

Re-Imagining the First World War

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*New Perspectives in Anglophone
Literature and Culture*

Edited by

Anna Branach-Kallas and Nelly Strehlau

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Canada

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INTRODUCTION

ANNA BRANACH-KALLAS
AND NELLY STREHLAU

In the Preface to his groundbreaking *The Great War and Modern Memory*, published in 1975, Paul Fussell claimed that “the dynamics and iconography of the Great War have proved crucial political, rhetorical, and artistic determinants on subsequent life” (ix). Forty years after the publication of Fussell’s study, the authors whose articles are collected in this volume reconsider whether the myth generated by World War I is still “part of the fiber of [people’s] lives” (ix) in English-speaking countries. What is the place of the First World War in cultural memory today? How have the literary means for remembering the war changed since the war? Can we learn anything new from the effort to re-imagine the First World War after other bloody conflicts of the 20th century? Tentative answers to these questions are provided in *Re-Imagining the First World War*. The authors of the essays gathered in this collection write about the war predominantly from a literary perspective, but also from historical, philosophical and sociological ones, including responses to the Great War in life writing, music, and film.

Though eclipsed by the atrocities of the Second World War, the First World War represented a crisis of testimony, a challenge to memory and imagination. The disruptive effects of shell-shock, a massive phenomenon during the Great War, highlight the issue of memory, which had become corporeal and controlled the traumatised self, yet evaded articulation (Winter 2006, 55). As Jay M. Winter contends, for the communities of the bereaved, the central problem was “How to accept the shock of the war, how to remember the ‘Lost Generation’” and how to find an appropriate vocabulary of mourning (1995, 6). Perceived in terms of rupture and discontinuity, the First World War required new frames of conceptual reintegration and new forms of commemoration. Winter therefore suggests that during the conflict and after the cessation of hostilities remembrance became a “multiform social project” (2006, 3). Significantly, with time “The images, languages, and practices which appeared during and in the

aftermath of the Great War shaped the ways in which future conflicts were imagined and remembered” (Winter 2006, 1). In this sense, the First World War has formed our *war imagination*. Perceived as a “modernizing experience” (Leed 193) or a major “corporeal crisis” (Bourke 251), the Great War has nevertheless become “a war imagined” (Hynes), a “literary” war (Fussell 155), an “invented tradition,” filtered through the images of “rats, gas, mud and blood,” popularised by Great War poetry, fiction and war memoirs (Wilson 43–44), as well as by the “post-memorial images” that have become part of the cinematic convention (Löschnigg and Sokołowska-Paryż 1). According to Ross J. Wilson, this limited view of the war, integral to popular remembrance, “reflect[s] more about those engaged in the process of remembering than it does about the events of 1914 to 1918” (44). Although a hundred years after the outbreak of hostilities we might be more sensitive to the tension between commemoration and contestation, there is a pressing need to re-member, re-conceptualise and re-imagine the Great War. Citing Paul Ricoeur, “Past things are abolished, but no one can make it be that they should never have been” (280). The function of cultural memory is to preserve the meanings of the past that are important for us today; yet, at the same time, it is important to remember the historically contextualised meanings, projected by those in power but also by those who, although they remained in the shadows, were deeply affected by the war. For, as Ricoeur reminds us, “The duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self” (89).

Re-Imagining the First World War is divided into seven parts. We open the collection with two essays that situate the problem of re-imagining the Great War in a broad literary, artistic and philosophical perspective. In her comprehensive article, **Sherrill Grace** focuses on the practice of remembering—and forgetting—the war, drawing on sources ranging from contemporary political discourse to mass media to art and focusing on selected examples from Canadian fiction and non-fiction writing. She proposes a detailed list of the characteristic features of first-hand combat and eye-witness fiction and shows how they have been reconceptualised by contemporary writers. She uses Timothy Findley’s seminal novel *The Wars* to contextualise the three literary texts—one novel, one play and one “auto/biography”—that are the main subject of her analysis, namely Jack Hodgins’s *Broken Ground*, Vern Thiessen’s *Vimy* and David Macfarlane’s *The Danger Tree: Memory, War, and the Search for a Family’s Past*. Grace showcases the manner in which, by offering personal viewpoints on the past, the three writers problematise not only official historical discourse and record-keeping, but also the notions

of truth, intricacies of Canadian identity and nationhood and, last but not least, the ethics of bearing witness. Grace questions the often repeated slogan that would see World War I as Canada's—and not only Canada's—rite of passage into adulthood, offering an alternative interpretation of what constitutes national maturity, situating it not in war effort but in the effort of commemoration—one that does not elide inconvenient truths but rather “learns from the remembering” about both its victimhood and its victims.

Drawing on Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben, **Tadeusz Rachwał** in his thought-provoking “Stand-to-Arms. On Immobility in the Trenches and the Brotherhood of War” reflects on the gendering effects of war (in)activity, and on the manner in which World War I not only “[exposed] the distribution and assignment of gender roles” but also revealed their complexities. To this end, he contrasts the notions of “war brotherhood” and the masculinity it ostensibly entails, and the consequences of either non-participation in said brotherhood, as was the case with noncombatants, or the inherent immobility of trench warfare, where soldiers would spend significantly more time awaiting orders than carrying them out. Rachwał references a variety of texts, from wartime propaganda to contemporary popular culture, to illustrate his argument that the war made possible a certain re-evaluation of citizenship not only for women, who were (to a limited degree) invited to participate in the war effort through their actions on the home front, but also for those (self-)excluded from the “brotherhood,” who would as a result be denied not merely the status of citizens but, consequently, their right to live as well.

Part two consists of contemporary reinterpretations of the Great War canon, proposing in-depth studies of poetry, fiction, letters, and essays, analysed in the light of thoroughly researched biographical material. In his essay, **Jacek Wiśniewski** discusses Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas as “poets of war,” rather than “war poets,” as representatives of older generations who did not directly take part in the fighting. Using a variety of biographical and critical sources, the article shows the close affinities between the two poets' elegies on their own deaths, Hardy's “Afermath” and Thomas's “What will they do when I am gone?”, which, as Wiśniewski demonstrates, were poetic responses to the outbreak of the First World War. These two poems, in the author's view, function as memorials of war; they are perhaps, citing his words, “more durable than stone monuments and cenotaphs, which in fact often borrow lines from poets to carve those words in stone.”

In “The Great War, Heroic Manhood, and Rudyard Kipling's work,” **Katarzyna Więckowska** focuses on Kipling's contribution to the

construction of manly heroism and his response to its damage as a result of the Great War and the death of his son John. Kipling's personal involvement in the war and his participation in commemorating the dead soldiers after the war are analysed as attempts to provide a space, both physical and conceptual, in which the dead might live on as heroes rather than as unmanned victims of a senseless battle. Interpreting a variety of texts written in the first decades of the 20th century, Więckowska extends her interpretation to 21st century re-visions of John and Rudyard Kipling's story by Geert Spillebeen and David Haig.

Grzegorz Moroz in turn traces the development of Aldous Huxley's pacifism during his Garsington period. In August 1914, Huxley volunteered to fight, but was rejected on medical grounds. Upon graduation from Oxford University in June 1916, Huxley spent almost a year cutting and chopping wood as well as socializing in Garsington Manor, an informal centre of pacifism in Great Britain at that time. Analysing Huxley's letters, Moroz demonstrates the limits of Huxley's support for conscientious objection and illustrates his idiosyncratic ideas on war and pacifism.

In the last article in this section, **Ross Aldridge** offers an overview of the evolution of Bertrand Russell's attitude towards history and progress. Aldridge discusses the reasons behind Russell's uncommonly critical stance on World War I, presenting the conflict as an "intellectual trauma" for the philosopher. He analyses the extent to which the outbreak of the war resulted in a crisis of Russell's historical and social paradigm by undermining his conviction concerning the inevitability of the development of "reason and science" resulting in social progress, particularly where Europe was concerned.

The essays in Part three illustrate British discourses of commemoration, in non-fiction, the novel, drama, and film, thus problematising the issue of memory, monument, and memorial. In the opening article, **Marzena Sokolowska-Paryż** focuses on how the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, designed by Edwin Lutyens and inaugurated in 1932, is re-interpreted in contemporary British non-fiction, such as Geoff Dyer's *The Missing of the Somme* and Gavin Stamp's *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme*, as well as prose fiction: Robert Goddard's *In Pale Battalions*, Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong*, and Pat Barker's *Another World*. Highlighting the issue of ethics and the threat of oblivion, her essay shows that the enduring presence of the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme in the contemporary historical consciousness is dependent less on annual commemorative ceremonies than on the possibility of "re-imagining" the monument

according to contemporary ethics and the prerequisites of a post-genocide and post-traumatic culture.

In the next essay, **Edyta Lorek-Jezińska** approaches *Oh What a Lovely War*, first performed by Theatre Workshop in 1963, as an example of political theatre that contributed to what Jay M. Winter calls “the second memory boom,” questioning the official, militarily directed discourse of remembering the Great War. Analysing, with particular insight, the play’s aesthetics, Lorek-Jezińska focuses on marginal protagonists on the war stage, such as the private, the civilian or the woman. She develops the metaphor of war as a game through the figure of the pierrot, challenging the myth of heroic masculinity. The article explores such elements as rite of passage, nurse’s and suffragist’s perspectives, pacifism, No Man’s Land, bodily fragmentation and the abject, thus presenting the fascinating multidimensionality of the performance.

In “*Et in Arcadia Ego: Memory, Mystery, and Mourning in J.L. Carr’s A Month in the Country*,” **Ruta Ślapkauskaitė** examines J.L. Carr’s Booker-nominated novel with regard to how this work of fiction brings together its verbal and pictorial aspects to measure the endurance of historical memory and possibilities for spiritual healing. Seeing as the narrative is organised around two survivors of the Great War who find retreat in the idyllic English countryside, her reading of Carr’s novel considers the significance given to their post-war activities—archaeology and pictorial restoration—as metaphors for spiritual recovery.

In her essay, **Natalia Sabiniarz** traces, through close reading, the intertextual relations between Great War poetry and British novelist Pat Barker’s 1991 novel *Regeneration*. Applying Linda Hutcheon’s concept of historiographic metafiction and Harold Bloom’s revisionary ratios, Sabiniarz illustrates the complex network of borrowings, allusions and intriguing (re)interpretations that help Barker to re-imagine the relationship between Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon and the social and literary context of the Great War.

Anna Mądry in “Living on Borrowed Time: Brotherhood in *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo” compares the 2003 British novel with literature for juvenile readers created during and shortly after the First World War. She thus demonstrates that Morpurgo, free from the pressures of propaganda, highlights the atrocities and injustice of the war. A story of brotherhood, understood, as Mądry proves, in several ways, *Private Peaceful* exposes the infamous execution of the soldiers for insubordination, desertion or cowardice by the British and Commonwealth armies.

Nelly Strehlau's “Why Is It Different from Before the War?: The Portrayal of the Great War and Its Aftermath in *Downton Abbey*” analyses the popular British series, presenting the manner in which the Great War is shown to affect both the characters who are combatants and those who remain on the home front. She goes on to conclude that even though the series uses the war for dramatic effect in most characters’ plotlines, it ultimately minimises its effect on the status quo.

Part four explores Irish literary approaches to the First World War, exposing the tragic rupture that the conflict caused in the Irish society. **Marta Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk's** “Observe the Sons of Ireland in the Whirlwind of the First World War” presents an overview of Irish drama devoted to World War I, briefly touching upon examples of other narrative forms. Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk analyses George Bernard Shaw’s, Sean O’Casey’s and Frank McGuinness’s plays together with, among others, Patrick MacGill’s prose, to present a detailed discussion of Irish writings on the subject of the First World War, complicated as they are by the concurrent Easter Uprising. She also brings to attention the plays’ sophistication—both thematic and structural.

Also referring to the historical context of the Irish involvement in the Great War and the Easter Uprising of 1916, **Krzysztof Kosecki** analyses William Butler Yeats’s ambivalent literary reactions to the Great War, showing that, as a “mild nationalist,” Yeats was not always consistent in his views. Analysing poems in which Yeats immortalized historical figures, such as Roger Casement, Major Robert Gregory and Constance Markievicz, as well as “The Second Coming” and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” Kosecki illustrates Yeats’s problematic assessment of the historical situation and his catastrophic belief that the 1914–1918 events foreshadowed the end of modern civilisation.

Maria Fengler's “No Way Back to Tipperary: Reimagining the Great War in Sebastian Barry’s *A Long Long Way*” discusses the titular novel in connection to the renewed controversy surrounding the Irish participation in the First World War. Fengler contrasts the all but forgotten complexity of the Irish society and politics at the time of the Easter Rising and in its aftermath with the simplified record of the war, retained in the Irish foundation myth. She focuses on the means through which Barry’s novel defamiliarises the Great War, and situates it within both the author’s oeuvre and the relatively scarce body of work devoted to the South Irish contributions to World War I.

While Irish memory of the Great War was often obliterated in nationalist propaganda, in Canada and Australia the war gained mythical proportions, reviving imperial loyalties but also national aspirations. Part

five opens with “The War Quandary: Some Notes on the Images of the Great War in pre-1939 Australian Literature” by **Ryszard W. Wolny**, which provides an overview of early Australian war writings. According to the author, during and shortly after the First World War little of literary value was produced in Australia, which is surprising, taking into account the myth of the Great War in Australian culture. Dividing his analysis into manly adventures, sceptical voices, women’s responses, and heroic myth-making, Wolny interprets a variety of Australian poetical and fictional texts, with a particular emphasis on Frederic Manning’s *Her Privates We* (1929). **Tomasz Gadzina**, in turn, takes on the subject of the Anzac legend, analysing the figure of the “bushman” or “digger” as the prototype of the Australian soldier, as depicted during and after the Great War. Gadzina notes that although the image of the Anzac soldier was not exactly uniform, it nevertheless represented a blueprint for the formation of a national identity that was in many respects exclusive and that foreclosed the possibility of other narratives, for which reason it has come under attack from several directions.

In her essay “The Great War as a Trigger for Growing Up and Gaining Maturity in *Rilla of Ingleside*,” **Dagmara Drewniak** traces the parallels between the maturation of the protagonist of L.M. Montgomery’s novel and of Canada as a state. At the same time, she points to the novel’s function as a Bildungsroman and emphasises the book’s underappreciated potential as a text presenting the totality of war in its focus on the (underexplored) subjects of the home front and the lives of women in wartime.

In her “Configuring Antigone: Female Responses to the Great War in the Novels of Margaret Laurence and Jane Urquhart,” **Dorota Filipczak** compares the two Canadian writers’ fiction inspired by the Great War, using as a key interpretative frame the figure of Antigone. Referring to a variety of critical assessments of the classical heroine and her act of dissent, she demonstrates that Antigone’s desire to honour the dead who were denied a proper burial is echoed in Laurence’s and Urquhart’s fiction, which “shows their growing concern with publicizing the private experience of the marginalized.”

Finally, for **Marcin Gabryś**, Canadian commemorations of the centenary of the Great War present an opportunity to undertake a wider analysis of Stephen Harper’s government’s approach to history and to the construction of Canadian national identity. He showcases how memory and history cannot be separated from ideology and frequently become tools used for political goals, arguing that the Conservative government in Canada attempts to simultaneously monopolise patriotism and elide the more complicated aspects of the nation’s history, thus oversimplifying the

official account of Canada's World War I participation. At the same time, he draws attention to very practical effects of this ideological effort, consisting in lack of financial support for specific cultural and educational institutions.

The *Ex-centric Perspectives* in Part six resituate the Great War in unusual contexts, exploring the war experience of missionaries and nurses, as well as the treatment of Great War motifs in rock music. In "Lost Brothers, Lost Beliefs. Tragedy of the Great War from the Oblate Missionary Perspective" **Pawel Zajac**, using archival sources, sheds light on the fates of missionaries affected by the war both indirectly, as in the case of Arctic missions cut off from regular news concerning their family members and friends involved in the war effort, and directly, as in the case of German priests whom war caught in British territories, and who were subsequently placed in internment camps. His account further supplements the multitude of perspectives on the Great War, presenting its relatively unknown aspects.

Two subsequent essays explore nursing experience during the Great War. **Anna Slonina** interprets Mary Borden's anti-war text, published in 1929, *The Forbidden Zone: A Nurse's Impressions of the First World War*, which was consigned to oblivion for decades, until its rediscovery by feminist critics in the 1980s. Slonina is eager to retrace the author's presence/absence in this exceptional female war memoir, which, although it does not present a trench experience, still claims to provide a true perspective on the Great War. Slonina carefully analyses the fragmentation of the nurse's identity, paying particular attention to the issues of voice, truth, and language. **Magdalena Paluszkiewicz-Misiaczek**, in turn, provides a historical overview of the participation of Canadian nurses in the military conflict. By using personal communications and excerpts from the diaries of two nurses, Sophie Hoerner and Dorothy Cotton, she depicts the difficult conditions of their service as well as presents their attitudes to the war, amply proving the value of such writings as sources of historical records.

Highlighting the issue of marginality, **Marek Jeziński** discusses the representation of the First World War in *A Feast of Consequences*, an album released by contemporary Scottish rock singer Fish in 2013. Applying Vladimir Propp's theory, Jeziński demonstrates that Fish's songs devoted to the Great War are constructed according to a narrative scheme known from mythological stories and folk fairy tales. He also refers to the New Testament to highlight the apocalyptic themes in Fish's songs. Finally, the article illuminates Fish's intertextual allusions to the legacy of representations of war in rock music, by Genesis and Pink Floyd in

particular. In Jeziński's view, the album thus commemorates the victims of the First World War, as well as conveys more universal meanings connected with warfare.

Finally, the articles gathered in Part seven explore colonial encounters, thus illustrating the global implications of the Great War. In "T.E. Lawrence's Body and the Great War," **Zbigniew Białas** presents an insightful, personal reflection on the abject body in T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935)—one of the most influential texts of the Europe/Middle East encounter in the context of the First World War. As Białas claims, the European traveller's body as a walled citadel informs numerous Orientalist fantasies of "siege" and "submission." Re-situating war trauma in the East/West geography, his essay demonstrates that the metaphor of siege and the concept of the body as citadel do not necessarily yield to the omnipresent metaphor of trenches, thus offering intriguing suggestions for First World War studies.

In his "East-Asian Echoes of the Great War," **Stankomir Nicieja** devotes his attention to a little-known side of the First World War, namely the Chinese contribution to the effort of the Allied forces. He traces the journey made by Chinese labourers from China through America to Europe, where they provided auxiliary support, frequently suffering from inhumane conditions or even working in danger from enemy fire. Nicieja argues that although China did not manage to achieve the ostensible goals of its cooperation with the Allies, as evidenced by its refusal to sign the unsatisfactory Treaty of Versailles, it was nevertheless profoundly affected by the war, both on the social level and on the international stage, and that said influence of the war reverberates until today.

Mateusz Bogdanowicz in his article "'The White Man's War'? Aboriginal Contribution to the Great War Effort" analyses the participation of Canadian First Nations, Métis and Inuit soldiers in the Great War. He focuses on the obstacles such volunteers and conscripts faced and the long- and short-term results of their war effort, arguing that Canada failed to fulfil its obligations to minority combatants both during the war and in its aftermath, continuing to treat them as less valuable citizens or even denying them citizenship altogether.

In her comparative study, **Anna Branach-Kallas**, in turn, attempts to analyse contemporary post-colonial revisions of the tradition of Great War writing in *The Sojourn* by Canadian writer Alan Cumyn, *An Ice-Cream War* by British author William Boyd, and *The Prospector* by French Nobel Prize winner Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio. Paying particular attention to such elements as patriotism, dichotomous constructions, and the theme of Arcadia, she demonstrates that if the three authors use the techniques

traditionally associated with Great War poetry and fiction, they apply them with a post-colonial twist and thus “de-centre” the Eurocentric narrative of the Great War, illuminating new aspects of combatant experience.

The variety of themes covered by the essays comprised in this volume not only confirms the significance of the First World War in memory today, but also illustrates the necessity to develop new approaches to the first global conflict, and to commemorate “new” victims and agents of war. If our modes of remembrance have changed with the postmodern ethical shift in historiography and cultural studies, which encourages us to explore “other” subjectivities in war, so far concealed affinities and reverberations are still discovered anew, on the macro- and micro-historical levels, the Western and other fronts, the battlefield and the home front, which proves that the Great War deserves a substantial effort of imagination, to honour something *that no longer is, but has been* (Ricoeur 280).

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PART ONE:

RE-IMAGININGS
AND RE-CONCEPTUALISATIONS

THE GREAT WAR
AND CONTEMPORARY MEMORY:
CANADIAN LITERATURE
AND THE ARTS

SHERRILL GRACE

“Nations must justify killings, if only to support the feelings of the bereaved and the sanity of the survivors. In Canada, long after the original excuses were found wanting—the Great War, after all, was clearly *not* a war to end wars—a second justification lingered on. Because of Vimy, we told ourselves, Canada came of age; because of Vimy our country found its manhood.”

(Pierre Berton 307)

“Vimy quickly came to symbolize Canadian military capability, national pride and identity. Indeed, the battle had a profound influence on the way Canadians saw themselves—no longer as a collection of immigrants and provincials, but as a unified country able to hold its own with the great powers of Europe.”

(Mark Anderson 56)

Coming of Age?

In Canada, the Great War has traditionally been viewed as the event that forged a modern nation out of a country that still seemed to be a British colony. However, when Pierre Berton drew this conclusion (see first epigraph) in his celebrated history of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, he was sending readers something of a mixed message: on the one hand, he was reiterating dogma, because the myth of a nation coming of age in that war, specifically at Vimy, did, in 1986, and continues today to circulate and receive endorsement in the dominant discourse about the war; on the other hand, words like “justify,” “excuses,” and “justification,” as well as the factual statement that the war did not end all wars, open up the idea of an alternate discourse, a discourse that refutes or qualifies many of the claims so often made about the First World War.

I want, therefore, to pursue Berton's mixed message by exploring a few examples from Canadian literature in which the questions implicit in his remark—and in both his major books about the war—are addressed. Did Canada come of age in that war or in one significant battle? Do nations ever come of age through war? In what other ways, on what other landscapes, might we look for Canadian coming-of-age stories? What about all the Canadians who did not fight in the war? Canada, after all, was blessed insofar as it was not an actual battleground and Canadian civilians back home were not swept up in actual combat. How might I describe the impact of that war on the home front or, to put this slightly differently: what has been the legacy for the nation of the war or of a battle like Vimy Ridge?

Since 1977 and the publication of Timothy Findley's magisterial novel *The Wars*, many Canadian writers of fiction and non-fiction and playwrights have revisited the story of Vimy and the war more generally. Recent feature films and documentaries have re-examined the past; exhibitions of art commissioned from war artists have been mounted and toured the country in carefully curated shows with important accompanying catalogues. The War Museum in Ottawa was opened in 2005 and it displays some of this original work from its permanent collection in a historical context for contemporary eyes. If a picture really is worth a thousand words, then one could argue—certainly I would—that the rediscovery of this art (stored out of sight for many decades) has played a crucial role in addressing those worrisome terms in Berton's remark.

Obviously, I can only touch upon a few examples from literature in this discussion, but before I turn to the primary works, I want to set the stage briefly. Although I will not take time to describe the dominant narrative of the war (beyond Berton's comments), it is necessary to acknowledge that some contemporary historians have challenged the claims made for Vimy and for what Jonathan Vance has called "the myth" of the Great War. Nevertheless, such myths die hard and there are many ways in which the dominant story continues to circulate—from the yearly observance of the armistice in 11 November ceremonies, the selling of poppies on street corners, and the reciting in schools of John McCrae's famous poem "In Flanders Fields," to popular histories, newspaper articles, and official Veterans' web sites, including the on-line Memory Project. In short, Canadians continue to be told that the nation was forged in the Great War. It is only if readers or viewers look more closely at the novels, memoirs, plays, and art exhibitions that have appeared since 1977 that they will detect an alternate discourse—one more critical of this nation-building story, one much more complex and nuanced, and one that

stresses a broader inclusivity of the home front as a serious landscape of national memory and national identity.

After I sketch some general context for cultural production in literature and the arts of the period and briefly describe the formative influence of Findley's *The Wars*, I will focus on three texts: Jack Hodgins's novel *Broken Ground*, Vern Thiessen's play *Vimy*, and David Macfarlane's memoir *The Danger Tree*. For all these texts it is useful to identify some of the narrative strategies that distinguish them from what I call "eye-witness combat" texts. Finally, I conclude my discussion with some reflections on how the centenary of the war is beginning to be marked right now.

“You begin at the archives with photographs” (Findley 11)

Canada celebrated its centenary in 1967 and one result of this event was an upsurge in national pride and cultural activity. Several of the Anglophone writers who would soon achieve national and international acclaim began to publish at this time, and by the end of the 1970s were recognized, award-winning artists: Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley, Rudy Wiebe, Alice Munro, Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Laurence, and Mordecai Richler are just a few. Parallel developments were taking shape in Canadian theatres and the visual and musical arts¹.

Findley's *The Wars* not only won the Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1977 but was also published in Canada by a Canadian publisher. It became, almost overnight, a best-selling literary success with reviewers discussing it, debating its presentation of the war, and praising its techniques. Canadians were—as Findley asked his readers to do—*paying attention*. The novel quickly gained an iconic status among scholars, younger writers (like Jane Urquhart and Joseph Boyden), and general readers. It would soon be widely translated, made into a film, and then a play; it has been, and continues to be, taught in high schools and universities, and it has never been out of print. Why this is so extends beyond my present scope². Suffice it to say that Findley did things with narrative structure, focalization and voice, thematic development (of a theme long neglected by our writers), and historical fact that showed the way for his own and later generations of writers to go if, for whatever reason, they chose to think about their country and the Great War. *The Wars* taught all of us where to begin—with archives, photographs, material culture, *facts*, and memory.

How a writer would work with these fragments of history was the first challenge, and what they decided to say about these fragments and about their process of recreating the war was the next. This “how” and “what” are inextricable in practice, of course, but I want to separate them briefly to identify what was so innovative about *The Wars* and how Findley set about constructing his text because his narratological strategies would prove influential. *The* fundamental, indeed inescapable, condition for writing *The Wars*, as well as my other post-1977 texts, is *memory* in the context of accurate history. These authors, born long after the war, have to work with/from memory and the received historical facts. Hence the importance of the archive and those fragments Findley’s narrator “begins with.”

It goes without saying that these memory-works differ greatly from texts composed by First World War combatants or civilian eye-witnesses of the period, but let me list a few common features of first-hand combat and eye-witness fiction (see also Cobley; Fussell; Novak):

1. written shortly after a combatant’s experience and maintaining experiential “presentness”;
2. written chiefly by men about men and male experience in war;
3. explore conditions of heterosexual masculinity in a homosocial context, with gender parameters tightly controlled;
4. battle front events are the main, centre-stage subject and action;
5. home fronts are downplayed or portrayed negatively; women are portrayed as weak, dangerous, unable to understand;
6. “realist” in style, form, and language (documentary qualities; eye-witness; testimony); “autobiographical pact” (see Lejeune) used to assert truth claims; first or third person focalization close to the author; lack of self-reflexivity or foregrounded literary strategies; episodic, chronicle style, and linear diegesis; closure achieved or narrative just stops; language fallacy—language used as if it were transparent;
7. rarely address causes of war, ideological questions, or construction of individual, liberal identity—what Cobley calls the unexamined “ideological unconscious” (ix). Therefore, rarely anti-war, despite attention to horror and suffering.

While I cannot consider each of these features or examine specific differences between combat and memory texts, I do want to note a few key distinctions between combat and memory works.

The first two characteristics can be passed over, with just one aside: the “presentness” in memory works is the present of remembering, or trying to remember, long after the events have passed into history. This is,

in part, what Marianne Hirsch means by “post-memory.” My third characteristic does carry forward to *The Wars* and my other post-1977 texts. However, the conditions of masculinity explored are much broader, richer, and more complex. Findley’s men (like Hodgins’s, Thiessen’s, Macfarlane’s, and Boyden’s) differ from each other; they are human beings, not killing machines or faceless cannon fodder. While today’s texts include the experience of battle (#4), they stress the home front (#5), and the “hero” (an identity often critiqued) must share the life-storying-remembering stage with others (other men, women, children), and the wisdom achieved *through* the characters and the process of remembering usually leads to a condemnation of war by a witness inside the text and/or by the reader. In short, there is a carefully constructed ethical perspective in these memory works that rarely exists in the combat ones. On this point, Evelyn Cobley’s critique of combat works that reproduce and reinforce militarist thinking is important (144–145).

The heart of this brief comparison between combat and memory works lies with the question of narrative style and fictional mode (#6). This is also where today’s writers face their greatest artistic challenge. If the combat texts were *realist*, using the aspects of realism I note (#6), then what is *The Wars*, *Broken Ground*, *Vimy*, or even a memoir like *The Danger Tree*? Memory works about the war must observe historical fact; they must have a coherent, accurate narrative through line: the First World War happened then, in those places, and with these casualties. The writer cannot confuse Passchendaele with Dieppe, Gallipoli with Ortona, the destruction of Ypres with Hiroshima or Dresden. Beginning with the archive—facts, dates, numbers—memory works, from *The Wars* on (including many non-Canadian texts), problematize the story of war through irony, complex multiple perspectival story-telling, and clear self-reflexivity (using intertexts [actual and fictional], fictional auto/biography, and deliberately non-linear, disjunct plotting). Moreover, truth claims are scrutinized, debated, and conclusions that bring resolution or reconciliation with tragedy, loss, trauma, and atrocity are withheld. At their best, these memory works invite active reader response, enable the process of secondary witnessing, and aim to create what LaCapra calls “empathic unsettlement.”³

Findley’s *The Wars* exemplifies these characteristics and narrative strategies. Briefly, for those unfamiliar with the novel, the story is about a young Canadian, Robert Ross, who enlists, is wounded, returns to the front where he is severely traumatized by the use of gas, by the terrible deaths of his fellows, and by his rape by men who are, very likely, his fellow officers. He rebels against the senseless orders of his Captain in order to

save a barn full of horses when their signals station comes under enemy bombardment, kills this officer, and goes AWOL with the rescued horses. He is caught, arrested, and court-martialled (in absentia); he dies, aged 26, as a result of the severe burns received during his arrest, when the military police set the barn in which he was resting, with the rescued horses, on fire. Back home, his mother (a powerful presence in the novel), father, and siblings wait and mourn. Mrs. Ross rages against the war, the militarist patriotism preached at her in church, and her inability to keep her children alive. Very simple.

Except that the story of Robert Ross is gathered together by the fictional biographer inside the text who must struggle to produce some modicum of fact and life from the fragments in the archive, from official History, from those family members who will talk to him, and from two crucial interviews with women who knew Robert. These three narrators are all working from memory; the two elderly women remember Robert and hold him and what he did in high esteem. Their fictional eye-witness accounts, tape-recorded and transcribed for us, complicate the story, introduce many other players into the main biographical-historical plot, and infuse History, official documents, and public events with personal, autobiographical emotion and reflection. Where the army and Robert's brother, who will not speak with the biographer, condemn Robert as a coward and a criminal, and where others consider him insane, the two elderly women consider Robert "*un homme unique*" (16), absolutely sane and courageous. To them it was the war that was mad and officers like Robert's Captain who were insane killers.

Our role as secondary witnesses outside the text is to work *with* all this gradually accrued information from many different and conflicting sources. Like the biographer we also study several different intertexts, peer closely at important photographs, and listen carefully to the testimony and ethical judgments of the characters. To make sense of this complex material, we must also *read* metaleptically (to adapt Genette's use of the term)⁴ back and forth across the sections of material, which are placed to disrupt a smooth chronology. For example, the novel opens with a terrifying scene that happens towards the end of Robert's story; this placement produces an immediate sense of uncertainty and demands that we pay attention—very close attention if we hope to understand. At the end we are left with a description of a photograph of Robert and his sister Rowena in happier times: this is the hope held out at the end—"Look! You can see our breath!' And you can" (191). There is no tidy conclusion to the story, no final summation, no reconciliation with a terrible past, no laying to rest of ghosts. Robert, Mrs. Ross, and many other characters will

continue to haunt a reader long after the book is finished. The weighty questions raised by the novel remain with us. We must reflect upon what we have helped to recover from the past, not with anger or self-pity, but with empathic unsettlement.

Broken Ground, Vimy, and The Danger Tree

In *Broken Ground*, Jack Hodgins revisits the Great War in many ways, but most of the revisiting takes place on the broken ground of home in an actual Returned Soldiers' Settlement in the town of Merville on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. The narrative present of the story is 1996, by which time the war stories and traumatic memories of the early veteran settlers have almost been erased from the contemporary settlement's memory. Therefore, to convey the past to the reader, Hodgins creates Charlie MacIntosh, an octogenarian witness and story-teller, the son of one of those first soldier-settlers. At the centre of old Charlie's remembering is another returned soldier, Matthew Pearson, an ex-teacher attempting to become a farmer and to forget his terrible experiences in the war. But there is another ex-soldier, called Donald McCormack, who sits silently on the margins of the community and the remembering until the crisis occurs in 1996 that prompts Charlie to do his research in order to tell the whole (or much of it) story of Portuguese Creek and the returned soldiers' settlement at Merville by going back to 1922 when the families began to clear—Canadians say to *break*—the land for farms and houses.

The novel opens with a long section called "Voices from Portuguese Creek." This compilation of brief interviews, remembered events, scenes, and stories within stories, historical facts (like the actual fire that almost destroyed the tiny community in 1922), newspaper items, and so on, provides the remembered landscape for Charlie's present story. We meet all the residents, listen to them by turns, see others from multiple perspectives, register the many different interpretations of events, and come to value a community leader like Matt Pearson. Although we are made aware of a silent presence in a wheelchair sitting on the Pearson's porch with a leather mask over his face, we never hear him speak and only learn a little about his war wounds from the neighbours or the curious, gossiping children, until that fateful moment in 1996 when, as it were, this physical embodiment of memory breaks the silence to shatter his neighbours' forgetting with the pain of its individual human truth.

When the members of the community gather in 1996 to watch the film made about their collective past by a young grandson of one of the settler families, they see that the filmmaker has only captured—or selected for

his story—one version of this complicated history. The war has been left out, along with the trauma the veterans brought back from France with them, a collective trauma that has almost literally taken root in the broken ground of the settlement, and a suffering represented by faceless Donald McCormack sitting silently in his wheelchair with the audience. As the film draws to its close, however, “a subdued disturbance” is heard in the audience. A voice rises in a growling scream; other voices try to hush this noise. But it increases in volume until Charlie realizes that it is Donald who is trying to talk: “he *was* talking—I was close enough to know that [Charlie tells us], though it was the kind of talk that made no language sense” (332). Finally, Donald stands up but refuses to be led away. The film stops; the house lights come up; and there he is growling, waving his one arm, and then... he rips off the leather mask that had protected his neighbours from reality for so many years:

Courtesy demanded that we look away, but one quick glimpse was enough to imprint the image forever, I think. You don't forget a collapsed hole in the middle of a face where a nose ought to be, or a mouth that falls inward shapelessly like the crumbling entrance to an abandoned coal-mine shaft. It was hard to believe this calamity had been amongst us all these years without our seeing it. (334)

The “calamity” amongst the people of Portuguese Creek is, of course, this tragic ex-soldier, but it is also the past war that people have wanted to forget. Since Donald cannot explain the importance of remembering in words we understand, Charlie decides to take on this responsibility. The result is *Broken Ground*, a story about the Great War, about settling unbroken land in the Canadian west, about building a community—and part of a country—after the war on home ground. This terrible, primal scene at the film screening comes near the end of the novel for the reader, and Charlie has already filled up the gaping holes in memory by the time we reach this scene. The delayed telling increases, I would argue, the impact of the scene and of the entire text insofar as we are suddenly aware of having been tangentially aware of something almost hidden from sight all along, of this ghostly presence that has haunted the voices from Portuguese Creek and the many stories these folks have told us. This delay is a clever narrative strategy on Hodgins's part, of course, because it creates suspense while allowing the sense of hauntedness (as Ross Chambers would call it) to bleed through the pages and permeate the reader's consciousness⁵.

A more detailed examination of *Broken Ground* is not possible here, but I discuss the novel at length in *Landscapes of War and Memory* (138–

153). What I want to stress is that Hodgins rejects almost every characteristic of the conventional combat work and delves into the caveats raised by Berton. Home ground is *the* essential location of this war story about a nation coming of age. Memory is the *modus operandi* of the narrative (Pierre Nora would call Vancouver Island's Merville a *milieu de mémoire* and the novel a fictional *lieu de mémoire*). Many characters within Charlie's reconstruction bear (fictional) primary witness to what some of them call "The Great Fuck-Up" (108), while Charlie himself, a mere child during the war, bears powerful secondary witness to the war and primary witness to its long-term impact on his hero Matt Pearson⁶.

Pearson is the central protagonist (not the hero) and he will, ultimately, confess (through three expanding accounts of the story) to what really happened when young Hugh Corbett was executed, to what he witnessed of that appalling event, and to why he feels forever guilty and haunted, not just by the war, not only because he fathered a child in France, but also and most decisively by failing to help young Corbett. In other words, there are no soldier heroes in this novel; Canada does not come of age in battle; war is not productive of anything but grief, loss, and ghosts. What's more, the mode of story-telling—non-linear, disrupted by several fictional intertexts (including Matt's diary and letters)⁷, multiperspectival, ironic and ambiguous (as far as Truth is concerned), leaves the reader in the position of secondary witness (outside the text) who must listen, pay attention, and put the fragments together in an effort to understand a very different version of Canada and the First World War from the official History. The reader must make ethical decisions about what to believe, about Matt Pearson's actions, about how the past can be honestly, reliably remembered, and, finally, about what can be called Truth. Pearson believes he encouraged boys to go to the war by teaching them "The Charge of the Light Brigade": did he? Do we, today, promote war through our teaching?

Vern Thiessen's *Vimy* is one of several contemporary Canadian plays about the First World War⁸. In his "Playwright's Note" to the published text, he explains that he wanted "to crawl inside of one small corner of a large offensive [...] to discover how small actions can define us as individuals and as a nation" (v), and he chose possibly the most iconic battle *for Canada* of the entire war. He also insists that he was not writing to criticize or celebrate the war or the Battle of Vimy Ridge so much as to explore "the no-man's land between reality and memory, truth and dream, history and mythology" (v). He is precise about the "reality," "truth," and "history"—the battle took place between 9 and 12 April 1917, when four divisions of Canadian troops fought together for the first time under the

command of a Canadian (General Arthur Curry); of 10,602 casualties, 3,598 men died; four Canadians received the Victoria Cross, and at least four were executed by their fellow soldiers for failing to take part⁹—but he is more interested in the memories and experiences of his five living characters and his one ghost¹⁰.

Technically, this is a memory play, set in a primitive field hospital after the battle, as the characters remember together and individually; the only battle scene is a re-enactment. The characters (five men and one woman) come from different regions of the country, so that when they remember home they are superimposing specific home fronts on their shared battlefield. They are a Blood Indian from Alberta, a French-Canadian from Montreal, a canoe-maker from Ontario, and a construction worker from Manitoba who is gay. The nurse, Clare, is from Nova Scotia, as is her fiancé, Laurie, the man killed in the battle who will appear only to her as a ghost. Thiessen insists that the play not be staged realistically; the premiere was in a quasi-expressionist style, which facilitates the complex dream sequences of the story. Of the three epigraphs Thiessen chose for the text, the key one is this famous remark attributed to a First Nations Elder who challenged a white settler when the man claimed Canada as his country: “*If this is your country, where are your stories? Tell me your stories*” (iii). In this play, we will listen to the stories that, as Thiessen imagines it, contribute to the story of Canada as it was experienced at Vimy Ridge.

The central action of the play is the telling of these stories that bring memories of home into the present of injury, suffering, and death. Much of this material is what, in theatre, is called back-story, but in this play we share in the remembering/re-living of the home front pasts and are able to understand how the war has affected and changed these men and their nurse. Off-stage sound effects and lighting bring their memories of the actual fighting into the immediate present and in one centrally important scene, these wounded men get up from their cots to relive how they practiced the “Vimy Glide” and fought together (43–44)¹¹. As they practice, they repeat in French and English:

We need to work fast.
 We need to work smart.
 We need to work together.
 Nous devons travailler ensemble.

In other words, these men re-enact that process of coming together, *united* in a shared purpose, as a nation, and we are positioned as their witnesses to legitimate this working together.

In this one sense then, Thiessen reaffirms the myth of Canada being born as a nation in battle on Vimy Ridge. However, he qualifies and expands upon the received History in several ways. He includes in this fragment of his citizen army an Indian, a Francophone, and a homosexual Canadian; he places a woman, the nurse Clare, in a central position as a co-rememberer and citizen of importance; and he features trauma, perhaps the most shocking example of which is Jean-Paul's horror at being forced to participate in the execution of a fellow soldier and close friend, who refused to follow orders to speak only in English and to kill the Hun. Moreover, he establishes the home front as even more significant than the battlefield when it comes to individual and national identity: it is these people's deeply moving memories of home that saturate this play with meaning. And finally, he does not wrap up his play with anything approaching resolution or reconciliation, let alone a happy ending that celebrates the victory in battle at Vimy. One more soldier will die; the other three will return home taking their wounds with them; and Clare will mourn her dead Laurie for the rest of her life. As so many of the characters say throughout the play—Vimy is “stuck in here”—and those who survive are forever changed. Vimy, that is a more inclusive and de-romanticized Vimy, is now a part of who they are: “it's stuck inside” them forever.

David Macfarlane's auto/biography, *The Danger Tree: Memory, War, and the Search for a Family's Past*, is a special case in this discussion for two reasons. The first is that at the time of the First World War, Newfoundland was still a separate British Dominion with its own stamps and currency and a fierce pride in its unique identity. It joined Canadian Federation in 1949 and today it is formally known as the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The second reason for the *special case* classification is its genre. Not only is it autobiographical—a story about David Macfarlane's growing up, as a Canadian in Ontario, and searching for his ancestors and the Great War—but it is also a biography of the Goodyear family of Grand Falls, Newfoundland, his mother's family, and of the Goodyear men who enlisted in the Great War and did not return. Hence my use of the slash in auto/biography¹². But there is a further reason for singling out this book. Macfarlane has created an interestingly complicated representation of being/becoming Canadian in which *The Danger Tree* becomes a *national* biography too; it tells the tragic story of how one family's identity was transformed by the war from one definition to another—from Newfoundlander to Canadian—while simultaneously enriching our sense of who we were and have come and continue to be. Those lost Goodyear men are remembered as part of a doubled national story.