depicts a unified pre-War Movement and, in particular, two leading suffragettes, Francis Marion Beynon and Nellie McClung, who aggressively fought for women's rights and social reforms. Because the women are engaged in a battle for women's rights, the play problematizes the traditional association of women as inherently pacifist and passive even before the onset of World War I. The second act dramatizes the shattering of the unified Movement in the aftermath of the declaration of the War, illustrating how many women became divided over wartime issues such as the disenfranchisement of "foreign" women, conscription, and the value of pacifism. The play's second act thus presents the warring factions of the Movement, not only attesting to the War's presence within women's groups but also calling attention to women's active engagement in the War and the various "fighting" women in Canadian history.

I) Unity and Discord in the Canadian Suffrage Movement: 1890-1918

¹¹⁹ The play appears to have remained popular for numerous reasons. In the 1980s, a time of great feminist historical recovery, the play unearthed the little-known pacifist feminist, Francis Marion Beynon. Like much feminist work of the play's time, it also pointed to racist, exclusionary tendencies in the first-wave feminist movement. The play remains timely, however, for it gestures to the continued, problematic relationship of war, democratic ideals, and feminism and speaks to post-1980 feminist discussion about contemporary women's relation to pacifism and war.

Prior to the onset of the War, the Canadian Women's Movement gained significant prominence throughout the nation as many women rallied together in a concerted effort to acquire women's enfranchisement.¹²⁰ Historian Jane Errington notes that "[b]etween 1895 and 1910, suffrage or political-equality leagues were formed in each province with branches in all major urban areas" (71). In 1910, "the Canadian Suffrage Association sent a resolution before the annual [National Council of Women] meeting . . . asking that the Council formally declare its support for female enfranchisement" (Strong-Boag 276). This was initially met with hesitation;¹²¹ however, "the resolution passed," namely because "the majority" came to understand "that suffrage would insure other reforms" (Strong-Boag 277). As Canadian suffrage historian Catherine Cleverdon notes, "[t]he forces advocating woman suffrage contended that the state, like the home, needed women's point of view and influence in order to create a more perfectly balanced way of life" (10). Furthermore, suffrage was equated with "justice": "[t]he basic plea of the suffrage forces was for simple justice. Women were forced to pay taxes and obey laws; why not give them a share in making them?" (Cleverdon 9-10). "In the end," however, as Canadian historian Veronica Jane Strong-Boag contends, it was "the defence of motherhood and the extension of maternalism" that "remained the surest justification of political equality" (277). Thus, in 1912, the Council

¹²⁰ Historians Alison Prentice et al. note that "a measure of unity was fashioned at the community, provincial, national and even international levels" (187).

¹²¹ Catherine Cleverdon notes that in the prairie provinces, "[t]he real foe was a traitor within the camp—woman herself, through ignorance, indifference, or actual hostility" (49). She notes that "[i]gnorance was the chief affliction and that was fortunate, for it was the most easily cured. Having been shown the way, women of the prairies generally displayed marked enthusiasm" for suffrage (49).

“present[ed] the first ‘Woman’s Platform’ as a guide to politicians of all persuasions” (Strong-Boag 278).

This platform and other suffrage practices throughout the nation led to the growth and momentum of the Movement in the early years of the War. This was particularly evident in Manitoba, the setting of *The Fighting Days*. In 1914, leading Manitoba suffragettes addressed the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, advocating for women’s enfranchisement. While Manitoba Premier R. P. Roblin dismissed their arguments and “rejected the suffrage petition of a women’s delegation to the Legislative Assembly” (Prentice et al. 193-94), the suffragettes did not yield. The next day, they staged a comic women’s parliament, entitled *How the Vote Was Won*, at the Winnipeg Walker Theatre, which mocked patriarchal opposition to women’s enfranchisement. This play, along with other efforts, enabled suffragettes to secure provincial enfranchisement in 1916. The Movement’s unity, however, was short-lived, and, in the later years of the War, the War infiltrated the Movement, disbanding the sisterhood.

This was also the case for many suffrage organizations throughout the nation. As Strong-Boag contends, though “the Canadian woman’s movement maintained a considerable degree of unity” in the early 1900s, the Great War “test[ed] its durability” (280), creating significant internal fissures within the Movement (Roberts, “*Why Do Women*” 2). Historian Tarah Brookfield notes that prior to the War, “conflicting beliefs shared amongst members of the movement that were based on different allegiances to the ideals of maternalism, sisterhood, equal rights, nationalism, imperialism, pacifism, and party politics” were “tolerated” (197); however, “these schisms . . . became volatile amid the dual pressures of the war and home front politics” (197). Historians Alison Prentice et

al. echo this assumption in *Canadian Women: A History*, noting that “the First World War . . . accentuated old divisions and raised some new ones” (206). These wartime issues included the 1917 disenfranchisement of “foreigners” and the militarization of Canada.

A particular dividing piece of legislation, the Wartime Elections Act of 1917, created conflicts amongst suffragettes as it redefined the parameters of Canadian sisterhood. In 1916, Nellie McClung suggested that the government exclude “foreign” women from the upcoming federal election and thus contributed to the legislation of the Wartime Elections Act. This Act, implemented in part as a means to ensure government support and the legislation of conscription, established that “[w]omen who are British subjects and have close relatives in the armed forces can vote on behalf of their male relatives, in federal elections” (qtd. in “Women’s Right to Vote in Canada”). This enfranchised a distinct portion of the female population,¹²² many of whom were of British descent, while it systematically excluded many Canadian women, in particular, women of enemy descent.¹²³ Though many War-rallied suffragettes and women supported this legislation, “the Wartime Elections Act” nevertheless “provoked considerable controversy” (Strong-Boag 326), and many demonstrated “deep regret at the limited franchise” (Strong-Boag 327; see also Bacchi 141). As historians Sarah Glassford and

¹²² It also disenfranchised conscientious objectors and Canadian citizens of non-allied descent naturalized after 1902.

¹²³ Glassford and Shaw explain that “[t]his move has generally been understood (both at the time and subsequently) as a blatant political manoeuvre meant to ensure Borden’s pro-conscription Union Party would win the upcoming election, based upon the assumption that female relatives of soldiers would champion conscription for overseas military service as a way to support the men already serving. However, the gesture also seemed to offer a tacit recognition that women’s contributions to the war effort had demonstrated the type of responsible citizenship deemed necessary in a voter” (16).

Amy Shaw explain in their seminal 2012 volume *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War*, “[m]any suffragists . . . opposed the Wartime Elections Act because of its discriminatory elements, believing that only universal female suffrage would achieve real social change” (16). Glassford and Shaw argue that “[t]he Wartime Elections Act must therefore be considered, at best, as a partial transformation of women’s political rights in Canada and as a divisive, rather than as a unifying, development” (16).

While *The Fighting Days* considers the way in which the Wartime Elections Act divides prominent suffragettes, namely Nellie McClung and Francis Marion Beynon, it also remembers the “war” between militarized, pro-conscription suffragettes and their pacifist sisters. Historian Barbara Roberts explains in “Sisterhood Divided: Suffrage and the War (1914-17)” that “[t]he prewar women’s movement generally favoured peace, and considered war and militarism to be features of the barbaric and outmoded way of thinking that excluded women from full citizenship and from access to decision making in society and government” (119).¹²⁴ Roberts notes, however, that the War shifted many suffragettes’ attitudes, dividing the Movement into two ideological camps: “in Canada as in the other belligerent countries, the organised women’s movements split between a majority who took a patriotic stand, and a minority who retained their pacifist convictions” (“Sisterhood Divided” 119).¹²⁵ This also shifted many women’s beliefs in

¹²⁴ Gail Cuthbert Brandt et al. also note that “[c]entral to the ideology of turn-of-the-twentieth-century feminism was a strong condemnation of violence, associated with men and male power” (268).

¹²⁵ Roberts also notes that “[w]hen conscription was announced, the conflicts between prowar and antiwar factions intensified” (“My Soul” 182).

inherent womanliness and motherliness, which had long been associated with pacifism.

As Roberts explains,

Womanliness and women's mission as mothers of the world had hitherto led everyone to presuppose that mothers would protect their children, and all children against harm. War was stupid and harmful; solutions by force were antithetical to women's view of civilisation; women were opposed to war and brute force. Now, patriotic maternalism blessed women who sent their sons out to kill the sons of other women, in the name of civilised values. ("Sisterhood Divided" 126)

In the War years, few suffragettes maintained their inherent beliefs about war and womanhood or "sustained their pacifist opposition to violence," and those who did "found themselves increasingly isolated" (Prentice et al. 207). What this history (and its representation in *The Fighting Days*) suggests is that at the same time as Canada engaged in an overseas war against the Central Powers, an ideological and distinctly women's conflict erupted on home soil over the value of pacifism in wartime.

II) The Traditional Representation of Women and War

This remembrance of warring suffragettes is particularly important because it not only recovers little-known history but also attests to Canadian women's varied responses to the War as well as to their capability for fighting. Traditionally, women have been absent from war history and fiction, and when they have been represented within this literature, they frequently figure as a passive and/or pacific homogenous group antithetical to combatant men. Political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain explains in her seminal study *Women and War* that women have largely been inactive "backdrop[s],"

their “involvement in war . . . inferential, located somewhere offstage if war is playing” (165). Furthermore, she notes that their dominant figuration has been as “[t]he Noncombatant Many” (180) and as “a collective being embodying values and virtues at odds with war’s destructiveness, representing home and hearth and the humble verities of everyday life” (xiii).

Literary critics Claire M. Tylee, Elaine Turner, and Agnès Cardinal similarly point to women’s absence and/or peripheral representation in Western war discourse, noting that “[h]egemonic histories tend to concentrate on battles, politico-military strategy, and changes in maps and boundaries. Above all, like dominant war drama, the focus is on male experience at the battlefield” (1). They specifically point to the phallogentric representation of the Great War, noting that “with the notorious exception of individuals . . . , women are kept to the peripheries of First World War history in the popular imagination” (1). What they also make evident is that the traditional representation of war as a distinctly male activity (and its commemorations as such) reaffirms traditional “gender division[s]” as well as “primitive notions of masculinity and femininity” (2). Literary critic Donna Coates suggests that the recovery and study of Canadian women’s Great War fiction would mitigate this bifurcated thinking. She notes that “women’s voices continue to be absent from war. Women have been robbed of the right to express themselves, for the war novels which have attained literary status have been written by men, and the study of war literature has, until recently, been an exclusive male domain” (“Myrmidons to Insubordinates” 113). As Coates observes, novels written by women in the War years represent women “‘in action,’ functioning in the workplace,”

“enlist[ing]’ in the public sphere” (126), and “[c]oming to speech” (130)—rather than as a “Noncombatant Many.”

III) The “Great Army of Women” and the Aggressive Feminist Pacifists

Canadian women’s limited representation within War history and fiction has belied women’s agency on the home front during the War. Many War-rallied Canadian women, for example, were not characteristic of the “Noncombatant Many,” and they “were not bystanders in the Great War, quietly knitting for the duration” (Glassford and Shaw 2). Rather, as Glassford and Shaw contend, “[a]t the outset of the conflict, many women responded to the prospect of war with the same enthusiasm as did men” (11); “in a multitude of ways they were actively engaged in wartime society” (2). Historian Linda J. Quiney similarly describes many women’s response to the advent of the War, noting that “thousands of middle-class Canadian women, eager to find a concrete and viable application for their energies, were able . . . to sublimate their desire for an active role by enlisting in what the journalist Mary Macleod Moore characterized as that ‘great army of women’: the mothers, wives, sisters, and sweethearts of Canada’s fighting men” (2).¹²⁶

This “army of women” had a direct connection with the Suffrage Movement and with many existing women’s organizations throughout the nation. As Cuthbert Brandt et al. explain, “[a]lthough some women worked separately, most joined the existing, pro-British women’s groups or reform organizations that adapted or enhanced their programs by emphasizing war service” (265). Quiney explains that “[t]he women’s associations affiliated with the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) quickly identified

¹²⁶ See Mary Macleod Moore, *The Maple Leaf’s Red Cross: The War Story of the Canadian Red Cross Overseas* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1920).

patriotic service as a viable means through which to display their political responsibility, temporarily abandoning the quest for the vote in favour of voluntary war service” (3).

This patriotic war work not only included “the seemingly unending task of sewing and knitting comforts and hospital supplies, or bandage rolling” (Glassford and Shaw 12) but also participation in the Red Cross, the St. John’s Ambulance, as well as in “church groups, war charities, and voluntary organizations” aimed to ensure the War’s victory (Glassford and Shaw 12). Many women were also able fundraisers as they had been engaged in this type of activity prior to the War: “[t]hrough their organized reform activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women had developed and refined the skills of organizing and fundraising”; thus, “[i]n the war years, when the government needed civilian assistance . . . to raise war funds, it found ready-made support in existing women’s organizations” (Cuthbert Brandt et al. 267).

These women’s organizations also had experience in recruiting, and the government employed their members in public enlistment campaigns (Cuthbert Brandt et al. 267). Women’s recruiting, however, was not restricted to the public sphere and also took place within the home. As Glassford and Shaw contend,

Women and girls were an important audience and motivation for men’s heroism. . . . Wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters were expected to persuade their male relations to enlist, and their willingness to sacrifice loved ones for the cause of the empire at war was constructed in public discourse as an important part of female war service. A woman’s decision to encourage – or not to hinder – a man’s enlistment had the potential to transform the man in question from ordinary citizen into citizen-soldier. (13)

Women also used means other than “persuasion” and “encouragement” to push men to enlist. Though there is little scholarship on women’s shaming of men (Gullace 180), it is evident that this was a widely practiced form of recruitment in Britain¹²⁷ and in Canada—as *The Fighting Days*, for one, attests. What is also apparent is that women who refused and/or failed to enlist in the “army of women” were subject to stigmatization. As Janice Williamson and Deborah Gorham explain, “the main women’s organizations sprang to the defence of the ‘war effort’ and excoriated those women who did not do so” (31). Quiney echoes this assumption, noting that “[a]ny woman who failed to ‘stand and be counted,’ or who displayed either indifference or a lazy attitude towards her patriotic duty, was soon compared to those ‘slackers’ among the men who risked the white feather of cowardice by avoiding military service” (4). The “army of women” was thus not only engaged in the recruitment of men and women but also in warring against those who failed to enlist.

These women were also embroiled in a “holy” crusade against Canadians of enemy descent. Though many women and suffragettes demonstrated hostility toward “foreigners” prior to the War (Bacchi 52-54) and strove to prevent non-British women’s federal enfranchisement during the War, the War’s advent and, in particular, reports of overseas enemy barbarism led to the widespread identification of “foreigners” as enemy aliens and justified women’s taking up of arms against them. As Glassford and Shaw explain,

Emerging stories of German atrocities contributed further to existing patriotic wartime rhetoric, leading many women to support the war effort with an almost

¹²⁷ In “White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War,” Nicoletta F. Gullace details the British white feather campaign in Britain.

religious sense of urgency. Support for the war, in their view, was necessary to save (or avenge) the women and children of Belgium and the rest of Europe from the inhuman depredations of ‘the Hun.’ Neighbours of certain ethnic backgrounds were transformed in the public mind from fellow citizens into enemy aliens.

(11)¹²⁸

Though the troubling and perhaps violent effects of women’s shift in thinking have yet to be documented, it is apparent that a “war” against enemy aliens took place and that women participated in verbal and physical persecution.¹²⁹ While this undermines the notion that the home front was a refuge from the War, it also challenges beliefs about women’s inherent passivity.

The history of the pacifist feminists on the home front further contributes to the dismantling of women’s pervasive figuration as a “Noncombatant Many,” while it also destabilizes the long-held association of pacifism with passivity. In “Feminism and Pacifism: Historical and Theoretical Connections,” peace scholar Berenice A. Carroll calls attention to the problematic, widespread association of women, pacifism, and passivity, arguing, “we must disentangle ourselves from the stereotypic association between *pacifism*, or even *peace* itself, and ‘*effeminacy*’ . . . ‘*pacifism*’ is not equivalent to ‘*pacific behavior*’ (15). Roberts’ seminal study “*Why Do Women Do Nothing to End the War?*” makes this abundantly clear. She argues that many Canadian women pacifists

¹²⁸ Historian and peace scholar Deborah Gorham notes that though suffragette Flora MacDonald Denison initially did not support the War, “by 1917 she had come to believe that Germany, because it was more militaristic, less democratic, and more male-dominated than its enemies, was the guilty party, and that its defeat was necessary and justified” (138).

¹²⁹ See, for example, Michael Bird, *The Town That Died: A Chronicle of the Halifax Disaster* for a detailed discussion of the persecution of German Canadians in Halifax. See also Davies’ *Shatter* for a dramatization of this antagonism.

were actively opposed to the War and were engaged in an aggressive fight against the spread of militarism (1). As Roberts explains,

There was a feminist pacific network, involving perhaps hundreds of women all across Canada who were opposed to the war and worked to end it. They were linked to the international feminist pacific network that convened the 1915 conference at The Hague (in which the Canadian women's organizations' wartime umbrella group refused to participate), where women from belligerent and neutral countries met, worked out a peace plan, organized an international campaign for peaceful settlement by negotiation and founded the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. (1)

Roberts notes that several of the Canadian feminist pacifists wrote newspaper articles and letters (1-2) and gave public lectures, "sometimes encounter[ing] deep hostilities" (2). She also points out that they countered attacks from the National Equal Franchise Association and the Women's Patriotic League (2) as well as accusations of traitorous activity worthy of incarceration and/or institutionalization (2). While these experiences illustrate feminist pacifists' ability to fight for their causes, they also attest to the way in which women's organizations waged "war" against the pacifists in their midst, whom they envisioned as enemies. *The Fighting Days* dramatizes this conflict, primarily from the point of view of Francis, the character based on pacifist feminist Francis Marion Beynon.¹³⁰ The first act represents Francis as united with her pacifist feminist sisters in a

¹³⁰ Tylee, Cardinal, and Agnès argue that "[b]ecause Francis is constantly present, she invites a bias towards her view" (9). Coates also points to Lill's partiality, noting, "Lill makes her preference for Beynon . . . obvious. . . . It is pretty hard to miss the [suffragettes] she admires" ("Pot Shots" 186, 189).

shared quest for suffrage, peace, and social reforms. The War's infiltration of the home front at the close of the first act, however, divides the sisterhood—namely, Francis and Nellie—into two warring camps: one that opposes and one that supports the militarization of Canada.

IV) *The Fighting Days*

i) The First Act: 1900-1914

The first act of *The Fighting Days* represents the Manitoba feminist pacifist suffragettes as a harmonious sisterhood, actively engaged in the recruitment and enlistment of women. Early in the play, Francis arrives in Winnipeg, and her sister Lily welcomes her to the literary world of women and into the Suffrage Movement. She suggests Francis meet her “newspaper friends and join [her] suffrage club” (11), assuring the hesitant Francis that she will be an appreciated presence within this association (11). When Francis meets the Movement's leader, Nellie, she is further integrated into the feminist community. Nellie strives to highlight their commonalities, namely their childhood farm lives (14), their love of literature (14), and their desire for education (14-15). According to literary and drama scholar Don Perkins, this introductory conversation between Francis and Nellie functions as a means of consolidation. He notes that “[t]heir conversation . . . brings them closer together as they find sisterhood in shared ambitions and dreams of getting beyond their allotted stations from rural, female backgrounds” (232). Francis is “*entranced*” (15) by Nellie and, in particular, by her oration, and when Nellie asks if she will attend her speech the next day, Francis willingly agrees, her enthusiasm somewhat akin to a new military recruit (17). Nellie also invites Francis to

her “Women for Peace Committee” and asks her to join her “disarmament campaign,” noting, “[w]e can always use new recruits, Francis” (32). Lill thus figures Nellie as a key recruiter and Francis as a newly enlisted member of a pre-War “army of women” that, unlike its succeeding party, condemns war.

While Lill calls attention to the pacifist tenets of this community, she does not associate pacifism with passivity. Rather, she illustrates her characters’ aggressive pacifism by dramatizing them as engaged in a battle against patriarchy. Within the play, patriarchy figures in tangible form, namely as McNair, “the editor of *The Rural Review*” (13) and “the only male character in the play” (Perkins 232). McNair thus functions not only as an adaptation of Francis Marion Beynon’s editor George McNair and of her possible romantic partner Donald but also as a “stereotypical opponent to women’s issues” (Perkins 233), a “stubborn anti-feminist” (Perkins 235), and “the voice and personification of the opposition” (Perkins 234).¹³¹ Though this figuration is evident throughout the play, it is most notable in the play’s second scene. Prior to McNair’s physical appearance in the play, Nellie and Lily vilify him, introducing him to Francis (and, consequently to the reader/audience) as the enemy. They note his blatant opposition to women’s public speaking and call attention to his repeated objectification and slandering of leading members of their front. They recall that “he said [Nellie] rattled along like an old tin can” and “squeaked along like a set of rusty bagpipes” (13). They also point out that he identified “Isobel,” another leading member of the Movement, as

¹³¹ Coates critiques Lill’s figuration of McNair as it “misinterprets McNair’s role and character in *Aleta Dey*” (“Pot Shots” 174). For a detailed discussion of Lill’s construction of McNair, see Coates, “Pot Shots” 174-75.

“as useless as a button on a hat” (13). For Nellie, McNair is thus “a wart on the nose of progress” and “a loose nut in a machine trying to go forward!” (13).

Lill’s representation of McNair as an embodiment of the enemy becomes further evident upon his entry into the play. His first lines of dialogue illustrate his significant opposition to women’s public speaking, which he envisions as a perversion of inherent womanhood. After one of Nellie’s public lectures, McNair undermines the eloquence of her speech, suggesting it was deafening and uncanny (19). He articulates the dominant adversarial position on women’s oration, sardonically noting, “[i]t’s always interesting to hear a woman speak in public. It’s sort of like seeing a pony walk on its hind legs. Clever, even if not natural” (19). In a later one-on-one discussion with Francis, he further voices these beliefs. After Francis enumerates her journalistic skills, attempting to secure a position at *The Rural Review*, he points out that her discourse is inappropriate, saying, “Miss Beynon, you’re making a speech. It’s unwomanly” (23). Francis opposes this outdated mode of thought, arguing, “[i]t’s not unwomanly, Mr. McNair. It’s 1912” (23). Though this discussion ends with McNair hiring Francis (23-24), complicating his figuration as a simple, formulaic antagonist, it nevertheless serves as a means to establish the enemy voice.

While the play’s very early figuration of two camps, one represented as Nellie, Lily, and Francis and the other as McNair, suggests a “war” is taking place between two sexes, it does not polarize women and men; instead, it illustrates women’s and, in particular, suffragettes’ capability for warring—even prior to the War’s onset. The suffragettes, for example, not only recruit members into their community but also adopt militaristic language in their fight against patriarchy and for enfranchisement. Nellie’s

public “I’m a disturber” speech is a case in point. Nellie not only identifies herself as a “disturber” (18) but also utilizes martial language to illustrate that women and, namely, mothers, are a united, aggressive front: “[w]e mothers are going to *fight* for the rights of our little girls to think and dream and speak out. We’re going to refuse to bear and rear sons to be shot at on faraway battlefields” (emphasis added 18). She also reasons that women’s campaign for enfranchisement is a heroic one, a means “to bring about a better, more equitable, peaceful society” (19); her discourse is thus not unlike that of recruiters who rallied Canadians to enlist in a crusade-like War.

Francis also envisions women as a fighting force engaged in a heroic crusade for women’s freedom.¹³² For Francis, enfranchisement represents a means to end women’s captivity within patriarchal society and to overthrow “cruel husbands and fathers, . . . hypocritical ministers,” and “war-mongering politicians” (34). While Francis’ line suggests that women have been victims of patriarchy, she does not engage in “victim feminism.” “*Victim feminism*,” as feminist Naomi Wolf explains, identifies women as powerless within patriarchal societies, dismissing women’s agency to effect change. At the same time, it constructs a binary relationship between women and men, one which identifies women as innately passive and pacifist and men as active and aggressive (136-37). “*Power feminism*,” however, undermines these gendered categories by calling attention to women’s capability for agency while also pointing to the means which limit women’s empowerment (Wolf 137-38). Francis, by characterizing the 1910s as the “fighting days” (51), suggests that though women are confined by patriarchy, they

¹³² Francis also suggests that enfranchisement will free “mere children toiling incredible hours in factories making bullets and ammunition and uniforms for some faraway war” (33).

nevertheless have the power to effect change by campaigning for and winning the vote.¹³³

As she explains, “I want the vote, because a vote is like being given a voice when before we were silent. It’s like being set free after years of captivity” (39). For Francis, the fight for enfranchisement is thus an unambiguous struggle, a means to affirm women’s agency and to end patriarchal imprisonment.

What Francis fails to recognize, however, is that patriarchy is not the only threat to women’s emancipation. While Francis envisions herself as engaged in an unequivocal battle against patriarchy, she fails to consider the internal threats within the sisterhood, which impede all women’s progress. McNair problematizes Francis’ conception of the “war” as one-dimensional by calling attention to her leader’s elitism and to her sisterhood’s xenophobia. He makes evident that her leader is not an unambiguous hero, fighting for the rights of all women, as Francis perceives her to be. What he suggests is that Nellie “is a dilettante and a debutante. And a hypocrite. She’s an upper class snob who wouldn’t have given my poor mother the time of day” (35). He corrects Francis’ assumption that Nellie “is fighting for the vote for women” (35), saying, “[f]or women who don’t need the vote. For women who’ve got something better than the vote! Influence! And furthermore, the proper lineage!” (35).

McNair also points to the exclusionary nature of the Suffrage Movement under Nellie’s leadership. He asks Francis to consider “why [her] suffrage club list is full of names like Steward, Titheradge, Ward, Galbraith, Gordon, and not...Lewycky, Schapansky and Swartz?” (36). Francis, however, continues to envision the Movement’s

¹³³ The play also characterizes Nellie as engaged in a form of “power feminism.” While she recognizes women’s oppression, she does not envision women as passive or as powerless. As she explains, in the current political and social climate, women have “no one to blame but [themselves] for not doing what [they] want” (16-17).

fight as unequivocal, replying, “maybe their husbands won’t let them come” (36). For McNair, however, the “husband” is a lesser enemy to women than the leading members of the Movement; thus, he restates,

They’re not there because your suffrage club doesn’t want them there. Neither do they want them living next door to them on Chestnut Street nor their children sitting beside theirs at school. . . . Isobel Graham has gone on record saying she’s afraid the entire western hemisphere is sinking under the weight of the immigrants. . . . And Laura McLaughlin, another one of your leading lights, is heading up the fight to eliminate any foreign language in the schoolyard. . . . The fact is the suffragists are an exclusive club. (36-37)

Though Francis does not deny this accusation, she considers these women’s xenophobia a temporary product of the time (36-37), and she vows to continue “to keep fighting for [the vote]” (37). Rather than vilify her exclusionary sisters, she remains focused on what she envisions as the central enemy of the Movement, men like McNair who “have never shown interest in *any* women having the vote” (37).

What becomes increasingly evident to Francis, however, is the pervasiveness of xenophobia in Canada and the way in which it divides what she envisions as a homogenous, equitable female community. Initially, she identifies all women as her allies and as a front, joined by their shared female concerns and causes; however, what she quickly discovers is the ideological diversity of this assumed group. In her first editorial, on the homemaker’s page of *The Rural Review*, she addresses her female readership, whom she envisions as a uniform group composed of “the thousands of lonely women of the prairies” (25). She notes, “I hope *you* will be able get closer to one another. I hope

you can begin to see this as *YOUR* page, where *you* can write and think and rage...and in every way, help one another. The page is now *YOURS*” (emphasis added 25). Though the page initially functions as a discussion board on the various challenges of domestic life (25-29), what Nellie deems issues of “warts and matching wallpaper” (32),¹³⁴ the responses to Francis’ later writings on suffrage take on a more political tone, attesting not only to women’s political engagement but also to ideological divisions within her readership.

These responses establish two distinct groups of women within Canada, one that supports Francis’ call for all women’s suffrage and one that supports limited enfranchisement. Though several women respond by identifying as part of Francis’ imagined voting sisterhood (39-40), a reader identified as Wolfwillow utilizes the page to wage “war” against what she perceives as both male and female enemies within her midst. Addressing Francis, she argues,

With all this talk of women’s freedom, maybe there’s something you’re forgetting. And that’s the foreigners. Haven’t we got enough trouble with them over there, without letting them think they can run our country too? Can we bear dilution by the ignorance, low idealism and religious perversity of the average foreigner? I say no! (40)

¹³⁴ Lill notes that Francis’ readership is distinctly “Western”: “[t]hose poignant letters in the play from Prairie women who sat out there for ten years by themselves, . . . watching the dust collect on their noses is not part of the Eastern Canadian experience. The experience in the East is equally rugged, but it’s filled with many different images” (“Wendy Lill Interview” 43).

Wolfwillow also adopts militaristic language, rallying Canadian women of British descent by saying, “[w]e must keep them back. Give us good sound British stock women, already civilized, already subject to both earth and heaven for conduct” (40-41).¹³⁵

Francis counters this call to arms by redefining Wolfwillow’s xenophobic conception of the “foreigner,” whom she envisions as worthy of the vote. As Francis explains, the “immigrants within [the] country” (41) are not the enemy; rather, the enemy is the narrow-minded citizens who fail to support diversity within the nation: “I would say that the real foreigners are not those who have been raised in different countries, but those whose real standards and ideals of life are so immovable as to not allow for communication with others” (41). What thus becomes evident is that the suffrage issue is intrinsically connected not only with women’s emancipation but also with national identity. Whereas Wolfwillow calls for the enfranchisement of Anglo-Canadian women as a means to preserve a strong, united British Canada, Francis fights for all women’s acquisition of the vote—as it will bring about a strong, multicultural nation. As Francis reasons, “[i]f our great country of Canada is going to achieve its potential as a great nation, we must begin to recognize the contributions of people from *all* lands who decide to make it their HOME” (emphasis added 41).

Francis believes that leading members of the Suffrage Movement support the enfranchisement of all women and Canada’s growth as a multi-racial and cultural space. The impending War, however, awakens her to the xenophobia within the Movement.

¹³⁵ What becomes increasingly evident throughout the play is that this position is widely supported. McNair, for example, notes that “a group of [Francis’] readers from Minnedosa. . . . take exception to [her] column on the foreign question” (44).

While Nellie does not dispute Francis' defence of the "foreigner," she does not celebrate it; rather, she undermines it, describing it as "idealistic" (42) in light of "what's going on in Europe right now" (43). As she explains, "[s]ome of the countries where these foreigners hail from are rattling their sabres at Britain even as we speak. People are frightened. God only knows what might happen over there" (43). While these comments attest to the subtle "infection" of the Movement and of Canada with international politics and fear, Nellie's identification of Francis' editorial as "idealistic" is particularly troubling. As Perkins explains, this "dismissive, belittling turn of phrase echoes McNair's earlier belittlement of women in general, a belittlement that should signal to the audience another conflict within the drama, this time within the movement" (238). Lill closes the scene by foreshadowing this conflict; a "*crestfallen*" Francis exits the scene with Lily while Nellie stays back (43).

Despite this momentary discordance on the issue of the "foreigner," however, Nellie and Francis remain united in their quest for suffrage. At a "*suffrage parade*," "[*t*he atmosphere is jolly, excited," and the women rally together (51). Nellie assumes her leadership role, identifying her audience as a united sisterhood: "[a]ll right, *sisters*, you're got your instructions for the parade. . . . We've come a long way, *sisters*" (emphasis added 51). She makes no indication of internal strife, reminding her comrades of their unambiguous struggle against "bigotry" and for "social equality" (51)—though this is somewhat ironic given her earlier comments on the "foreigner." Francis is "*elated*" as she marches, commenting, "[o]h I am thankful to be living in these fighting days" (51). While this suggests the militaristic component of the Suffrage Movement prior to the War's onset, the War's advent, at the close of the scene, fully positions the suffragettes as

fighters, namely as martial, national subjects engaged in the War against the Central Powers. Lill carefully juxtaposes the suffragettes' fight with the nation's, illustrating the way in which the War infects the parade and the suffragettes. "[M]ilitary music" and "the sound of heavy boots" replaces "the suffrage music" and the "[p]arade sounds" (51), and "[a] drill sergeant" seemingly addresses the suffragettes, "call[ing] out," "'Company, halt!'" (51). The close of Act One thus marks the War's subtle invasion of Canadian terrain.

ii) The Second Act: 1916-1917

The play's second act charts the Movement's significant transformation in the wake of the War. Ultimately, it illustrates that many women (and, in particular, suffragettes) became embroiled in issues connected with the War and that their involvement manifested as what peace scholar Thomas P. Socknat deems "militant patriotism" (*Witness* 48). He notes that though a small percentage of Canadian women opposed the War (55-58), the majority "were actively involved in some type of war support activity" (48-49). As Socknat notes, these activities were largely headed by women's organizations. "Women's groups," as he explains, "quickly redirected their energies towards . . . pursuits in Red Cross work and patriotic activities" (*Witness* 48); "nearly all women's groups endorsed and supported the war effort in some manner" ("For Peace and Freedom" 68). What Socknat points out is that this was somewhat contradictory—given many of these organizations' pre-War attitudes toward militarism. As he explains, "it is ironic that the women who helped popularize the idea that women would react to war differently from men because of their moral superiority were the very

ones who contributed substantially to the disintegration of the myth through their various wartime endeavours” (*Witness* 48).

Lill points to this “war fever” among women’s organizations on the home front and, in particular, in the Women for Peace Committee of which both Nellie and Francis are part. As McNair notes, “[s]ince the war started, I haven’t heard a peep from [the] Women for Peace Committee” (62), and, as Francis explains, this is because they are engaged in war work: “[t]hey’re knitting socks and rolling bandages” (62). This characterization of the Women for Peace Committee as a community of knitters is particularly important as it demonstrates not only the ideological shift engendered by the War, which Francis does not support, but also women’s social and gender-appropriate participation in “total war.” As Glassford and Shaw contend, “[t]he knitting woman, especially the knitting mother, exemplified a societally approved means of fulfilling a female citizen’s wartime obligations. By linking the comfort of a familiarly humble domestic activity to broader wartime goals, the knitting woman became a powerful and enduring icon of an engaged home front” (12). By equating the Women’s Peace Committee with the iconic “knitting woman,” Lill thus illustrates women’s organizations’ transformation in the wake of the War and the way in which their war work was intrinsically linked with notions of “healthy” female citizenship.

While calling attention to a home front engaged in war work rather than passively awaiting the War’s end, Lill also explores the factors which contributed to women’s adoption of their pro-War roles and their engagement in the War effort. Lill’s examination of the destabilization of Lily’s pacifism in the wake of the War and her resulting participation in militarized women’s organizations is particularly effective for

exploring how and why certain women took up arms. Though prior to the War's onset, Lily appears to support Nellie's claim that feminist pacifists will "refuse to bear and rear sons to be shot at on faraway battlefields" (18), during the War, she engages in the War effort. At the start of the second act, for example, she "*roll[s] bandages*" (53) and attends a "first aid class" (54) led by pro-War women, noting, "[i]t's good to be prepared. . . . in case we have to do our bit" (54).

It becomes apparent, however, that Lily is an avid supporter neither of the War (57) nor of war, as her activities and engagement with "women in red, white and blue dresses" (59) suggest her to be. The War's onset, the War-rallied public, and the pro-War tenets of women's organizations, however, have destabilized her understanding of pacifism and, in particular, of the relationship of war to freedom. Lily, as Francis explains, has always fought for "freedom," and Lily acknowledges that she maintains many of her democratic ideals (57). At the same time, however, she also recognizes that "there are millions of young men going out and fighting for [freedom]," and she wonders, "[h]ow can they all be wrong?" (57). However, while male conviction and sacrifice contribute to her ideological dislocation, they are not the main reason she has joined the "army of women." Lily's wavering demonstrates that she unconsciously followed her peers into the War effort. As she explains, "[o]ne day we're collecting signatures for the vote, and the next, we're signing up people for the patriotic fund. I can't even remember any more who signed what. . . . I don't know what to think any more" (59). What Lily thus suggests is that her support for women's organizations unwittingly pulled her into the "army of women."

The play also suggests that Lily's continued participation in wartime activities is fear-motivated and a means to prevent stigmatization. Lill characterizes the home front as a hostile space and its War-rallied inhabitants as intolerant of pacifists. Certainly, the public is hostile to Vern, Lily's pacifist husband who speaks out against the War and refuses to enlist, and, by extension, to Lily herself. Vern is publicly scrutinised as a result of his pacifist leanings, and, as Lily notes, "[i]t would be a lot easier if he wasn't giving public lectures" (57). Lily avoids one of these lectures, seemingly as a means to avoid the stigmatization they engender; instead, she affirms her "healthy" citizenship by attending a first-aid class (56). Hostility towards Vern, who, as Nellie explains, "make[s] a mockery of what our boys are fighting for" (79), however, nonetheless extends toward Lily. Though Nellie remains friendly with Lily, others envision her as akin to her husband and as a suspicious presence on the home front. Lily notes "that half the paper won't talk to [Vernon]" (57), and though she is tolerated within their work space, she is subject to strict censorship. As she explains, "the copy editor checks my stories twice before they go to press. He assumes I think like Vernon" (57). What is thus apparent is that the public envisions Vernon and, by association, Lily not only as offensive but also as threatening.

Antagonism towards Vernon and Lily, however, also results from Vernon's refusal to enlist, which the public perceives as craven, and seemingly from Lily's failure to recruit him. As McNair explains, both men and women pressured men into enlistment, socially castigating those who did not. He notes the power of this practice, explaining, "it's . . . bloody hard to stay out of [the War]! If you're of age and not in uniform, women look at you as if you're not quite complete. And the men simply hate you" (61). Lily is well aware of these dominant perceptions, and she questions, "if [Vernon] won't go [to

the War], does that make him... a coward?" (58). Coates blatantly critiques this moment in the play, noting that Lily's questioning of Vernon's courage is "outrageous" given Lillian (Beynon) Thomas' own active pacifism ("Pot Shots" 188), and she suggests this misrepresentation of history stems from "Lill's ignorance of Thomas's pacifism" ("Pot Shots" 188).¹³⁶ While Thomas was evidently a "committed pacifist" (Hallett and Davis 143; qtd. in Coates, "Pot Shots" 188), the play appears to deviate from history in order to make an important point: that pacifist feminists were not immune to wartime ideology, the pressures of their peers, and the hostile home front. Lily is thus not an accurate historical reproduction of Lillian (Beynon) Thomas but a fictional construct, an irresolute pacifist who serves as a counterpoint to the "flag-waving patriot" Nellie (63) and the staunch pacifist Francis.

While Lill's construction of a triad of suffragettes attests to suffragettes' diverse, heterogeneous wartime experiences, her polarization of Nellie and Francis serves as a means to illustrate the way in which the War divides previously united suffragettes (and women) into distinct warring camps. The War's advent immediately puts the women at odds, as Nellie supports the War and Francis opposes it; however, it is the later disenfranchisement of "foreign" women that sparks a conflict between the women and their respective warring parties. The 1916 "*Press Club Christmas party*" (66) marks the advent of this "war."¹³⁷ McNair calls attention to the fact that Nellie "told the Prime

¹³⁶ For a detailed discussion of Vernon's and Lillian's pacifism, see Thomas Socknat, *Witness Against War* 66-67.

¹³⁷ Lill illustrates that the War invades all discussions. Though Lily specifies that "[t]here will be no bickering tonight...and no talk of the war" (67), McNair, Nellie, Lily, and Francis cannot avoid the subject. When McNair asks Nellie and Lily about their husbands' whereabouts, Nellie responds, "[a]t a patriotic drive," and Lily answers, "[a]t a conscription rally" (67). The topic of the War also pervades their discussions of an

Minister to exclude foreign women from the upcoming federal election” (70), and Nellie does not deny this accusation, explaining to Lily and Francis, “I simply suggested that the foreign women be excluded as a temporary war measure. A war measure” (71).

Ironically, it is a war measure: an attack on those who do not fit the presumed national profile. While Nellie stresses that this is “[a] war measure” (71), she also alludes to the pre-War conflict within the Movement over the enfranchisement of “foreigners.” As she explains, “[i]t’s not a new idea” (71). She makes evident, however, that this “idea” took full force in the War years—as the systematic exclusion of “foreign” women from the vote represented a means to ensure conscription. Nellie articulates this belief, justifying her disavowal of “foreign” sisters by saying, “[t]he foreign community . . . does not view conscription favourably” (72). Nellie reveals, however, that disenfranchisement also serves a second purpose—to preserve British-based customs and beliefs. As she explains, “there are districts where almost every single English-speaking man has enlisted. The moral tone of the electoral has drastically changed. . . . The only way to protect our . . . traditions . . . is to limit the vote to Empire women” (72).

Francis, however, fails to understand Nellie’s reasoning, and she questions, “[b]ut don’t the foreign women have the same ‘traditions’? Justice, love, equality?” (72).

Ultimately, she wonders how Nellie and her supporters could “turn [their] backs on [foreign women] . . . if [they] truly believe in women” (72). Though Nellie considers the issue more complex, especially in light of conscription (72), Francis envisions this systematic renunciation of women as simplistic and as indicative of Nellie’s failure as a leader: “[o]h, I see! How efficient you are! If one doesn’t view conscription favourably,

upcoming theatre production (67), an expectant mother (67), and the federal election (69-74).

then lop off their vote or their heads, whichever is easiest!” (73). Francis remembers that she “would have jumped off a cliff” for Nellie (72); however, in the wake of the War, as Lill explains, Nellie “[falls] short” (“A Feeling” 18). Francis thus becomes a mutineer, demonstrating insubordination by literally and symbolically “*walk[ing] out*” on Nellie (74).

Within the play, this scene marks the end of “the original ‘good versus bad’ conflict . . . between those for votes for all women and against extending the democratic franchise to women as a group” (Perkins 243), which was at the fore of the Suffrage Movement. While it calls attention to the end of this “war,” it does not suggest that women stopped warring but rather that they engaged in battle against one another—“with Nellie the locus of conservative attitudes, and Francis the focus of progressive, as measured against peacetime standards raised within the play’s first act” (Perkins 243). The play thus creates a new “good versus bad” conflict, one that Coates envisions as deeply problematic, especially as it misrepresents Nellie “as insincere and egocentric” (“Pot Shots” 180), “slights or ignores her attainments altogether” (“Pot Shots” 180), and “exaggerates [her] shortcomings” (“Pot Shots” 181). She notes that “Lill . . . accuses McClung of exclusivity in terms of federal suffrage, but she leaves out a number of the facts in order to score points” (“Pot Shots” 183). Ultimately, Coates points out that McClung was not the enemy that Francis imagines her to be in the play, and she notes that McClung “did not wish to divide the suffrage forces in any way” (“Pot Shots” 184).

In the play’s second act, Nellie certainly figures as “a humorless bigot” (Morrow B13) engaged in “unambiguous jingoism” (Warne 36),¹³⁸ and Francis contributes to the

¹³⁸ American reviews appear to be less focused on Nellie’s characterization in the play.

reader/audience's understanding of Nellie as such. While this characterization serves as a means to highlight the warring factions of the Suffrage Movement, it also reflects the time of the play's conception. Written in the 1980s, the play mirrors the scholarship of its time, which "emphasized the imperialist and racist foundations of early Canadian feminists" (Fiamengo 85). Literary critic Janice Fiamengo argues that while "[s]uch work has been crucial in redressing the errors and omissions of white feminist scholarship," it "has often shaded into outright dismissal, and in the process some of the complexities of early feminist discourse have been lost in the reductive conclusion that all first-wave feminist writing promoted a monolithic racism" (85).

While Francis assumes Nellie to be "a monolithic racis[t]," the play complicates Francis' characterization of Nellie by pointing to the significant forces that contributed to Nellie's warring against "foreigners," pacifism, and for conscription. Though Coates suggests that Lill ignores the wartime events, namely the reports on the German atrocity and the enlistment of Nellie's son ("Pot Shots" 184-85), that contributed to Nellie's ideological/political shift and wrongfully "implies that McClung's transformation was unusual" ("Pot Shots" 184),¹³⁹ further reinforcing Nellie's characterisation as an enemy,

For example, a review for the Angels Theatre Company's production of *The Fighting Days* (2005), which was staged "in observance of . . . Women's Equality Day" and the "85th anniversary of women's right to vote in the United States," does not discuss Nellie's representation; instead, it draws attention to the play's appeal in the United States. It includes a quotation from director Judith Hart, explaining her company's interest in the play: "[w]e found many similar things (between the movements)." It also features actor Brad Boesen's discussion of the play's contemporary resonance: "I see a lot of parallels to what is happening now . . . You have to support the war because our boys are there. There are other people who say our boys shouldn't be there. There are odd similarities to what's going on now" (Korbelik).

¹³⁹ Joan Montgomery Byles also notes that many women who believed in pacifism choose to stay "silent" because "[t]hey had a deep sense of loyalty to their men and were acutely aware of their sufferings and sacrifices. Not for the world would they say

Nellie and Lily's dialogue serves to inform the reader/audience of how "affections" (81) shape feminist politics in wartime. When Francis confronts Nellie, critiquing her wartime transformation by noting that it is "wrong" and a "total contradiction" (73), Nellie defends her position, vocalising the significant anxiety she has experienced since the enlistment of her son—in a manner that elicits reader/audience empathy, especially in light of the significant number of Canadian casualties in modern wars. As Nellie points out, "[y]ou have nothing to lose in this war. You know nothing of the pain and nausea I feel when I read the casualty lists. . . . It is I who is paying every minute this war continues" (73). She makes evident that this "pain" motivates her warring, saying, "[w]e have to end it, don't you understand! We have to win this wretched horrid war!" (73). Though Francis dismisses this reasoning, Lily is empathetic to Nellie. As she explains to Francis, "I understand how Nellie feels. She supports the war because her son is fighting in it. She has no choice" (80). She also calls attention to the relationship of "choice" to "affections," arguing, "[w]e're bound by our affections more than any legal contracts, or governments or causes. We're all trapped by something. The heart doesn't choose wisely, it just chooses" (81).

This notion of "free choice" is of central concern to Lill, who frequently explores the topic in her plays. As she explains,

I don't know how much I believe in free choice. I think that people do make individual choices, but always influenced by a combination of emotions and personal characteristics that make them head unerringly towards things. The

anything which would seem to undervalue their men, or suggest that they were offered for a wrong or mistaken cause. So that, in backing their men in the war in which they were actually fighting, many women seemed to be backing warfare itself, although most probably they abhorred it" (476).

question of choice is certainly an important one. And all the plays I write are about choice. My characters are all faced with that fork in the road: they have to make a choice and they do choose one direction. And usually, horrendous events befall them as a result. But I don't know what alternatives there are to making those choices. ("Wendy Lill Interview" 45)

Thus, while Francis condemns Nellie's actions as "wrong" (73), the play makes evident that Nellie deserves further consideration as she is a psychologically burdened mother traumatized by the War. Lily chastises Francis for dismissing her "friend" and her "teacher" (80), explaining, "[i]t happens to all of us, and it will happen to you. You'll marry McNair and have children, and you won't be so eager to pick up a banner or lead a parade. You'll shift your zeal and compassion to those you love...and the dream won't seem so crystal clear any more!" (81).

Throughout the play, however, Francis remains resolute in her quest for peace, and she refuses to consider Nellie's "affections" as a justification for the militarization of Canada. In fact, as Coates explains, "Francis . . . makes no attempt to understand why [Nellie] supported conscription or turned away from pacifism" ("Pot Shots" 184). Instead, Francis aggressively and publicly attacks Nellie in *The Rural Review*, exposing Nellie's call for limited enfranchisement as an assault on democracy. She writes,

When a coincidence of engagements brought Sir Robert Borden and Mrs. Nellie L. McClung to Winnipeg together recently, McClung made use of the opportunity to ask the Prime Minister to grant the federal franchise to all British and Canadian born women, excluding the foreign women. In this, Mrs. McClung was speaking for herself alone, and not for the organized women of the suffrage provinces. I

hope that the majority of the women who fought and won the suffrage fight, on the ground that democracy is right, still believe in democracy. (75)

While this editorial functions as a declaration of “war” against Nellie, it also attests to Francis’ active pacifism, further undermining the association of femininity, pacifism, and passivity. Francis concludes, arguing that she will continue to fight for democracy with her “tongue and pen”: “[f]or my part, I believe in democracy just as invincibly today as I did in the yesterday of my own political minority, and if a serious attempt is made to exclude these new women citizens from the franchise, my tongue and pen will do their little best by way of protest” (75).

The responses to Francis’ column, however, suggest that she is in the minority and that much of her readership considers her an enemy, a threat not only to their families but also to the War effort and the emergent national body. One woman, who identifies as Lonely at Home, for example, defends McClung and pro-War women, envisioning them as a “Canadian” community united with men in the struggle against “foreign” invasion. She responds,

You say that Mrs. McClung was speaking for herself alone, but I say her instincts as a patriot told her the right thing. My husband Jake and our three sons are in the war now and they’re all of voting age. Yet their voices won’t be heard. The foreign women have their husbands safe and sound by their sides and we all envy them. They may think differently and they may not, but how can we be sure? I think perhaps we should not take the chance. (75-76)

Wolfwillow aligns with Lonely at Home, Nellie, and other “patriot[s]” at home (76), writing, “I think that Lonely at Home should have five votes, not just one! One for herself

and four for the manhood she has sent off to war! And I say, more power to Mrs. McClung's elbow!" (76). Wolfwillow also calls for exclusionary measures as a means to safeguard the nation from "foreign" invasion and infiltration. She "[f]iercely" concludes her rallying cry, arguing, "[y]ou say you believe in democracy. Well democracy means government by the people. In this crisis I say the British people! Shall our men go and fight the Hun across the sea while their country is being turned over to a foreign power? A thousand times NO!" (76).

Despite this mounting resistance, however, Francis continues to vehemently protest the militarization of Canada; in fact, as McNair points out, Francis is so resolute in her quest that she is "like a terrier worrying the bone" (82). He also observes that Francis' opening and reading mail "put[s] the *fight* back into [her]" (emphasis added 83). This mail, however, is increasingly belligerent, indicative of a hostile, aggressive "army of women" who envision Francis as an enemy in their midst. One woman identifies Francis as both a "diseased" female and citizen, arguing, "[y]ou used to be alright when you talked about votes for women, but you're a disgrace to the female race the way you go on about peace. Anyone who talks like that is a traitor and probably has foreign friends" (84). The letter also implies that Francis will be subject to violence should she continue to engage in her campaign for peace. The letter continues, "'[m]y husband told me to say that he's proud of his country and proud to fight for it, and if you don't keep your mouth shut, you might find someone will shut it for you'" (84).

What becomes increasingly evident is that the "war" at home has taken on a more aggressive, even physical, dimension, one that threatens Francis' safety. As McNair explains, the War has infected the public, converting ideological conflicts into physical

warfare: “[t]he war is making people crazy. A man was nearly beaten to death at an anti-conscription rally last night. These are dangerous times” (85). Francis, however, refuses to yield, and she subjects herself to the War-rallied public. She distributes “anti-war pamphlets” (89) and attempts to “engage [passers-by] in conversation” (90), continuing to recruit despite risk of psychological and physical assault.

Francis also attends a pro-conscription “*women’s meeting*” (86), where she attempts to overthrow Nellie and to rally women to pacifism. This is a particularly important moment in the play as it highlights Francis’ (and pacifists’) fight against Nellie (and the war-rallied public) as well as the significant divides in the Suffrage Movement. Nellie articulates the position of the pro-War camp, calling for newly enfranchised “Dominion women” to battle for the legislation of conscription: “[t]he Wartime Elections Act has just given us Dominion women the vote, and I think we should use it to vote for conscription” (86). She attests to the electoral dimension of this fight, calling for “Dominion women” to align and support pro-War leaders and, consequently, War-rallied men. As she explains, “[n]ow is our chance to work for the candidates who are going to help our boys” (86). At the same time, she continues to recruit as a means to further strengthen the pro-War community and to ensure conscription. As she implores, “[w]e have no time to lose. The more women we can get out the better...” (86).

Francis envisions conscription as a democratic assault, a blatant disregard for individuals’ freedom; thus, she interrupts and counters Nellie’s rallying cry. She asks Nellie to consider, “[h]ow can our boys be fighting for freedom if we are not giving them the freedom to decide whether or not they’ll give their lives?” (86). She also attempts to

rally the meeting's attendees, whom she continues to envision as a sisterhood, to protest the War's continuation:

Why don't *we* tell the politicians that *we* women, the mothers, wives and sisters of Canada, want to bring this war to a peaceful conclusion right now, before any more blood is shed! . . . *We*, as women, in our first chance to use our franchise, are being asked to vote for war! To vote for sending more sons and husbands away to fight and be killed. Let's use *our* vote to say NO to war! (emphasis added 87-88)

At the same time, she appeals to the "Dominion women" to make allies of their "foreign" sisters and to end the xenophobia prevalent within women's groups, concluding, "[a]nd let's not exclude our sisters because they speak another language" (88).

Francis fails to recognize, however, that she is an unwelcome, enemy presence within the "*women's meeting*" (86) and, by extension, in the nation. At the meeting, while Nellie quietly, repeatedly dismisses Francis (86-88), Woman in Audience aggressively silences her, shouting, "[s]hut up. Just shut up! You don't know what you're talking about! You've got nothing to lose! Get out of here! GET OUT!" (88). "*FRANCIS leaves, anguished*" (88), symbolically exiled from her former community of women. Francis is also systematically silenced within larger Canada. As she explains to McNair, "I . . . received a call from the censorship board. Those scoundrels told me not to write anything about the conscription bill which might 'arouse' opposition!" (89). This censorship destabilizes her sense of the integrity of the nation and of its inhabitants, and she wonders, "[i]s this Canada or is this Prussia? Has everyone gone war mad?" (89). Francis further experiences a sense of dislocation when McNair informs her that their publisher

“wants [Francis’] resignation” (90). While McNair does not support this decision, he recognises that it is a temporary War measure. He thus echoes Nellie, explaining, “[w]e’ve just got to win the war and then you can hold any damned opinion you like. Just swallow hard and hold on” (91).

Francis, however, neither follows McNair’s advice nor accepts Nellie’s earlier promise: “[w]hen the war is over, we’ll get the suffrage issue straightened out and there’ll be a vote for everyone. Believe me, just like we’ve always dreamed. When the war is over” (80). Rather than await the War’s end and Canada’s return to democracy, Francis chooses to move to “the Mecca of all writers on this continent, the city of New York” (93) and “to a country where democracy still means something” (78). She thus follows the exiled pacifist Vernon, who was dismissed from his position as a newspaper writer for having “walked onto the floor of the Legislature to shake hands with the only politician with enough courage to make an anti-conscription speech” (78). Unlike Francis, however, who willingly takes refuge in New York, Vernon was symbolically and systematically exiled. As Lily explains, “Vernon had no choice . . . No one will hire him here now. At least in New York, he can write about what he believes” (79). What New York thus comes to represent is the antithesis of the Canadian home front, an idyllic, democratic refuge for Canadian pacifists. This polarization of New York and the Canadian home front enables the play to make a pointed note; while Canadian troops fight for freedom, Canada becomes an undemocratic “Prussia”-like space, intolerant of pacifist discourse.

Though Francis and Vernon are defeated on the home front and take refuge in New York, their flight does not signal the end of their pacifist warring. Rather, it marks

the advent of their engagement in a new “war”—namely, in a transnational, timeless struggle against militarism. Francis and Vernon will continue to write in New York and voice their opposition to war (79, 93). As Francis explains, she “will continue to work,” hoping that “in [the] dim and shadowy future, the world will have sense enough to value peace, and we will be able to live free of the fear of war” (93). Her “war” thus continues beyond the confines of national terrain and wartime.

* * *

The Fighting Days undermines the conventional association of Canadian women and pacifists with passivity by illustrating their capability for warring both inside and outside the parameters of the War. As the play illustrates, prior to and in the early years of wartime, many feminist pacifists/suffragettes actively fought for women’s rights and social reforms, and, despite ideological differences, stood as a united front. The War’s onset and, especially, its continuation divided members of women’s organizations, leading them to take up arms against each other in battles for their particular wartime beliefs. Nellie and the majority of the suffragettes enlisted in the “army of women,” undertaking war work and oppressing the perceived “foreign” and pacifist threats in their midst, whereas Francis and pacifists engaged in a “war” to defend “foreigners” and to end the militarization of Canada. While the play remembers Canada’s fighting women, it also points to the presence of the War on the home front and, in particular, within wartime women’s groups. Like Prentice et al.’s *Canadian Women: A History* and Glassford and Shaw’s *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War*, the play brings to light “the

many divisions among women that were sparked by the war . . . that are often overlooked or underplayed in existing literature” (Glassford and Shaw 5).

While the play focuses on a specific historical moment, it nonetheless remains of contemporary concern as it calls attention to the continued relationship of “feminist issues with international politics” (Coates, Tylee, and Agnès 9). As Lill explains, when she wrote the play, she “understood [Francis] in her own time and as she relates to issues today” (“Wendy Lill Interview” 44), and she recognized that “[t]here really was a similarity between the kinds of things [she is] interested in and what [the suffragettes] were interested in: the discussions about the war and pacifism, the discussions about women’s rights” (“A Feeling for our History” 18). What the play makes evident, however, is that these issues remain intrinsically linked to world politics. Though the play focuses on a specific historical moment, the “infection” of women’s organizations with the “war fever” generated by World War One, it nonetheless enables readers and audiences to reflect on the contemporary entanglement of war, women, and pacifism as we continue to live with the global legacy cast by the violence of the First World War.

CONCLUSION

The wealth of Canadian plays about the Great War produced since the 1970s suggests Canadians' continued preoccupation with the War's memory and its cultural and historical significance to the nation. The War was initially remembered as a nation-building and consolidating event of foremost importance, and it acquired this significance, in part, because it explained the nation's gains in the War in simple terms and enabled bereaved Canadians to cope with significant human losses (Vance 9-10). For many, the War continues to function as a means of consolidation, uniting an imagined community of Canadians in a shared heroic past—as many Remembrance Day celebrations attest; however, in recent years, with the distance of time, in the wake of the death of living memory, and as the War's centennial anniversary approaches, Canadians and, in particular, playwrights have increasingly opened the First World War to new interpretations. While this might suggest Canadians' anxiety about irretrievable, unearthed aspects of the past, shrouded by the symbolic narrative of the War, it also indicates that the War is no longer intrinsically connected with mourning and that its mythic quality can be challenged without offending the bereaved and/or dishonouring the casualties of the War.

What also might be important to consider, however, is the emergence of these plays during the growing anti-war and peace activism in the Vietnam War and Cold War eras. During the Vietnam era, peace movements and a general anti-war ethos were central in the United States and in Canada as was a consciousness about the horror of war, which the media had brought to light. This context as well as that of the nuclear-disarmament campaigns of the 1970s-80s, of peace movements related to the Cold War, the Yugoslav

Wars, and the wars in the Middle East, and of humanitarian efforts in the 1990s (namely in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda) certainly appear to have contributed to the critical ways in which Canadian playwrights have looked back to the First World War. This context, coupled with the loss of living memory, might explain why many of the plays grapple with the subject of the War, often demonstrating anti-war sensibility and focusing on the unromantic aspects of the War while at the same time acknowledging Canada's significant sacrifices in the War. Frequently, these plays call attention to the personal costs of the War, without recourse to "consolatory" and "explanatory" myths (Vance 9) and without succumbing to patriotic rhetoric.

This dissertation focuses specifically on plays that explore little-documented manifestations of the War on Canadian soil,¹⁴⁰ namely because these plays have received little scholarly attention despite their quality and the significant contribution they have made to Canada's contemporary collective memory of the War.¹⁴¹ These plays are deserving of attention as they undertake a critique of the symbolic narrative of the War, illustrating that its representation of the home front as a refuge from the War led to the exclusion of many Canadians from War memory and from the national identity that emerged in and as a result of the War. They also offer an important critique of traditional Canadian Great War narratives that imagined the home front as somehow protected from the horrors of warfare. Ultimately, they figure the home space as a *front* and civilians as

¹⁴⁰ There are plays not featured in this dissertation that focus on the War at home. See, for example, Maureen Hunter's *Wild Mouth*, Anne Chislett's *Quiet in the Land*, and Michel Marc Bouchard's *The Madonna Painter* (translated by Linda Gaboriau).

¹⁴¹ One of the reasons Coates and Grace created an anthology of "Canadian plays about war" was because of the "number and quality of such plays written by Canadians and produced in Canada and abroad since about 1977" (Grace, "A different kind of theatre" v). Grace notes that many of these plays "are remarkably good and deserve more attention on the stage and in the classroom" ("A different kind of theatre" v).

engaged in an “absolute form of war,” and, in doing so, they suggest that neither Canadian terrain nor domestic spaces were “neutral spaces” (Clausewitz 46). In doing so, the plays reveal that no one is immune to the psychology of war: it invades the home space during war and long after. The plays, in a sense, are still grappling with the extended legacy of the First World War—and the continued re-emergence of global violence—as it continues to affect Canadians in the present day.

Also in need of further attention, however, is the wealth of contemporary Canadian plays that focus on Canadian soldiers’ multifaceted, diverse experiences of overseas warfare. Though plays about the war front have received more scholarly attention than those about the home front, much work remains to be carried out on these important theatrical works. Many call attention to the “unusable” and/or unspeakable aspects of soldiering, and, in doing so, represent Canadian soldiers as human individuals rather than as a mythic, homogenous group. While this sometimes undercuts the romantic resonance of soldiers, refiguring them in the popular imaginary, it also attests to many of the playwrights’ interest not only in unearthing the little-known past but also in deconstructing the symbolic narrative of the War and in considering the “long term implications of loss” (Grace, “A different kind of theatre” iv).¹⁴² The plays about combatants, then, like most contemporary plays about the War, are as much about the “process of remembering, or of post-memory,” as they are about the occupants of wartime (Grace, “A different kind of theatre” iv). They are all written by playwrights

¹⁴² Grace notes that this is characteristic of most playwrights writing about the First World War, particularly Vern Thiessen and R.H. Thomson (“A different kind of theatre” iv).

who did not experience the First World War,¹⁴³ and they are the result of a contemporary questioning, interpretation, and negotiation of inherited and/or transmitted memory. This might explain why there is a double response in many of these plays; frequently, there is a cautious, respectful, and commemorative honouring (and, in some instances, a continued romanticization) of the wartime experience even as there is a critique of symbolic national narratives and an expression of disillusionment about the militaristic justification of the War.

The most celebrated contemporary Canadian play about overseas combat is Eric Peterson and John Gray's *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1981), an award-winning musical that has been produced throughout Canada and in the United States (Charlebois and Nothof). While this play remembers Canadian flying ace Lieutenant Colonel William Avery Bishop and his numerous aerial achievements, it also attempts to understand Bishop outside the parameters of his heroic representation, largely solidified by Bishop's sensational autobiography *Winged Warfare* (1918), which the playwrights discovered in the late 1970s (Wasserman, "John Gray with Eric Peterson" 379; Gray 381). The play is certainly an adaptation of this book, as literary critic Mary Jane Miller explains; however, it is also an examination "of the processes of myth-making" (Miller 196), which "shows us how . . . a hero was created" within the wartime context (Miller 189). As Miller argues, "[w]hy and how Billy becomes BILLY BISHOP V.C. is at the heart of [the] play" (190). Canadian drama scholars Gaëtan Charlebois and Anne Nothof similarly interpret the play, noting that it "critically examines its protagonist, questioning the nature of

¹⁴³ Grace explains that "[e]ach [of the plays in *Canada and the Theatre of War: Volume I*] is written by a man or woman born during or after World War II who must conduct research on the war she or he is trying to remember and understand" ("A different kind of theatre" iv).¹⁴³

heroism and the reasons for and consequences of war. It shows how values are compromised and changed; and how heroes are constructed” (Charlebois and Nothof). Thus, while the play remembers a key figure in Canadian War history (and both his heroic and unromantic characteristics), it also calls attention to the contemporary questioning of representations of combatants and, in particular, of War heroes in the wake of the death of living memory and in the context of the Vietnam era.¹⁴⁴

Though R.H. Thomson’s *The Lost Boys: Letters from the Sons in Two Acts: 1914-1923* (2002) does not focus on a celebrated hero, it is similar to *Billy Bishop Goes to War* in considering how remembrances of soldiers are constructed. The play’s central character (Man), who functions as a representation of Thomson, embarks on a quest to understand his five great-uncles’ wartime experiences in the aftermath of their deaths, namely by reading a series of letters they sent home in the War years. These letters are quoted extensively throughout the play, bringing the veterans to life (Grace, “Theatres of War” 90) and offering the protagonist glimpses into their past. What becomes increasingly evident to the protagonist, however, is that “*much is hidden from him in the letters*” (34). He recognizes that “[t]he first level of deception in these letters is the triviality, the off-handedness. There was so much they could not write about” (35).¹⁴⁵ He is thus, as literary scholar David Williams explains, “forced . . . to rethink his own faith in written documents as a reliable source for the recovery of ‘lost time’” (196). This “rethinking” leads him to interrogate gaps in the letters and to fill silences with archival

¹⁴⁴ The Vietnam War ended in 1975, and the play was first produced “around Remembrance Day in 1978” (Gray 381).

¹⁴⁵ This topic is also explored in *Billy Bishop Goes to War*. Billy composes letters about the horror of the War, often in an off-handed manner, to Margaret, who later becomes his wife. It is unclear, however, whether he ever sends these letters.

research and speculation. Though he cannot fully retrieve details of the past, he does unearth some little-known, unromantic aspects of his great-uncles' wartime experiences. His archival research, for example, enables him to discover that his great-uncle George was twice hospitalized for venereal disease—though, in George's letters, George reported that he was institutionalized as a result of orthopedic and auditory ailments (34-35). What the protagonist makes evident, however, is that the details of George's sexual encounters remain irretrievable, and he grieves the loss of this information, noting, “there's nothing in the letters, George, nothing. It's a world unspoken” (35). This suggests the way in which George's (and other soldiers') silences enabled the concealment of daily wartime trauma from popular knowledge (35). Thus, while the play certainly “commemorate[s]” Thomson's uncles (Coates, “R.H. Thomson” 4), it does so without ignoring the “unusable” aspects of their pasts, and it calls attention to how much of their wartime experiences remain unknown. At the same time, it suggests the way in which this void affects Thomson, who wrote the play, in part, “to lament what he lost as a result” of “his adolescent inattentiveness” to the past (Coates, “R.H. Thomson” 4).

Vern Thiessen's celebrated *Vimy* (2007) similarly seeks to remember little-known aspects of combatants' experiences, and it demonstrates a particular concern with those of underrepresented minorities. *Vimy* takes place “in a field hospital in France shortly after the storm of the German-held [Vimy] Ridge” (Coates, “Vern Thiessen” 224), an event widely understood as initiating the birth of the modern Canadian nation. While the play venerates this battle (Coates, “Vern Thiessen” 224), calling attention to soldiers' significant gains and heroism, it also points to the distinctiveness of Canadian troops. Ultimately, it inserts “men from across the nation” into the story of Vimy Ridge as a

means to “break from more traditional narratives which focus on the experiences of Anglo-Eastern Canadians” (Lermitte 44).¹⁴⁶ The play features “representational” characters (Wasserman, “Shedding light”; see also Grace, “Theatres of War” 100 and Nothof 4) that come from different geographical locations (Alberta, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia), have different religious and cultural backgrounds, and speak different languages. As Nothof explains, the characters therefore “embody the diversity of cultural background of the 97,000 soldiers in the four divisions of Canadian troops at Vimy” (4). Of particular importance is Thiessen’s attention to the contributions of “Aboriginal, First Nations, and Métis” men (vii) and of French Canadians in combat. In his “Historical Notes,” for example, he points out that “[o]ne in three Native men . . . volunteered to serve in the Great War” (vii), and he represents these men within the play in the form of Mike, a “Blood Indian from Standoff, Alberta” (2).¹⁴⁷ While Mike serves as a means to remember Native men’s contribution to the War effort, his discussions of “visions” and of “his sacred duty in relation to the warrior heritage he comes from” (Lermitte 49), although somewhat stereotypical, enable Thiessen to call attention to religious and cultural diversity amongst combatants and to undermine the assumption that for all soldiers, the War was a Christian crusade (Lermitte 49-50). What is also noteworthy is Thiessen’s attention to French-Canadian overseas engagement and, in

¹⁴⁶ The play also features a female character, Clare, and, in doing so, remembers the presence of the “Canadian Army Nurses Corps” in France (2).

¹⁴⁷ Grace notes that “[p]erhaps the most significant absence from our representation of Canadians in either world war has been that of First Nations soldiers” (“Theatres of War” 88). I was unable to find a play about the War by a Canadian Indigenous writer.

particular, to a Quebecois soldier's mistreatment at the hands of English-Canadian officials (57-58).¹⁴⁸

While Thiessen includes the experiences of minorities in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, commemorating the achievements of a range of Canadian soldiers engaged in this battle, he also calls attention to the significant extent of their sacrifice and to the lasting physical and psychological repercussions of their soldiering. What Thiessen makes abundantly clear in the play is that each of the in-patients is in a state of suffering: Mike, for example, “*suffers* from the effects of a gas attack”; Jean-Paul “*suffers* from shell shock”; Will “*suffers* the effects of shrapnel to his arm and upper body”; Sid “has been blinded and *suffers* head injuries as well as tuberculosis” (emphasis added 2). The play also suggests that though some of the soldiers will physically recover, many will never escape the War. Sid, for example, succumbs to his injuries (75), and though J.P. is discharged, he comments, “[*I don't know how I'm gonna....*]” (76), subtly suggesting that he will carry his traumatic memories of the War home.

Other plays also focus on the losses and human casualties rather than on the gains of the War. Though Don Hannah's *While We're Young* (2009) is set in various time frames and contains only one narrative strand about trench warfare, like *Vimy*, it

¹⁴⁸ *Vimy* delineates not only cultural but also sexual diversity amongst soldiers, further redefining and refiguring the Canadian soldier in collective memory. The play subtly points to the emotional and physical intimacy of comrades Sid and Will (60, 75), and, though a romantic relationship does not fully develop within the play, *Vimy* remains one of the only contemporary plays about the War to broach the subject of homosexuality and the War. This topic is surprisingly absent from Dennis Garnhum's adaptation of Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (2008), a play that follows the story of Robert Ross as depicted in the novel, but which omits any “sexually graphic scenes” (Schelling). The topic, however, is present in Don Hannah's *While We're Young*, where two combatants “*kiss long and passionately*” (61). There is also a violent and exploitative homosexual encounter in *Dancock's Dance* (182-83).

considers the lasting repercussions of soldiering. The play's first section on the War (19-29) dramatizes three men (Paul, Mac, and Jamie) in a trench in Flanders, reminiscing about home life and discussing the nature of death in the War. As Paul notes, "here, after awhile, [death's] nothing special. Happens everywhere, all over the place, sometimes umpteen hundreds of us in a single day" (24). While this statement evocatively points to the horror of trench warfare, it does not prepare the soldiers and, in particular, the reader/audience for the sudden, graphic death of Mac. Mac, who has been sleeping, "*is still dozy*" and "*starts to stand*" (29) before "*an intense flash of light*" appears, leaving "*MAC's face . . . drenched in blood*" (29). The scene ends abruptly, reinforcing the accuracy of Paul's statement about the pervasiveness of death. This point is further reinforced in the play's next section on the War (56-62), which features Paul wounded in Passchendaele. The play undermines the glorious resonance of the War by having Paul admit, "I think I just shit my pants" (60) and with Jamie ironically responding, "[t]he Empire doesn't get much more glorious than this, does it?" (61). The scene ends with Paul's death and with Jamie, seemingly the only unwounded soldier on the battlefield, "*genuflect[ing]*" (61). Though this gesture honours Paul's life, the scene closes without acknowledging the value of his death; therefore, at the same time as the genuflection serves as an act of respect, it also ironizes any Christian justification for the loss.

Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding* (2008) and Kevin Major's *No Man's Land* (1995) similarly call attention to the costs of the War by dramatizing the deaths of soldiers in battle.¹⁴⁹ While they do represent soldiers as heroic and reflect on the value of their sacrifices, they also feature scenes set on Canadian terrain, which evocatively call

¹⁴⁹ *Mary's Wedding* was also made into an opera.

attention to the lasting effects of soldiers' deaths on Canadian social-domestic life. Though, as Coates explains, "*Mary's Wedding* does not consist solely of appalling slaughter" ("Stephen Massicotte" 107), the play nevertheless points to "the bleak reality of trench warfare" (Hunt) and calls attention to the fact that the War was not akin to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's romantic poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade"—as the play's naïve protagonist Charlie initially assumes it to be.¹⁵⁰ As reviewer Robert Hurwitt explains, "[a]s much as the characters love Tennyson, . . . the lyricism and gripping descriptions of terrible carnage contain more resonant echoes of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and the other trench poets of World War I." The play dramatizes Charlie's participation in the 1918 Battle of Moreuil Woods, a valiant cavalry charge into machine-gun territory, which contributed to the defeat of the German offensive and which resulted in a high number of casualties.¹⁵¹ While the play acknowledges the gains of this attack (155), it also demonstrates Charlie's recognition that "[t]he charge . . . wasn't poetry" (153) as well as the traumatic effects of his death on Mary. As Mary recalls, returning to the aftermath of Charlie's death, "I nearly die of heartache. I swear, for months I can't move" (156), and her bereavement continues until the night before her wedding to another man. At the play's close, however, Mary experiences a sense of healing; though she acknowledges that she will forever carry the memory of Charlie, she bids his ghost-like presence farewell, an act that signals the commencement of a new chapter in her life (157-58).

¹⁵⁰ The poem is quoted throughout the play.

¹⁵¹ The play is set in 1920 and features a dream-like reconstruction of the War.

Unlike *Mary's Wedding*, Kevin Major's *No Man's Land*,¹⁵² which focuses on Newfoundland's horrific overseas experience of the War, does not end with a peaceful resolution.¹⁵³ The play largely focuses on the wartime interactions and preparations of the Newfoundland Regiment (24-114) before dramatizing soldiers' untimely, tragic slaughter in the Battle of Beaumont Hamel (115) and considering the distressing effects of these deaths on home-front occupants.¹⁵⁴ The play evocatively recreates soldiers' valiant "*scramble over the lip of the trench*" and into "[*m*]achine-gun fire" (115), and, though Major does not dramatize the excessive carnage that ensues, he leaves only one man standing at the Battle's end (115), symbolically calling attention to the devastation of the Regiment (and of Newfoundland's male population). The play then shifts to the home front, where women describe the unromantic details of the Battle. Mrs. Martin, for example, identifies the "July Drive" as "[t]he drive of men and boys into a wall of bullets" (115). She also suggests the senselessness of the over seven hundred deaths,¹⁵⁵ speculating that "[m]any of [the soldiers] were shot . . . trying to get through their own barbed wire" and noting that "[i]t is doubtful if even one of them ever made it to a German trench" (115).

The play also points to the lasting social-domestic consequences of this event in Newfoundland. The veteran Ned, for example, returns "a silent man" (116), and Martin, a

¹⁵² The play is an adaptation of Major's novel *No Man's Land*.

¹⁵³ Newfoundland was not part of Canada in the War years; however, it became a Canadian province in 1949. In contemporary histories of the Great War, Newfoundland's experience of the War is usually included as an integral component of Canada's contemporary memory of the War.

¹⁵⁴ See also David French's *Soldier's Heart*. This play takes place in the aftermath of the War, in 1924, calling attention to the experiences of Newfoundlanders overseas and the traumatic effects of the War on a veteran and his family.

¹⁵⁵ Mrs. Martin notes that "[o]ut of the eight hundred who went over, sixty-eight answered the roll call the next morning" (115).

survivor of the Battle, symbolically “*remains in the trench alone*” (117), seemingly unable to escape the War. Jane, a nurse who was stationed overseas (and a representation of many Newfoundland widows), mourns the loss of her beloved fiancé Bruce and remains in a permanent state of bereavement. As she explains, “I came back home to Newfoundland with a sorrowful heart. And I shall die with one. And like Bruce, when the time comes, I shall die alone” (116-17). Though she attempts to console herself by embracing the notion that the Newfoundland “boys died for a good cause. For something more than the Empire,” her comments suggests that she remains doubtful (117). Mrs. Hayward similarly struggles to “accept” that her son “died for a good cause” (117). She longs to accept this reasoning as truth, for it will quell her suspicion that her son was unjustly sacrificed. As she evocatively concludes the play, “[t]he war took from our Island the best of men. I ache to think it was easier to send them into the bullets because they were from Newfoundland. Because the cry of their loved ones was an ocean away” (117).

* * *

There is a wealth of contemporary plays on Canada’s little-known experiences and the troubling consequences of the Great War both overseas and at home, yet these plays have received neither significant attention nor acknowledgement as a distinct and growing dramatic genre. Though Coates and Grace point to the significant number of contemporary “plays about war” (Grace, “A different kind of theatre” v) and devote a section of their seminal anthology *Canada and the Theatre of War: Volume 1* to these works, this dissertation is the first comprehensive examination of contemporary Canadian First World War plays as a specific category of analysis. It calls attention to the literary

outpouring of theatrical representations of the War and, in particular, to contemporary playwrights' preoccupation with the little-known manifestation of the War on the home front and, consequently, with the War's continued presence in Canada in the form of post-memory. At the same time, it gestures to important, distinct (though not mutually exclusive) subcategories within the genre—that is, to plays about the home front and to plays about the war front.

Whereas traditional war literature focuses largely on the war front, the home front has become the focal point of much contemporary Canadian war literature. As Grace explains, the “artistic turn to the home front has become one of the most striking aspects of almost all [Canadian] important representations of war created since the 1970s” (“Theatre of War” 65-66). What this “turn” might suggest is Canadians' increased preoccupation with the subtle ways in which war invades home terrain. At the same time, it might also be indicative of Canadians' growing dissatisfaction with the traditional understanding of war as an overseas conflict between military personnel, especially in the light of Canada's engagements in modern wars and conflicts and, in particular, as a result of 9/11, which evocatively destabilized the division between military and civilian spaces.

As this dissertation demonstrates, the plays about the Great War home front commonly illustrate that the War came home in the form of the “Spanish” influenza, the Halifax Explosion, the Easter Riots, trauma, and intra-communal in-fighting and suspicion, collapsing the boundaries of the war and home front and, often, the parameters of wartime. Many of the plays (namely, *Unity (1918)*, *Dancock's Dance*, and *Québec, Printemps 1918*), for example, illustrate the War's presence on Canadian terrain not only in wartime but also shortly after the declaration of armistice. Their representations

therefore undermine the traditional understanding of Canadian terrain as an idyllic, impenetrable refuge from the War and of the War as a military conflict that took place between 1914-1918. Although a detailed discussion of plays about combatants is outside the scope of this dissertation, my conclusion gestures to these works as a means of illustrating their importance and relationship to plays about civilians. Collectively, these plays about the home front and the war front offer an important, panoramic, and multi-faceted representation of the Great War, inclusive of a diversity of people and experiences in domestic and international settings during and after the War, which unsettles and troubles Canada's conventional, mythic, preferred memory of the War. They suggest that the memory of the War can no longer be easily contained as an event characterized by national harmony or limited to an overarching, singular, "Canadian" community.

Most interesting, however, is what the plays, set both overseas and at home, reveal about the present; the wealth of plays produced in the last forty years suggests that the War in the form of transgenerational memory continues to linger in contemporary Canada. While the content of the plays attest to the fact that the War transcended the boundaries of wartime, the plays themselves suggest the War continues to "infect" the minds of many Canadians playwrights who grapple with its memory and who demonstrate a significant unease with the War's traditional representation. This dissertation recognizes these neglected plays as a rich, diverse, and growing body of contemporary work focused on a seminal and foundational moment in Canadian history and indicative of Canada's continued preoccupation with the past.

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