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## **“The seal set on our nationhood”: Canadian Literary Responses to the South African War (1899-1902)**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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## Abstract

This dissertation seeks to modify the widely held view that the Great War (1914-18) was the defining military event in Canadian identity by turning to Canadian literary responses to the nation's participation in early post-Confederation overseas combats: Garibaldi's expedition against Rome, to which a regiment of French-Canadian Papal Zouaves went in support of Pope Pius IX (1868-70); the Nile Expedition (1884-85); and the Boer or South African War (1899-1902). In exploring these literary responses, the dissertation demonstrates that the construction of a national identity was articulated through overseas military engagement long before Canada's collective reflections on Vimy, Passchendaele, and the Somme.

The dissertation begins by placing its primary focus—the South African War—in the context of the literature responding to the first two post-Confederation overseas engagements. Chapter Two explores Canadian poetic responses to the South African War to demonstrate the shift away from connecting Canadian identity to British imperial history towards viewing Canada as a nation and, in some cases, an empire in its own right. In considering poems by William Wilfred Campbell, Frederick G. Scott, Robert W. Service, and others, Chapter Two argues that Canadian poets seized on the South African War to demonstrate that Canadian identity is ontologically militaristic. Chapter Three extends the argument from the previous chapter that Canadian South African War literature foreshadows Canadian literary responses to the First World War in its themes, subjects, and tone by comparing the discursive construction of the battles of Paardeberg and Vimy Ridge as moments of national formation.

Finally, the dissertation explores contemporary Canadian historical fiction on the South African War by novelists such as Sidney Allinson, Fred Stenson, and Trilby Kent in order to compare the novelists' uses of historical realism and revisionism. In doing so, the chapter analyzes the depiction of Canadian soldiers as morally superior to their British counterparts, and argues that the War serves not only as a site for the exploration of issues of race, gender, or class, but also as a distant mirror for the reflection of Canada's continuing racial politics.

## Keywords

Battle of Paardeberg; Canadian historical fiction; Canadian literature; Canadian poetry; commemoration; First World War literature; South African War literature; Vimy Ridge; Service, Robert W.; Stenson, Fred

## Summary for Lay Audience

In order to modify the widely held view that the Great War (1914-18) was the defining military event in Canadian identity, this dissertation turns to Canadian literary responses to the nation's participation in early post-Confederation overseas combats: Garibaldi's expedition against Rome, to which a regiment of French-Canadian Papal Zouaves went in support of Pope Pius IX (1868-70); the Nile Expedition (1884-85); and the Boer or South African War (1899-1902). In exploring these literary responses, the dissertation demonstrates that Canadian identity was associated with overseas military participation long before Canadians attached national identity to events such as Vimy, Passchendaele, and the Somme.

The dissertation begins by placing its main focus—the South African War—in the context of the literature responding to the first two post-Confederation overseas engagements. Chapter Two explores Canadian poetic responses to the South African War to demonstrate the shift away from connecting Canadian identity to British imperial history towards viewing Canada as a nation and, in some cases, an empire in its own right. In considering poems by William Wilfred Campbell, Frederick G. Scott, Robert W. Service, and others, Chapter Two argues that Canadian poets seized on the South African War to demonstrate that Canadian identity is essentially militant. Chapter Three extends the argument from the previous chapter that Canadian South African War literature anticipates Canadian literary responses to the First World War in its themes, subjects, and tone by comparing the way that the battles of Paardeberg and Vimy Ridge are viewed as moments of national formation. Finally, the dissertation explores contemporary Canadian historical fiction on the South African War to argue that the War serves not only as an

opportunity to explore issues of race, gender, or class, but also as a distant mirror for the reflection of Canada's continuing racial politics.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Summary for Lay Audience.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	ix
List of Figures.....	xi
Chronology.....	xii
Introduction.....	xviii
Chapter 1.....	1
1 Canada’s First Overseas Post-Confederation Conflicts and Canadian Identity.....	1
1.1 “Talk of your Papal Zouaves”: Canada’s First Overseas Military Expedition.....	6
1.2 “As once beneath Egyptian suns, the Canadians on the Nile”: Narrating the Nile Expedition.....	22
1.3 “Going Native” on the Nile: Indigenization and the Nile Expedition.....	53
Chapter 2.....	62
2 Canadian Poetics of the South African War.....	62
2.1 “Be the old flag unfurled!”: Pro-Imperialist Poetics.....	70
2.2 Canada as Empire.....	79
2.3 War and Canadian Nationhood.....	82
2.4 Writing War.....	89
2.5 Ambivalence, Opposition, and Dissension.....	99
2.6 Imperial War Loss: “Lonely,” “Unmarked,” and “Untended” Graves.....	108
2.7 Women’s Wartime Loss.....	117
2.8 War Poem as Palimpsest: The Limits of Canadian War Memory.....	125
Chapter 3.....	138
3 The Panegyrics of Paardeberg: Commemorating the Battle of Paardeberg in Canadian South African War Writing.....	138
3.1 Canadians at The Battle of Paardeberg.....	145
3.2 Canadian Contributions.....	151
3.3 Baptism of Fire.....	159
3.4 High Ground on Horse Hill.....	161
3.5 The Anti-Militarism of the Canadian Militiamen.....	168

3.6 Military Metaphors .....	174
3.7 Commemorating Canadian Deaths at Paardeberg .....	180
Chapter 4 .....	203
4 Realism and (Anti-)Revisionism in Contemporary Canadian Historical Fiction on the South African War .....	203
4.1 Contemporary Literary Context .....	206
4.2 Anti-Revisionism in Contemporary South African War Literature.....	211
4.3 Retrospective Realism in <i>The Great Karoo</i> .....	219
4.4 Theft, Looting, and Farm Burning in South Africa .....	241
4.5 “[A] Bloody Oath”: Rumours of Boer Execution.....	247
4.6 Revisionism and Exceptionalism in <i>Keeley’s Big Story</i> and <i>Stones for My Father</i> .....	250
4.7 “Singing our own Canadian war song”: Distinguishing Canadian Participation in South Africa.....	251
4.8 “Dissolv[ing] into myth”: Revising the Past.....	254
Conclusion .....	262
Works Cited .....	268
Curriculum Vitae .....	308

## List of Figures

- Fig. 1: “Boer War: a group of wounded war veterans at the docks in England.” .....133
- Figure 2: Richard Caton Woodville, *The Dawn of Majuba Day* (1900), author’s photo.140
- Figure 3: South African War Memorial, Toronto, Ontario, author’s photo. ....142

## Chronology

- 1795 British seize the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa
- 1803 The expiration of the Treaty of Amiens, which had temporarily ended British and French hostilities during the Napoleonic Wars, and entailed that the British give back the Cape of Good Hope to the Dutch
- 1806 The British reoccupy the Cape of Good Hope
- 1815 The British purchase the Cape of Good Hope
- 1833 British abolition of slavery
- 1835 The beginning of The Great Trek, the movement of thousands of Boer colonists from the Cape of Good Hope to two settlements: the Orange Free State and the Transvaal (or South African Republic)
- 1843 Natal is proclaimed a British colony after Britain annexes the Boer Republic of Natalia
- 1852 The Sand River Convention recognizes the independence of the Boers who moved to the Transvaal Republic
- 1854 The Orange River (or Bloemfontein) Convention recognizes the independence of the Boers who moved to the Orange Free State
- 1867 Discovery of diamonds in the Cape of Good Hope
- 1886 Discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand
- 1877 Boer-Zulu Conflict; Boers seek British protection

- 1879 Anglo-Zulu War
- 1880 Beginning of the First Anglo-Boer War (First Transvaal War of Independence)
- 1881 27 February: The Boers defeat the British at the Battle of Majuba Hill  
3 August: The Pretoria Convention grants self-government to the Transvaal and ends the First Boer War
- 1885 Establishment of the first Canadian branch of the Imperial Federation League, Montreal
- 1890 Queen Victoria's birthday, 24 May, is renamed "Empire Day" in Canada
- 1897 Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee
- 1899 31 July: Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier moves a resolution in support of the Uitlanders cause  
30 Sept.: At a special meeting of the Canadian Military Institute, George Taylor Denison moves a resolution to call upon the Laurier government to provide military assistance to South Africa  
11 October: Boer troops invade British territory  
13 October: Lord Minto, Governor General of Canada, requests permission to begin organizing a Canadian contingent for South Africa  
30 October: The *SS Sardinian* troop ship departs Quebec City with the First Canadian Contingent for South Africa  
29 November: The First Canadian Contingent arrives in South Africa  
10 December: The British suffer losses at the Battle of Stormberg

- 11 December: The Battle of Magersfontein sees another British defeat
- 15 December: The British face a third loss at the Battle of Colenso to end heavy British losses from 10-15 December, which would come to be known as “Black Week.” British General Lord Roberts’s only son, Frederick Roberts, dies at Colenso
- 1900 1 January: The Canadians participate in their first battle of the War at the Battle of Sunnyside
- 10 January: Lord Strathcona, the Canadian High Commissioner to Britain, offers to equip a regiment for South Africa at his expense, a unit that would be known as Lord Strathcona’s Horse
- 15 February: The British relieve Kimberly, which had been under siege by the Boers since 14 October 1899
- 18 February: Known as “Bloody Sunday,” the Canadians join with several British units to begin their assault against Boer General Piet Cronjé who arrives at Paardeberg Drift with approximately five thousand men, women, and children. Twenty-one Canadians die at the battle or as a result of their wounds.
- 27 February: On the nineteenth anniversary of Majuba Day, General Cronjé surrenders; Canadians would commemorate the Battle of Paardeberg by naming 27 February “Paardeberg Day”
- 5 March: Britain rejects Boer Presidents Paul Kruger’s and Martinus Steyn’s peace proposal

- 13 March: Lord Roberts arrives in Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State
- 17 March: Lord Strathcona's Horse departs Canada for South Africa
- 21 March: The *Milwaukee*, the last ship transporting the Second Canadian Contingent from Canada, arrives in Cape Town after the *Laurentian* arrived on 16 February and the *Pomeranian* on 26 February
- 25 March: The 3<sup>rd</sup> (Special Service) Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry replaces the British battalion at Halifax
- 10 April: The Strathcona's Horse arrive in Cape Town, South Africa
- 21 April: The Canadians leave Bloemfontein for Springfield Farm
- 25 April: The Canadians are instructed to seize Thaba 'Nchu in the Battle of Israel's Poort
- 5 May 1900: The Royal Canadian Dragoons and Canadian Mounted Rifles participate in the Battle of Coetzee's Drift where Lieutenant Richard Turner would receive the Distinguished Service Order
- 10 May: The Battle of Zand River sees two Canadians killed and two wounded
- 28-29 May: The Battle of Doornkop at which the Royal Canadian Dragoons, Canadian Mounted Rifles, and Royal Canadian Regiment all fight. The Canadians assist the British in seizing a new crossing of the Klip River and attacking Doornkop, a Boer-held position on the way to the gold-mining town of Johannesburg

- 30 May: The Battle of Faber's Put where "E" Battery of the Royal Canadian Field Artillery fight with the British to save horses and guns against a Boer ambush
- 5 June: The Royal Canadian Regiment joins the British in the march past Lord Roberts to celebrate the fall of Pretoria
- 1 October: Most of the first Canadian contingent leaves Cape Town for Canada
- 24 October: The remaining Royal Canadians march past Lord Roberts in Pretoria to celebrate the annexation of the Boer republics
- 2 November: The First Canadian Contingent returns to Halifax from South Africa
- 7 November: The Boers attack the British at Leliefontein. The Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Royal Canadian Artillery fight to save the guns; Lieutenants H.Z.C. Cockburn and R.E.W. Turner and Sergeant E.J. Holland win Victoria Crosses for their bravery
- 30 November: The remaining Royal Canadian Regiment members who left South Africa via England are greeted by the Queen and fêted at Windsor
- 1901 8 January: The *SS Roslin Castle* docks at Halifax after transporting the Second Contingent home from South Africa
- 17 February: Lieutenant Arthur L. "Gat" Howard, machine gun officer of the Royal Canadian Dragoons who raised The Canadian Scouts in South Africa, is killed in action



- 1902 31 March: The Battle of Boschbult farm (Harts River) where the Boers corner the Canadian Mounted Rifles who fire their last round before surrendering; thirteen Canadians die and forty are wounded
- 31 May: The signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging brings the Peace of Vereeniging that signals the end of the South African War
- 1914 4 August: The First World War begins for Canada
- 1915 22 April: The Second Battle of Ypres begins, ending 25 May 1915
- 1917 9-12 April: The Battle of Vimy Ridge
- 1918 11 November: The ending of the First World War

## Introduction

Although there is extensive scholarship on Canadian writing about the First World War, there is a near absence of attention to literary responses to Canada's first post-Confederation overseas combats: Garibaldi's expedition against Rome, to which a regiment of French-Canadian Papal Zouaves went in support of Pope Pius IX (1868-1870); the Nile Expedition (1884-1885), which saw Canadians attempt to rescue General Gordon from the siege at Khartoum; and the Boer or South African War<sup>1</sup> (1899-1902), a British Imperial war in which 8,372 Canadians served (Horn and Haycock 161). One reason for this absence is the fact that Canadian scholars and historians have identified the First World War as the site of the burgeoning Canadian nationalism that was crucial to Canada's emergence onto the international stage in the post-war years. This dissertation provides a comprehensive examination of Canadian literary responses to Canada's earliest post-Confederation involvement in overseas conflicts. In doing so, it demonstrates how configurations of Canadian nationalism and imperialism predate the First World War. The fact that representations of nationhood appeared in Canadian literature during and following the early post-Confederation conflicts and in ensuing national and international commemorative efforts points to the value of examining the connections between Canadian literary responses to these military engagements and the formations of Canadian identity in the post-Confederation period. Canadian literature that

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<sup>1</sup> In *Black People and the South African War 1899-1902* (1983), Peter Warwick explains the need to call the war "South African" to account for the impact of the war on Black lives that the term "Anglo-Boer War" does not encapsulate (4).

responded to these conflicts suggests that being “over there” provided Canadian writers with answers to the question “where is here?” (Frye 826). Based on the degree to which overseas military participation has defined Canadian identity, Canadians seem more preoccupied with the question “who are we ‘over there’”? By focusing on Canadian literary responses to the South African War, this dissertation puts into question the singularity of the First World War in Canada’s cultural memory and demonstrates how these responses influenced subsequent literary responses to the Great War and shaped ideas of Canadian identity and national commemoration.

In the late seventeenth century, Dutch peasants established a settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, where French Huguenots and other immigrants joined them. The British seized the Cape colony from the Dutch-speaking Afrikaners, or Boers, in 1795, and power shifted between the two sides into the nineteenth century, when, in 1820, four thousand Britons migrated to the Cape (Miller, *Painting the Map* 11). With the reinforcement of British law in the area (and especially because of British abolition of slavery in 1833), the Boers moved and established two republics, the Transvaal (or the South African Republic) and the Orange Free State, in order to settle part of South Africa independent of British rule. The British also encountered opposition from the local Bantu peoples, one result being that this “troubled, triangular relationship between Bantu, Boer, and British” led to the British recognizing Boer independence in the republics (Miller, *Painting the Map* 11). In 1877, the Boers relied upon British military and financial aid during the Boer-Zulu conflict, but shortly thereafter the Boers rebelled in order to successfully seek self-government during the first Anglo-Boer War (December 1880-March 1881).

In addition to the area's economic value, including the discovery of diamonds and gold in 1867 and 1886 respectively, language, religion, and politics also complicated relationships between the Boers and the British (Miller, *Painting the Map* 12). The British disagreed with Boer opposition to foreign enfranchisement in the republics. This denial of political rights to foreigners—called Uitlanders in Afrikaans—was part of the impetus for war from the British perspective, which championed its cause in the name of freedom and democracy. In the summer of 1899, failed meetings between Paul Kruger, the President of the South African Republic, and Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner to South Africa, indicated a looming military conflict. The Boers responded to increasing British military presence in the Transvaal Republics, delivering an ultimatum that troops leave them. On 11 October 1899, Boer troops invaded British territory in South Africa. Canada sympathized with the perceived plight of the Uitlanders, and Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier—with some reluctance—moved a resolution in support of the Uitlanders' cause on 31 July 1899 (Miller, *Painting the Map* 37).

After a summer debating Canada's obligation in South Africa and believing the Boers and British would avoid war, Laurier finally succumbed to political pressures on 13 October 1899. The resulting decision entailed that Canada would be responsible for the costs of recruiting, equipping, and transporting troops to South Africa, where they would become imperial troops paid by the British government, which was also responsible for the return of the troops to Canada. Canadian leadership negotiated that the troops operate as a Canadian contingent and not be dispersed in imperial units when they arrived in South Africa (Miller, *Painting the Map* 51). On 30 October 1899, the *Sardinian* transported the First Contingent of 1,000 Canadian troops to South Africa; four

Canadian nurses accompanied the First Contingent. Designated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry, the contingent was associated with Canada's Permanent Militia and commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel William D. Otter. The Second Contingent for South Africa included four nurses and was composed of 1,200 men in battalions of mounted rifles and field artillery: the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the Canadian Mounted Rifles, and the Royal Canadian Field Artillery. Lord Strathcona, Canada's High Commissioner in London, financed the recruitment, equipment, transport, and paid the wages of a battalion of scouts 500 strong, Strathcona's Horse, commanded by Colonel Samuel B. Steele. Major "Gat" Howard formed Howard's Canadian Scouts in December 1900 and January 1901 largely of veterans from the Second Contingent (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 77). Approximately 1,200 Canadians also joined Lord Baden-Powell's South African Constabulary, a police force of nearly 10,000 men that attempted to maintain order after the occupation of South Africa (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 78). In November 1901, Britain required further colonial assistance: the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR) of 901 officers and men was enthusiastically recruited under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel T. D. B. Evans. The 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> CMR units were recruited but arrived in South Africa too late to see active service in the war (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 84). By the war's conclusion on 31 May 1902, 224 Canadians had died and 252 were wounded (Horn and Haycock 161).

Carman Miller explains that French-Canadian sympathy with the Boers and opposition to the war led to a "cultural-linguistic contest between French and English Canadians" ("Introduction" 24). He cites a campaign by the *Montreal Star* and its allies that "published false and distorted tales of Boer 'atrocities.' Stories of trainloads of

women and children killed and injured by Boer sabotage, of Boers kicking to death the secretary of the Uitlanders' South African League, and similar accounts were all designed to arouse a sense of outrage and missionary urgency" ("Introduction" 24). Creating a specific image of the Boers as a vindictive enemy was another way to garner Canadian support for the war, even though the sympathies of French Canada lay with the Boers who they believed were being colonized by the British (while also colonizing South Africa). F. J. Livingston's pamphlet titled *My Escape From the Boers: The Exciting Experiences of a Canadian Medical Missionary* (1900) is one example of the Canadian first-person accounts written about the war in South Africa. Livingston emphasizes the injustices the Boers committed, effectively mounting the reader's anger or disgust with their actions and attempting to justify Canadian involvement in South Africa. Livingston highlights the inequality afforded to the Uitlanders, and outlines the corrupt operations in the Transvaal. After he was captured by the Boers, Livingston watched them "set fire to and utterly destroy[] every building about the place" and was "helpless in the clutches [sic] of such an unprincipled lot of renegades, who knew neither discipline nor honor, and were ruled by no law but that of their own passions" (24-25). Livingston wished to dispel the notion of the pious Boer while elevating the faith in Britain—and the Empire—as exemplars of Christianity. He insists the current struggle is "not a conflict of Britain for gold" and hopes the war's outcome "will be all that the interests of Christianity and civilization and British hearts could desire; that in the near future the racial hatred which has cursed that country for three generations may be blotted out" and "British supremacy be forever established" (34-35). In addition to the Imperialism for which Livingston advocates in this paragraph, he also highlights a common theme much of the literature

expressed at the time: that British interests in South Africa were of a civilizing and Christian nature, not economically motivated by the knowledge of South Africa's resources, a common claim even in contemporary wars of occupation. The value of the Boer republics to Britain's colonizing efforts in Africa more generally was a root cause of war, but the discovery of gold in the Transvaal also enhanced British interest in the republics. Of course, the economic advantages for Canadian business also motivated entrepreneurial Canadians to enter the war (Horn and Haycock 142).<sup>2</sup>

Many Canadians believed that, in addition to liberating the Uitlanders and establishing the Boers as an enemy, war in South Africa was justified because of the notion that it was missionary and liberatory for the African peoples who lived there. According to William Withrow's *Methodist Magazine and Review*, "Briton and Boer shall alike rejoice in a higher civilization in South Africa, [...] the black race, freed from the oppressions of the Boers, shall enjoy the blessings of the Gospel as they never enjoyed them before" (qtd. in Berger, *The Sense* 250). Afrikaner beliefs held that Africans were spurned by "the curse of Ham," and that Black people "were 'creatures' not fully human," which enabled their own colonizing project and led them to conscript Black South Africans into forced labour (du Toit 928). Despite claims that the British were fighting to free what was termed "the Black race," the war was considered a "white man's war" and Boer and British sides did not believe in enlisting Black soldiers. Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" (1899) outlined what were believed to be

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<sup>2</sup> In the article "Canada No Longer Unknown" in the *Hamilton Evening Times* from 13 March 1900, the author writes that "[t]he war in South Africa will be costly to Canada, in money and in men, but it is a great advertisement" (4).

the civilizing duties of whites at the end of the nineteenth century. The British accepted men primarily from white settler nations, for as J. Castell Hopkins states in *South Africa and the Boer-British War* (1900), “it was not deemed well to use colored soldiers” (259). St. John Brodrick, British Secretary of State for War, and British General Lord Roberts believed sending “colored soldiers” from the colonies “would appear as a confession of weakness, since the impression would be given that the army had no more white troops left” (Warwick 23). Although the British claimed to be liberating Black South Africans, they eventually relied upon them for free labour and military assistance during the war. As Peter Warwick explains, by the war’s end, “[a]t least 10,000, and possibly as many as 30,000, blacks were fighting with the British army as armed combatants by the end of the war” and other Black people occupied non-combatant roles or performed less formal police or intelligence duties (5). Of course, these roles prompt scholars to refer to the war as “South African” instead of “Anglo-Boer” in order to recognize Black labour and the participation of many colonies and people excluded from the latter.

In his speech to Strathcona’s Horse prior to their departure for South Africa, Nicholas Flood Davin describes the technological advances that altered communication during the South African War: “[t]he telegraph has annihilated space. In other years, especially when serving in distant countries, men fought removed in great part morally as well as physically from the bulk of their fellow citizens. But to-day the telegraph places us in the battlefield” (11). Davin explains that the increased speed of communication and the ability of millions of citizens to gain access to the battlefield experience in effect led to the democratization of the military. Whereas before only a high-ranking officer would receive praise despite “the thousands [who died] in dim heaps” (12), Davin describes how



technological innovation reversed the former inequality for “the heroism of the private, not less than that of the commander, is seen and universally acclaimed” (12). The changing nature of communicative technologies meant that the South African War enabled Canada and the world to become invested in the experience of the individual soldier. Ironically, these same technologies would eventually expose the war’s darker realities.

Contemporaries recorded their enthusiasm: John McCrae, who would write “In Flanders Fields” (1915) during the First World War, felt “sick with disappointment” that he did not enlist with the First Contingent for the South African War (qtd. in Miller, *Canada’s Little War* 27). McCrae would eventually enlist, and of his own preoccupation with the war he wrote, “I am certain there has been no fifteen minutes of my waking hours that it has not been in my mind” (qtd. in Miller, *Canada’s Little War* 27). L. M. Montgomery wrote in her journal on 14 January 1900 that

Canada is in a state of red-hot excitement from shore to shore because several regiments of Canadian boys have volunteered for service in South Africa. . . .

There is something stirring and exciting and tingling about it all even here in this quiet little Island thousands of miles from the seat of war. Everyone is intensely interested in the news. (248)

Montgomery highlights the fact that Canada’s distance from the events in South Africa did not inhibit the country’s interest in the war, but to some degree, propelled it. She also suggests the unity of the nation’s interest stretching from “shore to shore.” Hopkins describes the enthusiasm in Canada, for “the country from Halifax to Vancouver was stirred as it had not been since the North-west Rebellion of 1885—perhaps as it has never

been in the sense of covering the entire Dominion” for “St. John and Halifax, on the Atlantic coast, were met by Victoria and Vancouver, on the shores of the Pacific, in a wild outburst of patriotic enthusiasm” (245, 247). In order to project the sense of enthusiasm for the war, Hopkins suggests interest extended beyond regionalism and connected Canadians from coast to coast, drawing upon the logic of national unification, *A Mari Usque Ad Mare*.

Stanley McKeown Brown, a war correspondent for the Toronto *Mail and Empire* with the First Canadian Contingent to South Africa, names the South African War Canada’s “greatest glory and her widest fame” (vii), emphasizing how the men believed “they were going on one of the greatest outings of their lives,—a gigantic picnic” (9).<sup>3</sup> E. W. B. Morrison’s *With the Guns in South Africa* (1901) conveys the enthusiasm with which Canadians responded to calls for volunteers, and Morrison hyperbolically claims it was no exaggeration to say that “thirty thousand men could have been secured as easily as three thousand” (12). The *Times* noted that “[t]he progress of events in South Africa is watched as keenly in Canada and in Australia as in this country” (qtd. in S. Miller 44). In the introductory chapter to T. G. Marquis’s *Canada’s Sons on Kopje and Veldt: A Historical Account of the Canadian Contingents* (1900), George Munro Grant writes that “[a]n electric current flashed across the Continent, from Halifax to Victoria, thrilling all English-speaking hearts at any rate, and a cry went up that the war was Canada’s as well as England’s” (2), referring to some Canadians’ commitment to share in the “burden” of Empire. He continues that Canadians “spoke, read and thought of nothing but the war”

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<sup>3</sup> This comment echoes forward in a response to the First World War by Liddell Hart who called that war “a great picnic” (qtd. in Bourke 142-43).

(Grant 2). Similarly, Brown explains how “[t]he recruiting stations were literally besieged with men, flushed with the enthusiasm that the enlistment of soldiers for Africa had caused throughout the length and breadth of all Canada” (7). There were even several cases of suicide consequent on rejection at the recruiting centres (Brown 9), which reveals the depth of interest and even the desperation to participate in the war.

After the enthusiastic response of recruits followed the community’s excitement upon the ship’s embarking for South Africa:

From the ship it was seen that every available coign of vantage ashore was black with people—the Citadel, the house-tops, the cliffs, Dufferin Terrace, and the wharf. The weather-beaten ramparts of the Citadel rising majestically above the surrounding cliffs, re-echoing the cheers of the thousands of people, and the accompanying boom of cannon as flags were lowered and the ship moved slowly down stream, left an impression on the mind not easily eradicated. (Hart-McHarg 51)

The notion of an entire country joining together in Quebec inspired thoughts of national unity. William Hart-McHarg’s image connects the parting troop ship with Quebec City’s fortifications, linking Canadian participation in the South African War with the nation’s former domestic military history. Marquis stresses the “undeniable good” that came from the South African War, claiming that “[a] country with a noble, fighting past is more firmly based than one that has never known war, and if the West should ever cry for separation from the East the blood of the lads from British Columbia, Quebec, and the Maritime Provinces will cry to us from Kopje and Veldt, and we will be true to our past and remain united” (62). Marquis’s use of prosopopoeia—“a rhetorical device by which

an imaginary, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking or acting” (*OED Online*)—intends to unify the disparate regions of the Canadian nation around the war deaths in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Marquis links Canadian participation in the South African War with Canada’s creation, citing the appropriateness of the contingent’s departure from Quebec where “Canadian life began with Champlain’s colony; everything about the great brown cliffs reminded the young soldiers of the sternness of war” (60-61). Here Marquis militarizes the Canadian landscape in order to emphasize Canada’s history of warfare. Marquis establishes Canada’s identity as ontologically militaristic by means of the connection between the land and the military landscape.

Enthusiasm did not wane upon the recruitment of the second contingent for South Africa and of Lord Strathcona’s Horse, a unit Lord Strathcona, Canadian High Commissioner to Britain, patronized. Sam Steele reported to a civic luncheon in Montreal prior to the embarkation of Strathcona’s Horse on 17 March 1900 that “[t]here are men here who had travelled on foot 600 miles on the ice of the Yukon river to come here to volunteer” (qtd. in Berton 48). Upon the embarking of the second Canadian contingent, “Halifax was once more gaily decked with bunting, noisy with the shouts of the populace, and sonorous with the music of military bands” (Marquis 337). Marquis continues, “Canada, a peace nation, had evidently become a military power. Even greater enthusiasm than had been displayed when the First Contingent left for the war was shown at every point at which the soldiers stopped on their way to Halifax” (338). The war’s popularity continued into 1900.

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of the use of prosopopoeia in Canadian South African War responses.

Marquis connects Canada's role in the South African War to the country becoming a nation, arguing that the mobilization in Canada brought together "the best blood of our land from every part of Canada this confederation was to be finally realized, was to become a living thing" (61). In his Introduction to Marquis's study Grant states that "the larger patriotism, which has now taken possession of Canadians, cannot possibly vanish. . . . We are henceforth a nation . . . so, we must make our militia force a reality; must organize a naval reserve; must defend our coasts; must attract Newfoundland into our confederation; and must do these things at once" (6-7). As a result of Canada's participation in the war, Grant argues, Canada must fulfil its potential as a nation within the Empire. Norman Patterson wrote: "Canada sent seven thousand of her sons. Two hundred and fifty of them will never come back, for they have been laid away in the sandy veldt. Nearly four thousand are still there, struggling against disease, accident and fate, and some of them may not return. These are part of the price we pay for our nationhood" (205). In Patterson's terms, Canada's South African War dead are the cost of nationhood.

An essential element of proclamations of Canadian nationhood was Canada's international reputation on account of the nation's participation in the overseas war. According to Bernd Horn and Ronald G. Haycock in "The Primacy of Lesson Learned: Boer War National Command" (2006), the Canadians garnered "international respect" (156) and "earned a remarkable reputation. Accolades from British commanders and press were profuse. Adjectives such as 'dashing,' 'fighting like devils,' 'gallant,' and 'courageous' were lavishly doled out" (154). In "Rifle Shooting as a National Pastime for Canada" (1900), William George Beers praises "the brave fellows whose deeds have

added new lustre to [Canada's] history" (119). He continues: "[w]hen we go abroad now, on whatever continent, we shall feel proud, we of British and French blood, to say, 'I am a Canadian!'" (119). For Beers, Canadian nationhood was exclusionary—Canadians had "British and French blood"—and national pride was contingent on international recognition of Canada's role in the South African War. He writes: "[o]ur brave boys in Africa have made world-wide history for us, and a world-wide record for themselves. A country which can produce such stuff for soldiers can to-day hold up its head with pride and courage, even in the face of the old fighting nations of Europe" (Beers 130). Beers's adjectival repetition of "world-wide" emphasizes the importance of the South African War to Canada's international reputation. In his speech at the Canadian Military Institute in 1902, Lawrence Buchan quotes British General Garnet Wolseley who wrote to him, "[a]ll Canadians should now be very proud indeed of the great services their men have rendered to the Empire in South Africa. I am told [...] that no men have shown greater military aptitude and genius during this war than the Canadian troops" (17). General Wolseley's appeal to anonymous authority by means of the passive voice "I am told" highlights the military reputation the Canadians gained during the war. In the "Society" column in *Montreal Life* from December 1899, the author argues that "[b]y participating in the Boer War, Canada is gaining a notoriety she little expected. Namely, she is being discussed in *The New York Sun* in countless letters to the editor" (23). The article includes a statement from one of the correspondents who wrote that "[t]he participation of Canada in the Boer War is a direct affront to the United States and to every American nation.' We are certainly gaining importance. Canada little thought she

could menace anyone!” (“Society” 23). The author reveals the American interest in Canadian participation in the War, and indicates some amusement at the notion.

As Pierre Berton writes in *Marching as to War: Canada's Turbulent Years 1899-1953* (2001), “[t]he people believed in war as they believed in the Bible. War was seen as an extension of politics, a necessary tool in the advancement of civilization, a contest in which a few broken bones were forfeited in the interests of a higher cause” (9). In *Canada's Soldiers in South Africa: Tales from the Boer War, 1899-1902* (2011), John Boileau observes that “[t]he Boer War had an immediate effect on Canada. Most Canadians had an opinion about it” (14). Bernd Horn and Ronald G. Haycock suggest that the most important effect of the war was its promotion of Canadian identity; they argue that the war was “the first truly national effort in a foreign enterprise” (167). Referencing the communal experience that lasted beyond the war, Horn and Haycock stress the national effort exerted during the war: “the Canadian public devoured a virtual flood of daily newspaper reports and soldiers’ letters to local newspapers” (167). Children’s literature such as the *Boy's Own Paper* “presented war as glamorous, the pursuit of the imperial mission as heroic, and patriotism as a responsibility for all” (S. Miller 23). The portrayal of masculine and martial values in literature in addition to the availability of print news contributed to Canada’s interest in the War.

Despite proclamations of the importance of the South African War for Canada, its legacy was not always consistent; such a belief would suggest incorrectly that “communities can only sustain one myth at a time about themselves and/or that, if several myths are operating, they cannot contradict one another” (Gordon 18). In *Painting the*

*Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (1993), Miller challenges the assumption by most historians that English Canadians supported the war:

The hostility, indifference, and ambiguity towards the war among many English Canadians, the regional, partisan, and pragmatic character of the pro-war campaign, and the personal and material motivations of many of the volunteers, suggests that English Canada's response to the war was less monolithic and selfless than many historians have assumed. (xiv)

The heterogeneous response to the war is an early example of the negotiation and construction of a Canadian military identity. French Canada largely opposed the war, and anti-imperial sentiments strengthened in French Canada after the Battle of Paardeberg. Following that British victory—for which Canadians were given credit—a riot ensued in Montreal when a crowd of McGill students forced some of the small French-Canadian presses and City Hall to fly the Union Jack, and the mob ended at Laval in the evening; the police attempted to deter the mob, but they broke the university's windows before dispersing (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 50). This tumultuous incident reminded Montrealers and Canadians that Canada was not a unified nation at home, revealing the limits of imperialism in Canada, despite the fact that the country was fighting for imperial unity abroad.

In *Living with War: Twentieth-Century Conflict in Canadian and American History and Memory* (2016), Robert Teigrob also highlights the “seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes” that mark “Canadians’ relationship to militarism” and cites the various regional differences in Canada as the reason for this heterogeneity (10). Margaret MacMillan argues that toward the second half of the First World War, belief in the just



cause of the war prevailed because people needed to believe that the war losses had not been in vain (“The Great” n.p.). However, opinions about the South African War were less consistent. Stephen M. Miller explains the shift in attitude toward the second half of the South African War when “the nature of the war had greatly changed” because the Boers began a “campaign of insurgency” when they realized they “could not compete with the British utilizing conventional tactics as the disparity in manpower grew” (7). Historians have had a difficult time defining the latter half of the war, which Miller explains led to “the significance of the South African War as a modern guerrilla struggle” being “lost to generations of readers” (7). Not only do these differences influence understanding of the war, but that same unevenness has also occluded comprehension of the complexities of the social memory and literary responses to it.

After about mid-1900, when Boer insurgency began, Britain responded with its own unsavoury tactics; stories of farm burnings and concentration camps made the war less palatable for Canadians. As James Hannay wrote in 1904, “[t]he Boer war was popular at first but now that people are beginning to count the cost, a decided change has taken place in public sentiment. It is felt that this war might have been avoided if a consistent colonial policy had been pursued from the beginning of the occupation of South Africa” (297). In *The Boer War in the Novel in English, 1884-1966* (1969), Donald Jay Weinstock explains the waning popularity of South African War fiction in the immediacy of the war, stating that “[t]he majority of the novelists apparently thought either that this last stage of the war was too dreary to interest the public, or too sordid. Except to Afrikaner authors and to some of the authors of boys’ stories guerrilla fighting was generally regarded as criminal and against all codes of decent warfare” (25).

Although the change in war tactics toward the second half of the war may have troubled Canadians, Jim Wallace highlights the less than scrupulous participation of Canadians in the later phase of the war, stating that “[t]he success of the Canadian Scouts on the veldt confirmed that the Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders had become masters of guerilla warfare” (*Knowing No Fear* v). Canadians also participated in farm burnings and lootings, behaviour that contravened some conceptions of the standard rules of a just war, especially to pro-Boers. The varied perspectives account for the difficulty in creating a unified and sustained narrative about the South African War. Whereas the First World War readily became a usable past for Canadians (Vance, *Death So Noble* 9), the lack of enthusiasm toward the end of the South African War meant that it had less utility in a nationalist narrative—especially in the years after the First World War. The South African War sees less popularity today because, to borrow Rebecca Campbell’s term, some would consider it a site of “imperial shame” (42) as it is inconsistent with the theoretical inroads of settler colonial studies.<sup>5</sup>

Although historians generally cite the First World War as the event that initiated Canada’s independence, several scholars consider the effects of the South African War on Canadian nationhood. In *The Boer War and Canadian Imperialism* (1987), Robert Page argues that for Canadian soldiers and their supporters, the South African War exhibited “Canada’s new role as a military nation and as a contributor to the defence of the Empire. Canada was coming of age and flexing her youthful muscles” (22), and he

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, Berger’s point that many Canadian imperialists viewed conflict as progressive “because it advanced the boundaries of a superior civilization and secured peace through force” (*The Sense* 248) could hold true in the context of recent global conflicts. At the time, “[t]his view of war as salutary and beneficial in the interests of civilization was the universal explanation of the . . . South African conflict[] offered by sympathetic Canadians” (Berger, *The Sense* 249).

continues that the war led to “increased militia reform, to the debate on naval policy in 1909-11, and to the preparations—ideologically and militarily—for Canada’s awesome commitments in the two world wars” (22). James Wood also examines the post-war era when he argues that the citizen soldier ideal that existed in the late nineteenth century in Canada was reinforced because of “British defeats on the South African veldt, Canadians’ admiration and respect for their Boer opponents, and the widespread perception that colonial troops had performed exceedingly well during the conflict,” which he argues led to the change in the Militia Act in 1904 (17). In addition to national policy and international relations, the war also inspired Canadian writers to pen their responses to the situation in South Africa.

This dissertation examines a variety of written responses to the war. In Canada during the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for writers to associate historical writing with a national literature. Bridgette Brown explains that for the pressmen of *The Canadian Magazine*, “‘national literature’ would include both fictional and non-fictional editorial content that placed a thematic emphasis on Canada’s national progress, which they saw as manifested through Canada’s War contribution and victories at significant battles” (54). As Thomas Hodd points out, Charles G. D. Roberts was one Canadian author who placed “historical texts within the larger framework of a ‘struggling’ national literature” (40). In this vein, the dissertation considers the literary value of various historical writings on the South African War. In addition, it was commonplace for soldiers (or their families) to publish their private letters or diaries; Miller explains how grievances confided in letters to family and friends in Canada had been published in the press (*Painting the Map* 118). As he describes, there were two “often parallel and

intersecting levels of discourse” that historians have relied on to explain the war’s appeal to Canadians (“Introduction” 20). The public discourse, “found in speeches, editorials, lectures, and sermons, based its appeals on collective values: loyalty, patriotism, religion, civilization, honour, power, and influence,” whereas a more private discourse, “found in letters, diaries, and memoirs, focused predominately on personal influences, push-and-pull factors: adventure, boredom, escape, peer and family pressure, material and career advancement” (Miller, “Introduction” 20). The popularity of *The Boy’s Own Paper* prior to the war led to the inevitability of interest in the war memoir and the experience of the individual soldier. This publication history suggests that writers were indeed conscious of a wider, public audience for their ostensibly private written materials, which indicates the value of exploring this writing. In *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (1997), Jonathan F. Vance suggests expanding the kinds of sources that an historian should analyze. Similarly, Steve Attridge explains his use of diverse materials when investigating British responses to the South African War in *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds* (2003), noting that this methodological practice “is a historical question” because the South African War witnessed a “changing literary form” (15).

Attridge explains:

some texts are accounts hastily composed during the war which cannot be placed as journalism, as they were published in book form and do not always profess to communicate or interpret events as they happened, even if they sometimes borrow sentences and reported incidents from newspapers. They are not histories in the sense of being reflective, interpretive accounts based on documented incidents

and events. They are part of a range of Boer War ephemera in which the increased speed in printing and circulation could match the extraordinary consumer demand for Boer War materials. (15)

The dissertation follows the methodological imperative to respect a range of sources when investigating Canada's responses to the South African War.

This dissertation does not aim to suggest that the South African War revealed Canadian nationalism as in complete opposition to British imperialism. As Wolfgang J. Mommsen argues, the South African War "was in many ways the climax of the age of high imperialism" (1). To engage with the ways in which the South African War shaped Canadian national identity it is essential to recognize imperialism as one form of Canadian nationalistic expression. The dissertation refers to two kinds of Canadian imperialism. Of course, imperialism refers to the "urge to dominate and exploit the underdeveloped areas of the earth," (3), but as Carl Berger clarifies in *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* (1970), in Canadian history, imperialism refers to the "movement for the closer union of the British Empire through economic and military co-operation and through political changes which would give the dominions influence over imperial policy" (3). When Stephen Leacock said, "I . . . am an Imperialist because I will not be a Colonial," ("Education and Empire Unity" n.p.) he was referring to his preference for Canadian imperialism over the diminutive position of a colony. Berger calls the war "the decisive event in the history of Canadian imperialism" ("Introduction" 3). He continues: "To many English Canadians it was not a matter of aiding England. For them that experience was invested with all the enthusiasm of nationalism. Canada's participation [...] marked the entry of the Dominion into world

politics. She had become a force within the Empire and her path forward was straight and clear” (Berger, “Introduction” 3). In Berger’s terms, “Canadian imperialism was one variety of Canadian nationalism” (*The Sense* 9), and, thus, the dissertation considers various forms of nationalist expression in Canadian South African War writing. Canadian nationalism encompassed British imperialism as well as domestic pride.

This dissertation also seeks to reveal the myriad ways in which Canadians sought to distinguish themselves within the Empire and the degree to which the war catalyzed the discursive construction of the Canadian nation. In *Canada’s Little War: Fighting for the British Empire in Southern Africa 1899-1902* (2003), Miller describes how the Royal Canadians’ “brown canvas khaki uniforms, white helmets (later sensibly dyed coffee), heavy black boots, Sam Browne belts and Canadian-invented Oliver equipment—as well as their small distinctions of dress and kit and insignia—underlined their desire to differentiate themselves within the imperial family” (*Canada’s Little War* 27). The maple leaf-shaped badge “Canada” on their helmets “proved a great source of pride to many recruits” (Miller, *Painting the Map* 54).<sup>6</sup> Miller’s description of Canada’s uniform illustrates the degree to which Canada attempted to demonstrate autonomy by means of efforts to visually distinguishing the Canadian soldiers in South Africa. After the Battle of Leliefontein on 6 November 1900, the Canadians “knew that they had fought a coordinated, intelligent, courageous battle, and were proud that they had done so as a Canadian unit, deserted by the British infantry. Significantly outnumbered, Canadian citizen soldiers had engaged the Boers on their own terrain, employed their own tactics,

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<sup>6</sup> The Canadians in the First Contingent had affixed a three-inch badge featuring an imperial crown superimposed on a maple leaf with the word “CANADA” below the crown (Miller, *Painting the Map* 54).

and had beaten them and won their respect” (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 73). For many Canadian writers at the time, the nation's South African War feats were the lenses through which Canada came into view.

In *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (2006), Jay Winter argues that the Great War has cast a shadow “over later commemorative forms and cadences” (3). This observation speaks to the degree to which the commemoration of later events in the twentieth century inevitably accounts for what the Great War means. It is well established that the First World War has a dominant place in the construction of Canadian collective memory. In Canadian literary history, authors have repeatedly turned back to the relationship between Canadian nationalism and Canada's role in the First World War. Winter's argument also alerts scholars to the ways in which commemorating the Great War has overshadowed *earlier* commemorative efforts in Canada's history insofar as Canadian authors have been more likely to turn back to the First World War than any other historical event for their fictive pursuits. It is not only contemporary novelists but also critics who interest themselves in the influence of the First World War on Canada's national literature and identity. For example, Neta Gordon's study *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War One* (2014) examines writing that:

made use of the compelling myth that the Canadian nation was born in the First World War trenches, and the concurrent myth that a number of Canadian values were forged during the events of that war—values such as a sense of duty toward the just cause, a quiet, communal strength, a disinterest in ostentatious personal

heroism, and a sense of pride that Canadian soldiers could be counted on to fight while remaining morally committed to mediation and peace. (4)

The national myth Gordon highlights—that Canadian nationhood and its corresponding values were forged during the First World War—reveals the importance of Canada’s military activity in the First World War to the nation’s identity. However, as already intimated, this dissertation will demonstrate that it was the South African War that prompted Canadian writers to suggest that Canada’s military activity is concomitant with its national identity. The inextricable link between war and Canadian letters that, as Gordon points out, is best exemplified in contemporary writing about the First World War, was forged during the South African War.

Even prior to the First World War, the nation’s writers relied on military tropes to forge a national identity in Canadian literature. Gordon explains a critical bias toward military accounts about the First World War: “[s]ome critics have deemed it necessary to launch their literary analyses from the ahistorical premise that war itself is somehow un-Canadian, and that anything other than a clear-cut anti-war position in a literary work exposes what [Evelyn] Cobley darkly labels ‘complicit[y] with war’” (12). The same association between the investigation into Canada’s military past and celebration of it (or complicity with it) may account for the scarcity of critical conversations about Canada’s South African War literature. Although over eight thousand Canadians participated in the South African War, there is little scholarship that examines the Canadian literary responses to the conflict. W. B. Kerr writes in 1937 that, in the years following the South African War, “Canadian participation in that struggle occupied a high place in the national consciousness. Then came the absorbing effort of the Great War which almost



submerged the memories of the earlier contest” (419). Kerr provides a useful survey of Canada’s South African War literature, but his study covers only historical accounts, and prior to Bridgette Brown’s dissertation *The South African War (1899-1902) and the Transperipheral Production of Canadian Literatures* (2019), there had been no extended study of this topic in Canada’s national literature. Brown’s study valuably explores contemporaneous Canadian literary responses to the South African War within the framework of settler colonial and feminist studies. She examines the role of *The Canadian Magazine* in representing the idealized Canadian soldier and argues the publication exemplifies the “transperipheral productions” of Canadian literature, revealing how the War brought about literary interactions between Canada and South Africa (7). This dissertation is distinct from Brown’s in its attention to the literary historical and military context of Canada’s South African War participation, and especially to the many Canadian poems that represented the War. Furthermore, whereas Brown examines the War’s contemporaneous fiction to describe the generic innovation in *The Imperialist* (1904), *Cousin Cinderella* (1908), *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), and *The Judgment House* (1913), this dissertation extends the timeframe of Brown’s study to offer an analysis of contemporary Canadian historical fiction on the South African War.

Malvern Van Wyk Smith pays very little attention to Canadian poetry in *Drummer Hodge: The Poetry of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (1978), although he does refer to J. Douglas Borthwick’s collection *Poems and Songs on the South African War: An Anthology From England, Africa, Australia, United States, but Chiefly Canada* (1901) and briefly quotes from Robert W. Service’s “The March of the Dead” (1900).

Travis Mason writes in his review of Fred Stenson's *The Great Karoo* (2009) that "the South African War failed to elicit a book devoted to Canadian participation by a Canadian writer" (114). Furthermore, Donna Coates's entry "War" in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (2002) states that "the [South African] War did not seem to capture the imagination of the nation's writers" (1188), and does not include the numerous Canadian poems, memoirs, and prose responses written during and immediately after the war. This study of Canadian literature on the South African War draws upon the work of historians of late nineteenth-century Canada and the war to shed light on the important literary works on the same subjects. As MacMillan states in *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* (2020), "[i]t is not the time to avert our eyes from something we may find abhorrent. We must, more than ever, think about war" (272). Thinking about Canadian literary responses to the South African War illuminates Canada's past, clarifies Canadian responses to later wars, and enables the interrogation of the contemporary construction of Canada as a peacekeeping nation.

The first chapter of this study seeks to understand Canadian literary responses to the South African War by placing this literature within the context of two earlier post-Confederation Canadian overseas military expeditions. Whereas the three subsequent chapters deal exclusively with the South African War, the first chapter examines responses to the military engagement in Rome from 1868 to 1870 in which approximately 505 Canadians participated. This military expedition was not a national movement but a religious one which saw Catholics in Canada mobilizing to support Pope Pius IX and his fight to secure the papacy and Rome from Giuseppe Garibaldi during the Italian Risorgimento. The second post-Confederation overseas military engagement prior

to the South African War occurred with the development of the Canadian Voyageur Contingent to participate in the Gordon Relief Expedition, or the Nile Expedition, in the Soudan. In order to rescue British General Charles Gordon, who had arrived in Khartoum 18 February 1884, from the Sudanese rebel army led by Muhammad Ahmad, the self-proclaimed Mahdi,<sup>7</sup> the British recruited Canadian boatmen to navigate the Nile River en route to Gordon's location. Like the Papal Zouaves whose missionary aims motivated their expedition to Rome, many of the Canadian boatmen for the Nile believed they were going on a civilizing mission in which they would convert Egyptians to Christianity (Michel 237). However, some writers framed the expedition around imperial loyalty.

Both of the expeditions inspired literary responses that reflect a discursive strategy whereby the new Canadian nation, which ostensibly lacked a rich history, was linked to the ancient histories of Rome and Egypt, the sites of the Papal Zouaves' expedition and the Nile Expedition, respectively. The expedition to Rome gave French Canadians an opportunity to reaffirm Old-World values in Canada; it did not inspire nation-wide expressions of Canadian nationalism, yet writers expressed deep affinities for Canada within this literature. The Nile Expedition was a mission in which French, English, and Indigenous men travelled from Canada as a national contingent to the Soudan. In this case, the connection between Canada's history and an ancient past took on a greater significance partly because the expedition was more inclusive of three ethnic groups that made up the Canadian nation. However, the Nile Expedition was still limited

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<sup>7</sup> According to Islamic belief, the Mahdi is one who restores religion and justice, and who will rule prior to the world's end. Ahmad proclaimed himself the Mahdi in 1881, which instigated a revolutionary political movement that overthrew the Turco-Egyptian regime (*OED Online*).

in its ability to engender a consistent narrative about Canadian military participation; Anthony P. Michel points out that the tripartite division of the boatmen for the Nile—French, English, and Indigenous men—could only be absorbed into the narrative of Empire, and did “not bode well for the possibility of a common understanding of the contingent as Canadian representatives” (191). Both expeditions point to the ways in which international service began to be articulated with national identity. The engagements indicate that, although international military service led to literature that connects the nation with ancient histories of elsewhere, ultimately, it also led to a focus on and appreciation of the Canadian nation. When Canadians attended the South African War, Canadian writers began to view Canada as its own empire with its own historical narrative and identity and attempted to respond to the nation’s unprecedented international activity.

Chapter Two examines the poetic responses to the war, which proliferated in newspapers, journals, and books. The Governor General of Canada, Lord Minto, believed that a Canadian contribution to the South African War should be “official and reflect the country’s size and importance, since its value was symbolic, not practical” (Miller, *Painting the Map* 43); such emphasis on the symbolism of Canadian participation entailed that the war easily became the stuff of poetry. The Canadian poems on the South African War that are analyzed in Chapter Two register a vocal citizenry engaged in the war’s events. The chapter begins with an examination of the way writers who viewed the war as a key site on which to focus the development of a national literature negotiated imperialism in Canada. The chapter then examines the poems that reflect themes of ambivalence about the war, women’s war losses, and Canadian history, identity, and war

writing. Finally, the chapter examines McCrae's "The Builders of Empire" (1901) and "In Flanders Fields" (1915) as well as Robert W. Service's "The March of the Dead" (1900) to argue that some Canadian South African War writing reveals a protomodernist perspective that anticipated the sorts of ironic, critical responses to the First World War that Paul Fussell outlines in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975).

Chapter Three investigates the relatively forgotten Battle of Paardeberg in Canadian collective memory. In "Framing Canada's Great War: A Case for Including the Boer War" (2008), Miller calls the Battle of Paardeberg "the Boer War's equivalent of Vimy Ridge" (14), and he suggests that historians consider the battle amidst renewed interest in Vimy and the First World War. Thus, Chapter Three considers the similarities in literary responses to Paardeberg and Vimy to highlight that the construction of a Canadian identity that results from both battles accords with Canadian participation. The similarities between the discursive construction of Canada's role at the battles reveals the palimpsestic nature of Canadian war memory. Commemorative writing about Vimy Ridge reflects the reproduction of nationalistic tropes used to narrate Canada's experience at Paardeberg.

Chapter Three also examines Canada's first attempts to commemorate fallen soldiers of the African conflicts by means of international monuments in the form of nationally symbolic grave markers. As H. V. Nelles notes, "[w]e commemorate all the time" (12); commemorative efforts at Paardeberg point to early examples of Canada's inscription of its international military identity. Miller points out that the word "Canada" is inscribed on the granite stones in South Africa, with a large maple leaf below the inscription. In contrast to the plain wooden or iron crosses that mark the British and other

colonial soldiers' war graves in South Africa, "[t]he memorials speak eloquently of Canada's desire for distinctiveness within the imperial family" (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 85). The memorials at Paardeberg and other South African War battles in which Canadians died are examples of the attempts to inscribe Canadian military identity internationally as a result of the South African War. The Canadian South African Memorial Association was established in 1902 to identify and care for Canada's war dead's graves (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 85). Vance outlines Canadian memorials constructed prior to the First World War, including those commemorating such events as The War of 1812, the Battle of Chateauguay, and the Crimean War, but states "it was the South African War of 1899-1902 that produced the most concentrated burst of memorialisation the country had yet seen" ("Remembering" 421). These included monuments across the country "from the splendid mounted horseman in Calgary to a more modest tribute to local soldier Corporal W. A. Knisley erected by the townspeople of Cayuga, Ontario," a monument that "marked a shift in memorialisation away from great captains" (Vance, "Remembering" 421). As Vance notes, for Canadians who could not travel overseas to visit the graves of their loved ones and had no grave at which to mourn, "the local war memorial came to fill that void; it provided a site for mourning to people who had no other site" ("Remembering" 423). Chapter Three surveys some of the descriptions of the Canadian burials at Paardeberg to consider the commemorative efforts at the battle and to argue that the commemoration of Paardeberg reflects the curation of a collective memory for Canada that is founded upon military action. As Nelles demonstrates, commemoration can be "an act of self-invention" (12), and the

commemoration of Paardeberg illustrates Canada's investment in linking national identity and military participation.

Chapter Four is interested in contemporary historical novels that return to the South African War as a site of fictional engagement. There are a range of contemporary considerations of the War, including Eric Zweig's *Hockey Night in the Dominion of Canada* (1992), Margaret Sweatman's *When Alice Lay Down with Peter* (2001), Sidney Allinson's *Kruger's Gold: A Novel of the Anglo-Boer War* (2001), David Richards's *The Plough's Share* (2004), Deborah Ellis's *Keeley's Big Story* (2005), William Hay's *The Originals* (2007), Fred Stenson's *The Great Karoo* (2008), Trilby Kent's *Stones for My Father* (2011), and Paul Almond's *The Chaplain* (2013). In particular, the chapter focuses on Stenson's, Richards's, and Allinson's novels to investigate the renewed interest in Canada's British connection that coincides with the writing of traditional historical realism. By examining the link between form and content, the chapter introduces the term "retrospective realism" to suggest that Stenson's revisionist historical fiction relies upon traditional realism in order to expose racism and injustice in Canada during the South African War. The section concludes with a consideration of the limits of writing an inclusive historical fiction in the realist mode.

Chapter Four then investigates the historical revisionism in accounts for young adult readers, the second book in Deborah Ellis's *Our Canadian Girl: Keeley* series, *Keeley's Big Story* (2005), and Trilby Kent's *Stones for My Father* (2011). Whereas contemporaneous accounts attempt to emphasize Canadians' pluck, combativeness, and pugnacity, the novellas distinguish their central Canadian soldiers for their kindness, peacefulness, and morality. The revisionism of the contemporary novellas represents

Canadians in morally superior positions than their British counterparts, and the chapter sets this revisionism in the context of the more ambiguous ethics of the Canadians during the South African War. The study's Conclusion provides a reading of Alden Nowlan's "What Colour is Manitoba?" (1977) to explore the implications of Canada's lost South African War memory as illustrated in the body of the dissertation.



## Chapter 1

### 1 Canada's First Overseas Post-Confederation Conflicts and Canadian Identity

To understand the impact of Canadian literature on the South African War (1899-1902) as discussed in subsequent chapters, it is necessary to examine the literary responses to Canada's first two post-Confederation overseas expeditions. Between February 1868 and September 1870, Canadians took part in their first overseas military engagement when French-Canadian Papal Zouaves<sup>8</sup> participated in the fight against Giuseppe Garibaldi and his troops in the Expedition against Rome during the Italian Risorgimento. In addition to unifying Italy, Garibaldi wanted to eliminate the papacy. Approximately 505 French Canadians joined an international group of Zouaves who travelled to Rome to fight in support of Pope Pius IX.<sup>9</sup> The Canadians participated in the victory of Mentana, in the search for bandits in the Velletri mountains, in the retreat of Viterbe, and in the Battle of Rome (Lamontagne 221). Although not a national campaign but a religious one, this expedition to Rome saw the largest group of Canadian soldiers fight overseas prior to the South African War. On 15 September 1884, Canadians took part in their second overseas military engagement when members of the Canadian Voyageur Contingent sailed from Quebec City to the Soudan as part of the Gordon Relief Expedition, or the Nile Expedition. The expedition was intended to rescue British General Charles Gordon, who

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<sup>8</sup> The Zouaves were named after a band of Algerian tribesmen known for their ferocity in combat. The French Zouaves mimicked the Algerian's uniform, which included fez, baggy pants, and a loose jacket (Goodheart 193).

<sup>9</sup> Although approximately 505 Canadian Zouaves left Canada, 115 of them turned back at Brest because Rome had already surrendered (Lamontagne 221).

had arrived in Khartoum 18 February 1884, from the Sudanese rebel army led by Muhammad Ahmad, the self-proclaimed Mahdi. The Nile Expedition played a crucial role in the formation of a national identity for Canadians exceeded the nation's borders and participated in the work of empire.

This chapter examines the Canadian literature that emerged as a result of both of the post-Confederation overseas expeditions prior to the South African War. The literature reflects a discursive strategy whereby the new Canadian nation, perceived as lacking a rich history, was linked to the ancient histories of Rome and Egypt, the sites of the Papal Zouaves' expedition and the Nile Expedition, respectively.<sup>10</sup> In addition, both overseas expeditions inspired comparisons to Arthurian legends or the Crusades. When the men from Trois-Rivières returned to Canada from the Nile Expedition, a reporter said the crowds that gathered “reminded him of the return of the Zouaves” (Michel 439), revealing the link to that military past.<sup>11</sup> Writers in Canada's post-Confederation period, such as William Withrow on a visit to Europe in 1881, commented upon “the contrast between a new country that had few historical associations and an old one, dotted with ruins, ancient churches, abbeys, and castles” (Berger, *The Writing* 3). In Cornwall Bayley's *Canada. A Descriptive Poem. Written at Quebec, 1805. With Satires—Imitations—and Sonnets* (1805) the speaker dwells upon the same notion of the lack of a storied past while looking out from Cape Diamond's heights: “[a]nd yet on thee, no

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<sup>10</sup> Although the Nile Expedition occurred in the Sudan, some of the Canadian authors connect Canada's history to the ancient history of Egypt because of the Nile's significance to that country, and because Egypt had conquered the Sudan in 1821, governing much of the country until the Mahdi defeated General Gordon at Khartoum in 1885 (Erlich and Gershoni 172).

<sup>11</sup> Louis Hylas Duguay fought as a Papal Zouave in Rome prior to going on the Nile Expedition (Michel 203).

classic wreaths await, / To swell the annals of an ancient state” (35-36). Withrow writes that “[i]n the hoary minsters and crumbling fanes, in the many places consecrated by heroism or by song—by the martyr’s or the patriot’s blood, or by the poet’s lyre—one beholds a crystalized history which thrills the soul with a presence and power before unimagined” (qtd. in Berger, *The Writing* 3). In part, the literature on the first two overseas military expeditions in which Canadians participated reflects efforts to attach to Canada this sense of a “crystalized history.” By means of the nation’s participation in overseas engagements in two distinct ancient empires, Canadian authors linked the new nation to the rich histories of these empires.

Although the literature resulting from both expeditions reveals an attempt to connect Canada’s history with that of the ancient empires, it does so for different purposes in each case, and to different effect. The Canadian writers responding to the Papal Zouaves’ expedition linked it to ancient Rome. The expedition to Rome served as an opportunity for French Canada to prove its fidelity to traditional French-Catholic values. The Papal Zouaves were held up as martyrs and Crusaders because they could serve as a confirmation that the Catholic faith was still alive and well in Canada. Although French-Canadian writers suggest that the expedition to Rome proved advantageous for Canada and that the Zouaves represented well the Canadian nation overseas, the authors focus more particularly on the strength of the French-Catholic values that existed in Canada and expressed French-Canadian patriotism, but the excitement about the movement was not nationwide. That is, the expedition to Rome did not, for the most part, involve Canadians outside of Quebec, and did not occur on a

national scale; the significance of the expedition for French Canadians was its affirmation that Old-World values were thriving in the New World.

Whereas Canadian participation in the Papal Zouaves' expedition to Rome was largely limited to French Canada, the Nile Expedition saw French Canadians, English Canadians, and Indigenous boatmen representing the nation internationally. Connecting Canada's history to an ancient past in regard to the Nile Expedition took on a greater significance partly because the participants in the expedition represented more fully the Canadian nation; the Nile Expedition came to symbolize Canadian nationhood more than did the first overseas expedition. Anthony P. Michel notes the popularity of the expedition in the news, for "there was a continued public interest in the expedition's progress and the smallest bits of news were widely reprinted" (280). The Nile River in the Sudan was considered to be "both a bridge and a barrier" (Erlich and Gershoni 2).<sup>12</sup> Both of these geographic descriptions figure into the way Canadian writers framed the river during and after the Nile Expedition. Although the river proved to be a barrier to the successful completion of the expedition, the river was posited as a source of national beginnings for Canada. The Nile as a cultural symbol appealed to authors because, as Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni argue, the Nile "is a heterogeneous entity, a

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<sup>12</sup> The Nile is derived from the Greek Neilos, which is believed to have originated from the Semitic root *nahal*, "meaning a valley or a river valley and hence, by an extension of the meaning, a river" ("Nile River"). The Nile confounded the ancient Egyptians and Greeks because it flowed from the south to the north, and flooded even at the warmest time of the year ("Nile River"). Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni explain in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths* (2000) that "[t]he realities and myths of the river personified have been retold and reproduced from early ancient times to the present" (1). The river, the "site of early beginnings as well as the space of mysterious diversity," is believed to be "one of the earliest cradles in which humans coped with nature, a space in which experiences were organized and translated into ideas, practices, beliefs, and orientations" (Erlich and Gershoni 1). Herodotus described Egypt as "the gift of the Nile," and the river "was the source of life" of that nation (Erlich and Gershoni 2).

polysystem of cultures, interpretations, representations, and dialogues” and “a world of varied symbolism with different, often competing modes of memory, rituals, ceremonies, and artistic expressions” (2). In Canada during and after the Nile Expedition, these artistic expressions centred on celebrating confederation and what was narrated as new nationhood. As Erlich and Gershoni argue, “[c]onceptualizing the river was often a matter of defining one’s identity, of both one’s self and the other” (2). The Canadian literature on the Nile Expedition demonstrates that “conceptualizing the river” was a means by which Canadian authors defined the new nation, and constructed a national identity based on overseas military activity.

The final section of this chapter explores the diversity of the Canadian participants in the Nile Expedition. More than 100 of the men hired to navigate the Nile were Indigenous, but the diversity of the voyageurs involved in the expedition and the literary output that the Expedition generated has only been examined minimally. Both of the post-Confederation international military engagements in which Canadians participated prior to the South African War demonstrate the degree to which being elsewhere contributed to the construction of a Canadian identity. For example, in 1884, John A. Sherlock wrote to his Peterborough readers: “all the men feel now that the eyes of their countrymen not only in Canada, but all the world over are upon them, that the honor of their country is at stake, and that they all to a man are determined to do their duty as men, and leave a record that Canada may be proud of” (qtd. in Michel 275). Sherlock emphasizes the men’s awareness of the international stage and their attempt to create an esteemed reputation for Canada. The expeditions demonstrate that, although international military service led to connections with ancient histories, ultimately, it was a

turning inward—a focus on and appreciation of the Canadian nation—that resulted from this international participation.

## 1.1 “Talk of your Papal Zouaves”: Canada’s First Overseas Military Expedition

In “Mercenaries or Soldiers of the Faith? The Pontifical Zouaves in the Defense of the Roman Church (1860-1870)” (2017), Simon Sarlin provides a useful history of the more than 7,000 men who, between 1861 and 1870, went to Rome from various nations to volunteer for the papal army. When the Canadian Papal Zouaves initially went to Rome in 1868, they received no aid from the Canadian government. The expedition was an unofficial undertaking, but nevertheless, it marked a defining moment for the nation. Significantly, the group of French-Canadians defined themselves—and were defined by the media—as Canadians amongst a group of international Zouaves. Newspaper reports described the Zouaves wearing a “temporary uniform” of “a light Canadian grey with black facings” (“Latest from Montreal” 2). In *1861: The Civil War Awakening* (2011), Adam Goodheart describes the importance of the mania over the Chicago Zouaves, suggesting that reactions to the Zouaves, including a commentary by Charles Dickens, indicate that “personal freedom could exist even amid military regimentation: a truly democratic way of soldiering” (203). It is also significant that the Canadian government prohibited Canadians from fighting for American armies in the Civil War but did not prevent Canadian Papal Zouaves from fighting in Rome (Ross 10). This permission reflects a tolerance by the Canadian government for French Canada’s religious devotion.

The Canadian Papal Zouaves also reveal the degree to which French-Canadian

freedom—that from France and from English Canada—was expressed by means of the Papal Zouaves’ Canadianizing of the international Zouaves’ uniform and flag. In Montreal on 18 February 1868, a banner was presented to the first detachment of the Zouaves. The Bishop of Montreal, Monseigneur Ignace Bourget, presented this banner of white silk with the keys of St. Peter and the Papal tiara on the reverse and a blue shield displaying a maple leaf, beaver, and the motto “Aime Dieu et va ton Chemin.” Above the shield in gold was the word “Canada” (Ross 10). This flag, which differed from the Papal colours of white and yellow,<sup>13</sup> illustrates the way in which Canada attempted to distinguish itself on the international scene. The flag also indicates the degree to which the Canadian Zouaves expressed French Canadian patriotic spirit in addition to their obvious demonstration of religious fervour. One anecdote holds that Canadian Captain Joseph Taillefer believed it was his duty to avenge the insults that an Italian had visited on the Canadian Zouaves’ flag, the banner of the Sacred Heart, when they proceeded to the ship to embark at Marseilles: “[n]ot only military men, observed a Marseilles newspaper, but all honourable men without distinction of creed or opinion, agree in saying that it was quite natural for the Canadian Zouaves not to allow their flag to be insulted when they had to maintain the name of their country and the honor of their cause in a foreign land” (“Taillefer” 57). Howard R. Marraro, quoting the *Montreal Gazette*, highlights how the men desired “a little Canada on the banks of the far away Tiber,” for they too “wished for a separate organization, for their own officers, and their own bivouac” (90). The desire for “a little Canada” in Rome demonstrates the way the

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<sup>13</sup> The colours of the official Papal flag became the new background to the flag upon arrival in Rome because of the Papal authorities’ request.

Zouaves Canadianized their international military destination, just as Canadian soldiers would do during the South African War, and as Jonathan F. Vance demonstrates they did during the First and Second World Wars in *Maple Leaf Empire: Canada, Britain, and Two World Wars* (2011).

In order to characterize the Zouaves' expedition to Rome, it is helpful to explore Zouave groups that evolved after the initial group of French Zouaves who had fought in the Crimean War (1853-1856) or before the unification of Italy. Goodheart highlights the "satirical exaggeration" that some newspapers used to convey the "full splendor of the Zouaves' prowess," such as one journalist who claimed "a Zouave could drive the bayonet, musket and all, through the foe's body, turn a somersault over his head, and draw the weapon out the other side in a single flourish" (202). In 1861, the regiment was sworn in as the First New York Fire Zouaves in front of a crowd of nearly half a million New Yorkers (Goodheart 187-88). One group was referred to as Colonel Abram Duryee's Zouaves, a regiment that arrived in Virginia "resplendent in white turbans and baggy red calico pants" to fight for the Union during the American Civil War (Goodheart 328). During an attack at Big Bethel, the Union troops did not advance near the first line of Confederate entrenchments, in part because "Duryee's brightly plumed Zouaves [...] proved easy targets for the rebel guns" (Goodheart 338). Moreover, one of the French Zouaves, Charles DeVilliers, for instance, had moved to Chicago, where he taught typical Zouave drills to American cadet leader Elmer Ellsworth, who formed the U. S. Zouave Cadets (Goodheart 193). On 4 July 1859, approximately forty cadets performed what was closer to gymnastics than a military drill event, for "these militiamen leapt and rolled and yelled, loaded muskets while lying on their backs, jumped up to fire them and then fell



again, thrust and twirled their bayonets like drum majors' batons—all with a beautiful and precise synchrony” (Goodheart 194). During the summer of 1859, Ellsworth's Chicago Zouaves rode the American railway system performing across the country, and the frenzy they created was satirized in media such as the *New York Atlas* (Goodheart 201). By the time of the Italian Risorgimento, Sarlin explains that Zouaves volunteered for a variety of reasons and that their public perception was also disparate, pointing out that “[f]or the partisans of Italian unity the Zouaves were merely mercenaries attracted by the lure of gain or the spirit of adventure, while the defenders of the papacy saw in them volunteers who were enamored of religious ideals and ready to sacrifice themselves for the Church” (200).

Stephen Leacock's “The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias” from *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) references the Papal Zouaves, which contributes to the narrator's ironic tone in the story. The narrator would rather “see the Mariposa band in uniform and the Mariposa Knights of Pythias with their aprons and their insignia and their picnic baskets and their five-cent cigars” than the Papal Zouaves or the Buckingham Palace Guard (39). The polysyndeton in this passage—“the use of more conjunctions than is normal” (Harmon and Holman 393)—highlights the narrator's exaggerated excitement to see the Knights of Pythias, and Leacock's comparison of the local Knights and the cosmopolitan Zouaves elevates his irony. Following the expedition in Rome, the Canadian Zouaves did not fight in any official capacity. Eventually, around the time of the Quiet Revolution, the Canadian Papal Zouaves became associated with an antiquated version of Quebec nationalism, and to refer to someone as a “Zouave” meant “clown” (Pelchat 27). One author notes that in Quebec, the Papal Zouaves' image “has

comic overtones, and the word ‘Zouave’ has become a synonym for ‘gaudy fool’” (“Papal Army” C14). Before the Zouaves came to embody a parodic representation of antiquated Quebec nationalism, however, they were considered by many French Canadians as valiant soldiers and contributed to definitions of what it meant to be French Canadian, especially on the international stage.

Contemporaneous sources from French Canada attest to the significance of the Papal Zouaves’ expedition abroad on behalf of Canada. André Pelchat notes how in the years after the Austrians left Italy “there was rarely a week in Canada East without a demonstration, the publication of a book or an article, a subscription, a concert, a speech, or some other kind of event calling the French-Canadians to manifest their solidarity with Pius IX” (25). Bishop Bourget “commended the ‘noble project’” and he

showered upon it a heart-felt blessing and wished it complete success. The enrolment, in his eyes, shed glory on the country and brought a benediction on the inhabitants. The young men who were inveigled into this enrolment were told that they were going to fight for the principle on which humanity rested, and that they were giving “an admirable example of devotion to the Catholic cause.” (Lindsey 35)

Some contemporaneous writers cited the notion that donations for the Canadian Papal Zouaves would enable the French Canadians to aid the Holy See, and thus the expedition would “prove of advantage to Religion and be glorious for Canada” (Royal and Rivard qtd. in Bellefeuille 30). Édouard Lefebvre de Bellefeuille’s compilation *Le Canada et le Zouaves Pontificaux* (1868) includes quotations from several French publications to demonstrate the favourable international press the Canadian Zouaves received. In Paris’s

*Union*, a journalist wrote, “[t]ous sont de beaux hommes, d’un air calme et martial, et paraissent appartenir aux classes aisées et instruites de la société.... Les Canadiens répondaient en très-bon français, et avec beaucoup de politesse, aux questions qu’on leur adressait” (qtd. in Bellefeuille 185). This source addresses the international perception of Canadian French and Canadian demeanour, insofar as it is notable for its author that the Canadian Zouaves were able to respond in very good French and with proper manners. Bellefeuille emphasizes the public attention lavished on the 135 Canadian Papal Zouaves, describing how “[l]eur drapeau, leur uniforme, leur tenue militaire, leurs manoeuvres commandées en anglais, chose qu’on n’avait pas entendu en France, sans doute, depuis l’invasion des alliés, tout a contribué à attirer l’attention publique sur nos cent trente-cinq compatriotes” (184-85). The sources draw explicit links between the Zouaves’ appearance, language, and comportment and their international identity as Canadians.

In the poem “Aux Zouaves Canadiens,” Alphonse Bellemare highlights the Zouaves’ martyrdom, drawing upon a rhetorical trope that Carol E. Harrison suggests was used commonly in Zouave stories (275). However, Bellemare does not merely stress what it takes to be a Papal Zouave or a good Catholic; he also highlights that a Zouave will answer God’s call to fight by declaring what it means to be a Canadian. In the poem, a mother requests of her son: “Réponds pour nous, mon fils, réponds! et, fier chrétien, / Va dire au monde entiere ce qu’est un Canadien” (qtd. in Bellefeuille 78-79). In a letter from the Zouaves to A. M. Hamon, the curé of St. Sulpice in Paris, they thanked him in the “nom du Canada,” which, they argued, they would not cease to protect (qtd. in Bellefeuille 225). Louis-Edmond Moreau quotes from Bishop Laflèche’s speech to the Zouaves prior to their departure for Rome. Laflèche argues that the expedition to aid the

Pope provided Canada with independence because these members of “la malice sacrée du Pontife” will allow the nation to claim its place internationally: “Canada doit revendiquer au milieu des nations” (qtd. in Moreau 80). Although Canada’s first overseas expedition saw only French Canadians representing the nation, these authors remark on the importance of external recognition during the Canadians’ fight on the international stage in the nation’s first post-Confederation international military engagement.

Jean-Baptiste Labelle composed the music to which Alphonse Bellemare wrote the lyrics for *Cantate: La Croisade canadienne* (1870), a cantata dedicated to the Canadian Zouaves written for a concert in their honour. In “La Patrie aux Zouaves,” Bellemare highlights the international perception of Canada, noting “[l]’Astre du Canada brille sur l’univers” (14).<sup>14</sup> He continues:

Vous dont le noble caractère,  
A fait sur la terre étrangère  
La gloire du nom Canadien,  
Répandez sur notre patrie  
Les doux parfums de l’Italie,  
Parfums si chers au coeur chrétien! (Bellemare 49-54)

This stanza celebrates the Zouaves for spreading “la gloire du nom Canadien” in a foreign land.

In his monograph *Militia Myths: Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921* (2010), James Wood examines the citizen soldier in Canada by looking at the

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<sup>14</sup> The song is similar to a separate piece of sheet music with lyrics by Alphonse Bellemare and music by J. B. Labelle titled “Le Retour du Zouave!” (1870).

nation's "amateur military tradition." Wood's interests postdate the Zouaves' expedition, but the French Canadians' engagement in Rome nonetheless exemplifies the way in which the Canadian nation relied on its citizen soldiers, and shows how many citizens believed that an amateur militia was a viable option for national and international defence. Guillaume Amyot argues that the military authorities believed that the expedition to Rome "beheld real benefit to the country" (6) and that the young Zouaves, many of whom were cadets, had "an opportunity of becoming thoroughly acquainted with the life of the soldier" (6). Therefore, he believed, they would come back from Rome "having obtained practical experience, and the knowledge which they shall have acquired will not have cost the country a cent. Their services, however, will be a great benefit to Canada in the organization of an effective Colonial Militia" (6-7). As Wood argues, the "citizen soldier ideal," which was "so consistently and vocally expressed by Canadians in the years leading up to and throughout the Great War," was a body of ideas "that exerted an enormous influence on the military policies of both the Laurier and Borden governments and did much to determine the character of Canadian participation in both the Boer War and the Great War" (12). One contributor to the *Volunteer Review* cites the Papal Zouaves as one example of the "proof, if such were needed, that the people of the Dominion are foremost among the warlike races of the world" (Douglas 293). Wood highlights the way in which affect contributes to Canada's war myths when he writes that "Canadians have displayed a long-standing attachment to citizen soldiers, patriotic volunteers, and the amateur military tradition in general" (Wood 12). The Papal Zouaves' expedition exemplifies the sense of attachment that Wood describes, for the Canadian Zouaves did not serve a significant role in Rome, and yet they aroused a

considerable deal of interest and excitement among Canadians, and internationally. Stéphane Roussel and Jean-Christophe Boucher have recently argued in “The Myth of the Pacific Society: Quebec’s Contemporary Strategic Culture” that the Canadian Papal Zoauves’ expedition to Rome indicates that Quebec’s construction as a pacifist society is a myth propagated in Canadian history. Although the Papal Zouaves’ expedition to Rome “appears quite burlesque, it nonetheless reveals a willingness on the part of the Québécois to participate in wars on foreign territories if the cause was upheld by the Catholic Church” (Roussel and Boucher 31). The Zouaves’ expedition reveals the exclusions of the military-nationalist narratives of English Canada.

Some hyperbolic suggestions held that the Zouaves rescued not just Catholicism, but an Empire, and that not only Catholics, but “civilization,” “owes an everlasting debt of gratitude” to them (“General Herbert’s Speech” 8). Indeed, General Herbert’s speech continues by citing the “bravery and unselfish devotedness” of the Zouaves, which “helped very materially in protecting from insult the Divinely-appointed head of Christendom while saving for posterity the world’s grandest monuments and libraries with *chefs d’oeuvres* of genius and treasures of art that never could have been replaced” (“General Herbert’s Speech” 8). In this report on the speech, the journalist links Canada’s participation in Rome to preserving relics of the past, thereby connecting the nation to ancient history.

During the Zouaves’ expedition, Lower Canada was called to be in the New World what France was in the Old (Bellefeuille 242). The idea that the Papal Zouaves were representing Canada but also crusading for Catholicism indicates that for the

Canadian Zouaves, fighting for Pope Pius IX was not necessarily at odds with French Canada representing Canada internationally. As Carl Berger clarifies:

French-Canadian nationality was contained within the Canadian state, just as the “supra-nationalism” of Canada itself [the two forms of nationality in Canada] was contained within the framework of the Commonwealth. The limitations on each were not imposed from the outside but arose in both cases from shared experiences and a dedication to preserve existing freedoms. (*The Writing* 43-44)

Thus, the Zouaves’ patriotism reflected the complicated Anglo-Canadian nationalism that was not in conflict with British Imperialism during the nineteenth century (Berger, *The Sense*). The expedition exemplifies the conservative Catholicism and Ultramontanism that was encouraged under Bishop Bourget’s leadership. Wilfrid Laurier, supporter of liberal ideals and founder of the *Rouge* party, rejected Ultramontanism in part because, if Catholics were all organized into a single party without any other basis than religion for this organization, then the Protestant population would also be organized as a single party. He believed that this could only result in religious war in Canada, rather than peace (Lindsey 209). Leopold Lamontagne suggests that the debates between French and English Canadians, and Ultramontanes and liberals, remained “a journalists’ quarrel” and did not erupt into a serious racial or religious dispute (223). The Bishop of Toronto, Monsignor Lynch, did not allow the young men who tearfully implored him to go to Rome to join the Expedition. Lamontagne suggests this decision may have prevented the tensions that resulted when Canada recruited subsequent expeditionary corps for the South African War and the First and Second World Wars because it remained largely a French-Canadian affair (223).

Significantly, the Papal Zouaves' expedition to Rome was used in propaganda efforts to increase immigration to Canada. These efforts demonstrate the way that the expedition figured in frameworks of national development and bolstered international interest in the nation. In *Canadian Travellers in Europe, 1851-1900* (1987), Eva-Marie Kröller highlights efforts by Curé Labelle, who argued that Canada “offered a sanctuary to Frenchmen desiring to return to a pre-revolutionary society” (60). French Canada, by means of the Papal Zouaves' expedition, was figured as a haven for those desiring to recoup the loss of the French customs and traditions during the French Revolution. For some observers, the expedition to Rome revealed Canada as a representative of the Old-World spirit that had been lost. A journalist from *Le Monde* observes: “[l]e Canada reste fidèle à des mœurs que nous désertons chaque jour; il n’a pas été comme la mère-patrie, ravagé par les révolutions” (qtd. in Bellefeuille 185). This writing depicted Canada as a prelapsarian France, thereby strengthening the perception of the nation.

In *Nos Croisés: Ou, Histoire Anecdotique de l’expédition des Volontaires Canadiens à Rome Pour la Défense de l’Église* (1871), Louis-Edmond Moreau writes that Canada “n’as rien perdu de ton antique foi” (22). The Zouaves' expedition reflected a similar attempt to link Canada's past to an ancient history by means of the suggestion that Canada houses Old-World French values that are preserved and protected in the new nation. Berger cites John G. Bourinot, who “recalling that Gibbon was inspired to write the history of the Roman Empire while standing on the ruins of the Capitol,” doubted “that such a work could have been conceived in the forests of Canada” (Berger, *The Writing* 3). Bourinot contrasts the man-made wonders of the Old World—the “ruins of the Capitol”—with the untouched and natural beauty of Canada, such as its forests. The



Papal Zouaves went to Rome in the early years past Confederation, while the new nation was beginning to define itself. Canada's role in this expedition became a means of connecting the nation to a crystalized history and thus to establish the country as more than a colony. For Canada, nation-building in the New World relied in this instance upon linking the nation to the Old World.

Linking the Papal Zouaves' expedition to an ancient history also resulted in the connection between the expedition and the Crusades. In Lamontagne's article "The Ninth Crusade" (1951), he asks why it is generally accepted that the last Crusade was the Eighth Crusade, the disbanding at Carthage in 1270 by Louis IX of France, when the "Canadian crusaders" went to Rome in 1868 for another Crusade that ended in 1870 (220). He argues that an equally "deep religious faith impelled these martial pilgrims to go, in the one case, to Jerusalem for the protection of the Holy Sepulchre, in the second case to Rome for the defence of the Holy See" (220). The Count Louis Gustave D'Odet D'Orsonnens also argued that the expedition "resembled, in more respects than one, that of the first Crusades" and "contributed more to make Canada known to Europe than any other thing" ("The Count" 222). Charles Lindsey also wrote that the Zouaves regarded their expedition "as a modern Crusade" (*Rome in Canada*), and Charles-Edmond Rouleau calls it "la glorieuse croisade canadienne de 1868" (89). Bellemare referred to the Zouaves as the "nouveaux croisés," or new crusaders ("La patrie aux Zouaves" 8). In "Aime Dieu et va ton chemin" (1868), French poet Victor de Laprade labels the Canadians "nos jeunes croisés" (4) to emphasize the link between Canada and "l'antique France" (18) and suggests the nobility of their speech resembled the Old World (20). Moreau relates that H. Murray and Alfred LaRocque were the first Canadian Zouaves to

leave the nation to fight for the Pope; they received “la Croix de Mentana”<sup>15</sup> and were made knights of the Order of Pius IX. Major General Herbert, the General Officer commanding the Canadian Militia, told the men of the 65<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Montreal in an 1894 address that they “recall[ed] to [his] mind the finest pages of Canadian history” and instructed them not to forget that they “belong to the same race as [their] brave countrymen who belonged to the Regiment of Pontifical Zouaves, the *crusaders* of the nineteenth Century” (“Montreal” 5, emphasis added). Herbert’s remembrance highlights the military lineage of the Montreal regiment. The comparisons of Canadian citizens to the Crusaders link the new nation to religious history, which aggrandizes the colonial outpost and makes the Canadian nation more than a periphery of the Old World.

Despite the assertions that the French-Canadian Papal Zouaves made an impression internationally and inspired prolific enthusiasm (Pelchat), English Canadians adamantly opposed the expedition. Many believed it was a brazen breach of neutrality because Canada had no concern in the war (Lindsey 35). This belief stemmed from the fact that Canada was not permitted to war with any nation with which Britain was at peace and that Canadian soldiers should not be of service to a foreign government. Moreover, critics of the expedition turned to the domestic crises of the Red River Resistance (1869-1870) to suggest that the Papal Zouaves who were willing to fight internationally for the Pope would not fight domestically for Canada. In 1870, a writer by the pen name “Shamrock” quotes the *Evening Mail*: “If these young men want to go to Red River,—now is their time. But we will wager they won’t go” (“A Model Journal”

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<sup>15</sup> La Croix de Mentana was a decoration conveyed by Pope Pius IX for the Battle of Mentana after the French-Papal troops were victorious on 4 November 1867 against Garibaldi and his volunteers (Moreau 3).

5). “Shamrock” contests this argument, stating “when the time for action comes—and I trust it never may—those who are now so foully calumniated will prove themselves as ready as the Mail and clique, if not readier, to sacrifice their lives in their country’s cause” (“A Model Journal” 5). One source in *The Canadian Illustrated News* argues that, indeed, the men who went to Rome were willing to volunteer for other conflicts: “[i]t is gratifying to record that these young men, after having earned for themselves an excellent character for discipline and soldierly bearing in the service of the Pope, have now, at the first sound of alarm, voluntarily placed themselves at the disposal of the Government in defence of their Queen and country” (“Arrival of the Papal Zouaves” 410). Joseph Taillefer, Charles de Cazes, and Herman Martineau were three Zouaves who served with Wolseley at Red River (Lamontagne 232). One critical voice in the *Volunteer Review* refuted the accusations that suggested that the expedition legitimizes British imperial strength:

It is their religion which is attacked, and it is their religion they defend. Can we blame them. Are we not in a country in which religious liberty exists? And this demonstration which is permitted in a British Colony, is it not proof of the liberality of the British Government, of the moral independence of the Colonies, of the reality of those rights which our Constitution has given us, of the respect which everyone has for each others [sic] privileges. This demonstration, I repeat, is a palpable proof of the liberty which we enjoy, and of which we have reason to be proud. Let Canadian Protestants also go to foreign countries and fight in defence of their religious views when the interests of the country are not thereby affected, and Canadian Catholics shall be the first to applaud them. (Amyot 6)

Other Canadians similarly used the Zouaves' expedition to negotiate complex versions of Canadian liberties and democracy. Although the debates demonstrate that English and French Canadians disagreed about national priorities, they also indicate the liberties that existed in the nation in regard to free speech and religious tolerance.

Although French Canada's support of the international Zouave cause prompted questions of national solidarity and participation in the expedition contradicted foreign service laws, the Zouaves' expedition also intensified expressions of love and loyalty to the new nation. Bellemare's lyrics from *Cantate: La Croisade Canadienne* suggest that international service led to domestic creative expression, which is to say, international service led to creative expression that mythologized the Canadian nation. The overseas expedition resulted in a focus on Canadian themes and an appreciation of the nation. In the first stanza of his poem "Salut du Zouave a sa patrie" (1900), Bellemare compares the international sights witnessed during the expedition to Canada's domestic wonders:

Je vous ai vu, ciel des Romagnes,  
 France aux gigantesques palais,  
 Mais je préfère mes montagnes,  
 Mes jeunes cités, mes fôrêts...  
 O saint Laurent, vers ta rive chérie,  
 Toujours, toujours se portera mon coeur.  
 Je te revois et mon âme attendrie  
 O Canada, retrouve le bonheur (1-8)

For Bellemare, the beauty of the old world does not compare with Canada's natural wonders. His repetition of the first-person possessive "mes" emphasizes the speaker's

connection to Canada, and his repeated use of apostrophe intensifies the expression of affection for the nation. Bellemare's first invocation likens the Saint Lawrence River to a lover. This analogy emphasizes his fidelity to the nation, for the river will always have his heart. The second invocation to Canada places the speaker's love for the Saint Lawrence in the context of the nation as the site of his happiness. The poem continues: "Moi, comme eux, je ne saurais vivre / Sous le soleil de l'étranger" (11-12): the speaker could never live under a foreign sun. In addition to his fondness for Canada's natural wonders, Bellemare prefers Canada to Europe because it is his home. This early post-Confederation response is significant for its suggestion that the Old World might be considered "strange" in comparison to the new Canadian nation. In these lines, Bellemare establishes Canada as a civilized homeland because of the reference to the "soleil de l'étranger." In this passage, Bellemare turns inward to praise Canada's own wonders rather than attaching the nation's role in Rome to the histories of other empires. This line chimes with "sur la terre étrangère" quoted earlier from Bellemare's "La Patrie aux Zouaves," both of which anticipate the juxtaposition of home and away in Nile Expedition and South African War writing that depicts Africa as "foreign" and inhospitable in comparison to a beautiful and hospitable Canada.

Canada's Papal Zouaves may have provoked much criticism and ridicule, but the group is fascinating not only for its commitment to French-Catholic beliefs and traditions but also for its contribution to early Canadian nation-building. The comparisons of the Zouaves and the Crusaders suggest the religious fervour they demonstrated, and are at the same time indicative of efforts by early Canadian writers to connect the new nation to a rich history, and, ultimately, to praise the nation's own marvels. Although the Zouaves

were seen more as an affectation than Crusaders in later Canadian military combats and accounts, they nevertheless contributed to expressions of love and commitment to a youthful Canadian nation and constituted the first overseas military expedition.

## 1.2 “As once beneath Egyptian suns, the Canadians on the Nile”: Narrating the Nile Expedition

In *Records of the Nile Voyageurs, 1884-1885* (1959), C. P. Stacey argues that the Canadian voyageur contingent was more than “a microcosm of the Canadian frontier,” for it “was made up of both English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians, of red men and white, of men of education and (much more numerous, it seems) men who had little education but were wise in the ways of the wilds” (12). Perhaps predictably, previous Canadian domestic expeditions informed the way in which the British organized and approached the Nile Expedition. Major General Garnet Joseph Wolseley’s experience in Canada during the Wolseley Expedition of 1870 during the Red River Resistance, when 1,200 troops travelled the water route between Thunder Bay and Fort Garry, led to his conviction that a similar boating strategy would facilitate the transportation of men and supplies up the Nile. Wolseley assembled General Redvers Buller, General William Francis Butler, and Lieutenant-Colonel James Alleyne, his previous colleagues from the Red River campaign, but was especially drawn to the idea that the Canadian voyageurs who had portaged in 1870 would have similar success on this international river (Stacey, “Canada” 320). In *Canadians on the Nile, 1882-1898* (1978), Roy MacLaren observes that there were not many “voyageurs” remaining in Canada and many of the recruits for the expedition were “shantymen”—men who guided

logs down Canadian rivers, but the term “voyageurs” was nonetheless used to describe these rivermen. Butler asks William Prince, “chief of his tribe” (142), who served with Butler in the Red River Resistance and again on the Nile, if the voyageurs of the Nile Expedition were of the calibre that aided Butler in the Red River Resistance, and Prince replies, “[n]o; but there were a good proportion among them able boatmen. The Iroquois and French Canadians were nearly all first-class men; there were also several excellent boatmen from the Ottawa, but there were some ‘dead-beats’ who knew nothing of the work” (Butler 143). Prince humorously characterizes the varied skill-level of the boatmen.

Out of the 386 all ranks that sailed from Canada, approximately half were French Canadian, which led to the hire of Captain Telmont Aumond as a French-Canadian militia officer, along with Captain Alexander C. MacRae of London, Ontario and Frederick Denison who, with Nassau Kennedy and Egerton Denison, eventually joined the group of militia officers. Approximately sixty men were from the Kanyen’kehà:ka (Mohawk) communities along the Saint Lawrence and Ottawa rivers (Benn 10). Carl Benn cites a cablegram sent from London to the Canadian government on 20 August 1884 asking for three hundred good voyageurs from the Kahnawà:ke<sup>16</sup> and Saint Regis reserves in Quebec and from Manitoba, and he argues that the Imperial office referenced Manitoba “to indicate native rather than white river pilots from that part of the country” (17). The cablegram demonstrates the collaborative nature of the Nile Expedition in contrast to the Papal Zouaves’ expedition to Rome. The Canadians reached Alexandria,

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<sup>16</sup> The dissertation attempts to restore Indigenous terminology to describe the Kahnawà:ke region, referred to as “Caughnawaga” in the historic archive.

Egypt on 7 October 1884; however, General Gordon was killed by Mahdist forces on 26 January 1885 before the rescue mission would reach Khartoum. Sixteen of the Canadian Voyageur Contingent lost their lives during the expedition. Although the campaign failed insofar as Gordon was killed before the relief expedition reached him, the Nile Expedition was the second overseas military engagement in which Canadians participated and inspired prolific accounts of its significance to Canadians at the time.

Stacey and others have argued that the Nile Expedition was a precursor to the South African War (*Records* 1), for the expedition is “undeniably interesting as an early landmark in the development of Canadian external policy” (“Canada” 340). Stacey mentions the Mackenzie Government’s seeming obligation to build the first defences at Esquimalt, B. C. during the crisis with Russia in 1878 as the only incident previous to the Nile Expedition when “modern world politics broke in upon Canada’s colonial isolation and forced her to make something like independent decisions” (“Canada” 340). In “The Nile Expedition, New Imperialism and Canadian Baptists 1884-1885” (2011), Gordon L. Heath extends Stacey’s argument to demonstrate the importance of the Nile Expedition by demonstrating how the Canadian Baptist press, which he argues performed a nation-building role, embraced the new imperialism, noting it “was an ideology that had begun to capture the imagination of a number of Canadians more than a decade before Canadian troops embarked for their baptism of blood in South Africa” during the Nile Expedition (172). Vance argues that Sir John A. Macdonald was afraid of acting “as a puppet of Britain” but had to address English Canada’s imperial sentiment, so he made a “classic Canadian compromise” (*Maple Leaf* 17). This compromise held that individuals could privately sponsor boatmen and that the Governor General’s office was free to recruit



them, but, beyond permitting some Canadian militia officers to command the boatmen, the government would not get involved (Vance, *Maple Leaf* 17). As far as Macdonald was concerned, the Canadian government would not raise troops for the British army under Canadian expense. Stacey explains the decision by citing Macdonald's conception of the Empire as "a partnership of nations, rather than the unrealistic one, held by many people in Britain and some in Canada in those days, which thought of the Empire as a nation" ("Canada" 340). Macdonald believed in imperial unity, but did not believe that imperial interests should usurp national ones (Stacey, "Canada" 340).

General Butler's motivations for acquiring Canadian voyageurs for the Nile expedition resulted from his nostalgia for his time in Canada. In *The Campaign of the Cataracts: Being a Personal Narrative of the Great Nile Expedition of 1884-5* (1887), he writes, "it is difficult to realize that all that world of waving pine-tree—moss-covered rock—lake-shore lapped with cool wavelets, and crystal springs can co-exist on the same earth that holds the unburied skeleton of this dead Soudan world" (Butler 10). Given his successful experiences in Canada during the navigation of the Red River, Butler assumed the same successes would be had in the Sudan. But here he speaks more to the nation's natural wonders, rather than the Expedition, that he remembers so fondly. Butler's fondness for Canada's natural beauties in comparison to the "dead Soudan world" the crew experienced during the expedition mirrors the affection Bellemare expresses for Canada's natural wonders in comparison to international sights in "Salut du Zouave a sa patrie." As a result of both expeditions, the international settings reminded these authors of Canada's beauty. This reminder to look at the nation's own natural wonders is of

course very different to the narrative that forced the histories of established empires onto the nation.

In *Canada's Sons on Kopje and Veldt: A Historical Account of the Canadian Contingents* (1900), T. G. Marquis emphasizes the importance of the South African War by minimizing the relevance of the Nile Expedition, stating that it “in no way moved the people of Canada” (69). Marquis’s exaggeration at Canada’s disinterest in the expedition fails to account for the literature that responded to the venture. Poems such as Nathanael Nix’s “The Voyageur’s Grave on the Nile” (1884), Charles G. D. Roberts’s “Canada” (1886) and “Khartoum” (1886), William Wye Smith’s “The Canadians on the Nile” (1888), James McIntyre’s “Canadian Voyageurs on the Nile” (1889), and William Henry Drummond’s “A Canadian Voyageur’s Account of the Nile Expedition: ‘Maxime Labelle’” (1897) all depict Canada’s contribution to the Nile Expedition. In prose, Henry Cecil Walsh’s “The Homecoming of Ovide Bouchette” in *Bonhomme: French Canadian Stories and Sketches* (1899) characterizes a French-Canadian voyageur who returns from the Nile, and Marian Keith’s (Mary Esther MacGregor’s) *The Silver Maple: A Story of Upper Canada* (1906) focuses on two Ottawa loggers who travel to the Nile Expedition. Even Canadian musical compositions such as Arthur W. Hughes’s military march “Gordon in Egypt” (1885?) and Joseph David and Edwin Gledhill’s “The Death of Gordon: Hero of Khartoum” (1886) also commemorated the Nile Expedition.

Vance instructs us that “[w]e must put aside what we think historical actors *should* have thought or *must* have been interested in, and instead let them tell us what their concerns *actually* were” (*A Township* x). As the following pages will show,

Canadian authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engaged creatively and affectively with the nation's first overseas expedition for the British Empire.<sup>17</sup> Just as the First World War has overshadowed the South African War in Canadian consciousness, internal conflicts in Canada, most notably the North-West Resistance of 1885, and eventually the South African War, overshadowed the Nile Expedition. In Agnes Maule Machar's *Marjorie's Canadian Winter: A Story of the Northern Lights* (1892), Machar briefly refers to the "Canadian voyageurs" and mentions General Gordon several times, but it was the North-West Resistance that "was exciting the whole Canadian people with martial preparations and tidings of Indian risings and frightful massacres" (320). It is easy to see how the domestic martial event eclipsed interest in the Canadian voyageurs based on Machar's sensationalizing of violence between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government. Despite the literary responses that indicate an engaged, responsive audience to the expedition, public memory of the "Nile voyageurs" beyond the years of the expedition's immediacy is scant. Vance quotes the *Globe* to demonstrate that "this lot [the voyageurs of the Nile Expedition] hardly excited patriotic pride and fervour" in comparison to Canadian troops that would return from future wars (*Maple Leaf* 19). According to Vance, when the voyageurs returned in March 1885, one reporter wrote that they were "weather-beaten stalwart heroes of the Soudan," and commented on their "white helmets, coarse and dirty clothing, Turkish, Soudanese and

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Sweatman also makes brief reference to the Nile Expedition in her contemporary novel *When Alice Lay Down with Peter* (2001) when Major Clark says, "[v]oyageurs, they say—the same ones brought him out here—took him to the Nile to help Gordon. Of course," Clark confessed manfully, "Khartoum had fallen and Gordon was dead by the time Wolseley arrived" (145). David Gibbins's *Pharaoh* (2013) is another contemporary fictional representation of the Nile Expedition; the novel takes inspiration from the Indigenous boatmen's role in the expedition to provide the historical backdrop for a contemporary underwater archeologist's search.

Egyptian turbans of every possible colour and shape, blue, white and grey blouses, deep-dyed, sun-burnt cheeks, and shaggy hair, and unshaven faces” (*Maple Leaf* 19).

Although this depiction of the voyageurs as weather-worn suggests they were somewhat disorganized, it is this very sense of battling the elements—and overcoming the Nile—that inspired patriotic pride for some followers of the expedition. In addition, the return of the men to Kahnawà:ke did not result in the town claiming the men’s honour earned for Canada, but rather, framed the participation in terms of the skilled boating done by the “Caughnawaga Contingent” (Michel 441), which is a significant example of how the imperial expedition exemplified long-standing Indigenous allegiance to the Crown throughout Canada’s history.

Michel notes the absence of the expedition from Canada’s national memory, for it “seemed to have left little lasting impression, winning no commemoration in statues, works of memorable Canadian fiction, history texts, or school books” (466). He also points to the near absence of critical attention to the Nile Expedition in Canada, for “[v]ery few Canadian historians have made any reference to Canada’s involvement in the imperial war in the Sudan in 1884-1885, and of the handful that do, there are some, such as [Carl] Berger and [Desmond] Morton, who manage to do so without explicitly mentioning the phrase ‘Nile Voyageur’ let alone considering the significance of their participation” (Michel 467). Michel criticizes Stacey who admitted that he “passed over most of the actual texts created by the participants because they were only concerned with ‘local colour’ and not matters of ‘historical importance’” and he did not let “us read the words of the Nile Voyageurs themselves” (Michel 467). However, Michel also overlooks some of the literary responses to the Nile Expedition, incorporating poetry to

satisfy historical ends. Michel makes great interdisciplinary strides by quoting and engaging with some poetry and short stories about the Nile Expedition, but there are additional works to include in his study, and they deserve consideration as literary artefacts. Michel draws attention to many obscure poems and lesser-known authors who responded to the Nile Expedition, but the study demonstrates the critical bias that leads some historians to reject fiction or poetry that is not historical, and that sees literary scholars want for fiction that is not overly historical, especially since the beginning of the postmodern period.

As Michel notes, his study demonstrates that “the Nile voyageurs have been forgotten, both in public commemoration and, perhaps more importantly for our purposes here, in the historiography. By forgotten, what is meant is misrecognized and misrepresented. Historians are subject to the nationalisms of their time and other preoccupations of recognition” (482). The lack of interest in the subject reflects Sara Jeannette Duncan’s quip about Canadians, that “[w]e are ignored, and we ignore ourselves” (qtd. in Dean 10). Konrad Gross argues that literature featuring coureurs-de-bois, voyageurs, and trappers has been ignored in Canadian criticism. According to Gross, the modernists’ “diatribes against canoe and maple leaf” caused “Canadian criticism to turn a blind eye to the vast field of popular literature and to lose sight of an important Canadian tradition which (with the help of quite a few well-known artists) was established in the nineteenth century,” which risks “ignoring its immense iconographical value and neglecting its enormous appeal to many readers” (76). Gross refers to a critical bias that accounts for the disinterest in an imperial mission like the Nile Expedition that was connected to a romanticized, seemingly outdated part of Canada’s history. Michel

distinguishes between competing national narratives present in late nineteenth-century Canada: a romanticized version that looked nostalgically upon Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island and viewed Western civilization as recklessly encroaching on them, and one that promoted a view of Canada as modern and industrialized. Wolseley's inspiration for the expedition was connected to his nostalgia from an earlier venture with Canadian boatmen, and the Nile Expedition reflected the image of a bygone era that contrasted with Canada's hope to compete on equal footing in the Empire.

Some of the Canadian responses to the expedition reveal an attempt to represent Egyptians as backward and outdated in contrast to ancient history that saw Egypt as the seat of civilization, which enabled Canadians to depict themselves as modern and enlightened in comparison. Michel describes the reaction of Morrie MacKeand, a lieutenant in William Nassau Kennedy's Winnipeg Rifles and foreman in the expedition, who attempted to imagine "Luxor and 'ancient Thebes' as 'one mighty city of palaces, and the seat of civilization and the home of learning.' Centuries ago, he said, 'civilization was first rocked in the cradle of the Nile,' but today it is a 'place of lost glories' whose 'rains wonderfully contrast with the miserable mixed huts and hovels which are scattered throughout their midst'" (qtd. in Michel 291). MacKeand said Egyptians were "very dirty and live in huts built of corn stalks and mud," depicting them as primitive (qtd. in Michel 291), whereas Louis Jackson, an Indigenous boatman who wrote an account of the expedition, did not contrast the mud huts against the ancient architecture, instead appreciating them both (Michel 298). As Michel explains, "[i]n public memory and in the historiography, the Nile Voyageurs were forgettable because they were not the right type of imperialism for anyone's taste. They did not cohere to any of the scenarios about

Canada's relation to empire that were in play in 1885 nor did they complement anyone's national identity narratives in the years to follow" (Michel 482). Despite the absence of a coherent national narrative, the literature of the Nile Expedition reveals a fascinating depth of engagement with the overseas expedition that inspired much unexamined Canadian literature.

MacLaren emphasizes the national mythology generated by Canadian participation in the Nile Expedition. According to him, the Canadian boatmen demonstrated that

Canada was indeed becoming a nation. They had participated with honour as a Canadian contingent in the scramble to save Gordon, on the outcome of which the whole world had set its eyes. And still in the Sudan were dozens of their comrades who had re-enlisted . . . ensuring that the young nation of Canada would share in the dramatic dénouement of the adventure. (MacLaren 91)

MacLaren connects international serviced with nationhood. In *The Governor-General's Body Guard* (1902), Ernest J. Chambers points out that "[t]he incident of the Voyageurs was one of even more importance than appeared at the time the contingent was raised" and was "eloquent proof" of a united Empire (84). Chambers quotes Wolseley, the British General in command of the Nile Expedition, who remarked on "the most useful body of boatmen" who "showed a high military and patriotic spirit, making light of difficulties, and working with that energy and determination which have always characterized Her Majesty's Canadian forces" (89). Wolseley's remarks emphasize Canada's participation in the Nile Expedition as exemplary of the militaristic nature of the young nation.

Thomas Archer describes the voyageurs' prowess in *The War in Egypt and the Soudan: An Episode in the History of the British Empire* (1887):

There was, perhaps, no more striking indication of the far-reaching resources of the British empire than the engagement of the Canadian voyageurs, the grave skilful boatmen and half-breed Indians of the Great Lakes, to enlist for duty in navigating the Nile and guiding the great flotilla that was to carry British soldiers to the remote border-lands and arid deserts of the Soudan. ... The greater number of the Canadians undoubtedly did their work well, and the manner in which the pioneer expedition surmounted the difficulties of the river entitled them to confidence. ... The soldiers, however, thoroughly appreciated the skill and alacrity of the Canadians, without whose coolness and experience at the helm the voyage could not have been made. (249)

It is impressive that in a multivolume international work, the Canadian voyageurs are so lavishly praised for their skill at navigating the waters. Vance argues that, “[o]nce the souvenirs had outlived their usefulness as sources of celebrity, most of the boatmen probably put aside their service in the Sudan and said no more about it” (*Maple Leaf* 19). For the militia officers, however, “the expedition remained a shining moment of imperial solidarity. Fighting the Fenians or the Métis was amusing, but ambitious Canadian soldiers craved the kind of opportunity that only a global empire could provide. So, when Britain mounted another foray towards the Upper Nile in 1896, Canadians were ready and willing to assist” (Vance, *Maple Leaf* 19-20). Archer points out that, “of the 377 men who had left Canada ten had died, six of them having been drowned in the Nile. They had been engaged only for six months, but eighty-nine of them had renewed their service, and



of these eighty-seven had gone with the river column, where both their officers and men had worked with untiring vigour and dauntless courage” (219). MacLaren adds that this was an event “in the gradual evolution of Canadian nationhood” (130). As MacLaren’s work suggests, the concept of Canadian nationhood that emerged during the Nile Expedition was framed around national contributions to imperial military efforts. However, it is important to note that, as Michel points out, many of the men recruited for the Nile “did not go on the expedition as a demonstration of imperial loyalty, they went as workers on a contract” (386). Even though when the men’s contract expired General Gordon was still not rescued, only eighty-nine of the approximately 400 men re-engaged for the rest of the expedition (Michel 383).

Several authors highlight the particular skill of the Canadian voyageurs. In doing so, these authors indicate the voyageurs garnered an international reputation based on their river skill. William Wye Smith’s “The Canadians on the Nile” celebrates Canada’s participation in the Nile Expedition, suggesting as it does so that Canadians will be keen to help in future engagements and have achieved distinction within the British Empire because of the nation’s participation. The poem has a song-like rhyme and rhythm in the same style as Thomas Moore’s “A Canadian Boat Song” (1805). For Smith, Canada melds into Egypt, for “the East is but the West, with the sun a little hotter; / And the pine becomes a palm, by the dark Egyptian water” (1-2). The first lines are reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling’s “The Ballad of East and West” (1889). Robert Lecker argues in *Keepers of the Code: English-literary Anthologies and the Representation of Nation* (2013) that W. D. Lighthall included Smith’s poem in his anthology *Songs of the Great Dominion: Voices from the Forests and Waters, the Settlements and Cities of Canada*

(1889) because he was interested in “promoting Canada as a mystic new world where explorations of forest and river promise an entirely new perspective” (50). Lecker argues that Smith “presents the Ottawa River as ‘dark Egyptian water,’” and the “landscape is mystical, transformative, metaphoric” (50). Smith writes: “Then, it’s homeward when the run is o’er! o’er stream, and ocean deep— / To bring the memory of the Nile, where the maple shadows sleep!” (15-16). It is the memory of Canadian participation on the Nile that is important to Smith, which exemplifies the efforts to create a history for the new nation. For Smith, the Nile Expedition serves as an example of future Canadian military participation: “And it yet may come to pass, that the hearts and hands so ready / May be sought again to help, when some poise is off the steady!” (19-20). When Smith writes that “the Maple and the Pine be matched, with British Oak the while, / As once beneath Egyptian suns, the Canadians on the Nile!” (21-22), his metaphoric language suggests that Canadian equality with Britain resulted from Canadian participation in the Nile Expedition.

James McIntyre, the Ingersoll “Cheese” or “Dairy Poet,” and author of the famed “Ode on the Mammoth Cheese” (1884), also wrote a tribute to the Canadian Voyageurs. In the first quatrain of “Canadian Voyageurs on the Nile,” McIntyre highlights the degree to which the Canadians participated in the work of empire, impressing the British soldiers:

The British soldiers on the Nile  
 With gratitude did kindly smile,  
 On the Canadian voyageurs  
 Who skilfully did ply their oars. (1-4)

McIntyre suggests that the Canadians had a skill that the British did not possess, indicating a particular need for the Canadians in this overseas engagement. In McIntyre's poem, the voyageurs' international expedition only solidifies the boatmen's sense of domestic longing:

For in such toils they did partake,  
 On each native stream and lake,  
 Thoughts of their homes in visions throng,  
 While singing Canadian boat song. (9-12)

The Canadians sing a common song while traversing the Nile, for McIntyre's reference to the famous "A Canadian Boat Song" speaks to the popularity of Moore's poem in the nineteenth century. As Gross observes, Moore's song "started a spate of nineteenth-century works on the voyageurs and determined some of the most persistent literary conventions in which the voyageurs were enshrined" (77). McIntyre links the convention of the voyageurs singing boat songs with the romantic notion that they lived close to nature. The voyageurs also draw from a common bank of memories because they "never / Forgot the land of lake and river" (15-16). Even the mystic Nile could not compete with Canada's own lakes and rivers: although the Canadians were on the Nile, McIntyre claims that they were "dream[ing] about their own St. Lawrence" (18), just like the Zouaves' expedition to Rome leaves the speaker of Bellemare's "Salut du Zouave a sa patrie" (1900) apostrophizing to the Saint Lawrence River. Despite accusations that French Canadians were more hesitant to fight for Canada than their English counterparts, McIntyre's final quatrain emphasizes French-Canadian participation:

Those who speak the tongue of France,

From the banks of the St. Lawrence,  
 At call to arms quick advance,  
 With rifle, bayonet and lance. (29-32)

McIntyre's final stanza dispels the myth of pacifism referred to above by Roussel and Boucher, because the final lines suggest that French Canadians will in fact "quick advance, / With rifle, bayonet and lance" (31-32).

Nix's poem "The Voyageur's Grave on the Nile" was first published in *The Week* in December 1884, and it was reprinted in the *Canada Educational Monthly and School Chronicle* that same month. Nix writes:

Fearless, he cared not how  
 Slender his boat.  
 Down the St. Lawrence now  
 No more he'll float.  
 Strange here in stranger land,  
 Dead on the burning sand. (19-24)

Nix's lines "Strange here in stranger land, / Dead on the burning sand" (23-24) echo forward in Charles G. D. Roberts's poem "Canada" (1886), which reads in part:

They wait; but some in exile, some  
 With strangers housed, in stranger lands,--  
 And some Canadian lips are dumb  
 Beneath Egyptian sands. (44-47)

Both poems echo the Bible's Book of Exodus: "And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land" (*King James*

*Version*, 2:22). Exodus relays the story of Moses's birth after Hebrew sons have been decreed to die in the Nile River, a narrative link that connects Canada's birth with the Nile Expedition.

Roberts's "Canada" features the Nile Expedition as the focal point in its climactic final three stanzas. D. M. R. Bentley argues that Roberts links Canada's participation in the Nile Expedition to "the occult ('mystic') knowledge associated with ancient Egypt" (*The Confederation Group* 76). Roberts's poem links Canadian history to that of an ancient Empire:

O mystic Nile! Thy secret yields  
 Before us; thy most ancient dreams  
 Are mixed with far Canadian fields  
 And murmur of Canadian streams.

But thou, my Country, dream not thou!  
 Wake, and behold how night is done,—  
 How on thy breast, and o'er thy brow,  
 Bursts the uprising sun! (48-55)

Finally, however, Roberts's poem calls for an awakening of "national consciousness and action" (Bentley, *The Confederation Group* 77). Roberts naturalizes Canada's connection to Egypt's crystalized history by linking it to the land itself: it is the "Canadian fields" and "Canadian streams" that are now mixed with the Nile's "most ancient dreams." Like Smith's "The Canadians on the Nile" in which, as seen a moment ago, Canada mystically melds into Egypt, Roberts's poem presents the mystical transformation of Egypt into

Canada, by blurring the descriptions of the Nile with Canadian fields and thus transforming the Nile into a Canadian stream. By Canadianizing the Egyptian landscape, Roberts suggests that participation in the Nile Expedition was a means of nation-formation—and possibly even empire-building—for Canada. Moreover, the fact that the two poets link the bodies buried “[b]eneath Egyptian sands” or “[d]ead on the burning sand” to Canadian identity is suggestive of the nationalizing impulse that occurs when Canadian bodies are left on foreign soil during overseas wars (Roberts 48; McIntyre 24).<sup>18</sup> In addition to the fields and streams, Canadian bodies now form part of the Egyptian landscape.

Of course, Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier” (1915) is a classic British example of the homeland becoming a part of the foreign landscape, for “there’s some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England. There shall be / In that rich earth a richer dust concealed” (Brooke 2-4). A cruder example of Canadian bodies remaining in foreign territory during the Nile Expedition can be found in William Telford’s “Welcome: To Our Peterborough Canadian Voyageurs on Their Safe Return From Egypt” printed in the *Peterborough Review* on 9 March 1885 and included in *The Poems of William Telford* (1887). Telford writes, “[n]o, death has silenced several tongues, before their work was done, / The fishes of the Nile may feast on Canada’s brave sons” (43-44). Like the British bodies enriching the “foreign field,” Telford suggests that the Canadian bodies will be immersed in the landscape when they serve as food for the anthropophilic fish. Returning

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the soldiers’ bodies left buried at Vimy Ridge became symbols of the national identity that had been achieved in that place: “[i]n Canada after the war, the impact of Vimy Ridge did not decline. It became the symbol of Canadian ability on the battlefield [...]. Canada had come of age” (“Canada and Vimy Ridge” n.p.).

to Roberts's poem, the final lines suggest that, despite Canada's newness in comparison to the ancient empire, the country can "wake" as the "uprising sun" because of the nation's participation in the Nile expedition; nationhood can and must be embraced.

In *The Silver Maple*, Keith connects Canada's participation in the Nile Expedition to ancient history, which provides the nation with an established narrative on which to map the voyageurs' feats in the Soudan. In the novel, two Ottawa loggers, Scotty and Dan Murphy, leave Canada for the Nile Expedition. Keith connects Canadian participation in the Nile Expedition with biblical history, comparing Scotty's participation in the Nile Expedition with the flight into Egypt of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus:

[W]hile they worked on the upper Ottawa, the call for the Nile voyageurs had come. Here was an opportunity to see the world and serve the Empire, and the boys had gladly embraced it. And so Scotty was going down into Egypt, because the great Controller of Destiny had need of him there, as He had long before needed another young man in that same land to perfect His divine plans. (309-10)

The passive voice at the beginning of the paragraph leaves the "caller" in the "call for the Nile voyageurs" absent. Keith frames the call as the divine voice of the "great Controller of Destiny" calling Scotty to Egypt. The biblical allusion to the Book of the Prophet Isaiah gives Canadian participation in the Nile Expedition providential authority. Not only does Keith link the Canadian expedition in Egypt with the authority of biblical history, she also connects Canada with the Promised Land. When the Canadians are victorious in a skirmish, she refers to Canada as "the new land of promise" (332). Moreover, the narrator alludes to the Promised Land when describing the voyageurs' return to Canada: "And surely the Israelites, on the borders of Canaan, felt no more joy

than did the two voyageurs when they first sighted the green shores of Canada” (335).

Keith establishes a connection between Canadian and biblical history that links Canada’s overseas military participation with an established historical narrative for the new nation and gives the expedition a divine precedent.

Throughout the novel, Keith glorifies the Canadians. After the fall of Khartoum, the column needed to descend the Nile, and “General Brackenbury gave orders that none but the Canadians should be entrusted with the descent; so, early in the morning, the voyageurs walked down the stream to survey it” (325). However, for Keith’s voyageurs, the Nile Expedition was not so much about defending British General Charles Gordon as it was about conquering the Nile. Keith writes:

Many a time in the face of temptation [Scotty] blessed the saintly old woman [his Granny] far away in the Canadian backwoods for the godly training he had received beneath the Silver Maple. He found he needed all his strength in this new, wild life; for a more gaily-gallant, reckless, devil-may-care crew than the Canadian voyageurs, who fought and overcame the ancient Nile, surely never wielded paddles. His chief trial was his own faithful follower, for Dan Murphy strove to out-Canadian the wildest river-driver of the Ottawa valley. (322)

This passage suggests that for these voyageurs, the Nile Expedition was not so much about rescuing General Gordon, but, rather, fighting and overcoming the Nile that spurred on their expedition. Keith’s depiction of the voyageurs as “wild,” “gaily-gallant,” “reckless” and possessing a “devil-may-care” attitude establishes the Canadians as independent colonials, contrasting the discipline of the British regulars they were going to assist on the Nile. Keith’s depiction of Murphy represents the image of the scrappy



colonial warrior or the citizen soldier. Although his request to join the British advancing column on the shore at Kirbekan was denied, he “had not been trained to army discipline and was not minded to lose the glorious chance of participating in a real battle for such a trifling consideration as one man’s opinion” (Keith 323-24). Thus, Murphy “appropriated the accoutrements of the first man who fell, he rushed to the front, and was right in the van of the victorious charge that swept the enemy from their rocky stronghold,” thereby becoming “the hero of the Canadian voyageurs for the remainder of the journey” (Keith 324). Keith ennobles the image of the battle-hungry citizen soldier. MacLaren notes that “[a]broad, overseas service in Victoria’s army and navy was seen as an adventure, but it was also a place where Canadians learned to know themselves” (159). Keith’s anathemia in this passage—her substitution of the noun Canadian for the verb Canadian—suggests that the Canadians’ participation on the Nile was about proving one’s “Canadianness” outside of Canada’s borders.

Keith’s depiction of Dan Murphy’s desire to be both voyageur and soldier reflects the attempts to negotiate the complicated identity of the civilian recruits for the British military expedition. Canadians were disappointed when the British War Office rejected the idea of Canadian troops for the Sudan after General Gordon’s death (Michel 421). Michel points out the paradox that the “great deal of public discussion occurred around the mere *offer* of troops from Canada to the extent that it eclipsed the news and discussion of the *actual* services rendered by the voyageurs” (421). Returning to Telford’s “Welcome: To Our Peterborough Canadian Voyageurs on Their Safe Return From Egypt” reveals the degree to which militarism invaded discourses describing the Canadians’ expedition. Telford writes that although the boatmen were “not called to face

the foe” (17) or to be “exposed to shot or shell” (19), they demonstrated their bravery during the expedition, exemplifying their “daring skill” (20). Telford describes the “dangers” that loomed and the “threatening death,” but insists the boatmen “never wavered” and their “courage conquered fear” (25-26). He concludes the stanza with the assurance that “[t]he precious lives of British troops gave impulse to [the boatmen’s] arm” (28), referring to their paddling, but of course, “arm” also means “[a]ny of the major divisions of the army” (*OED Online*). Michel also points to the cleverness of Telford’s play on the double meaning of “blade” as both paddle and bayonet:

Our Canada is young, my boys, and little known to fame,  
 Your deeds in Egypt will impart fresh lustre to her name  
 If Britain needs your aid again, when she makes her appeal  
 You will stand forth to wield the blade, yes, either wood or steel. (49-52)

However, Michel points out that it is “an unstable metaphor if one hoped to imply that these two roles—civilian and soldier—were ultimately equally valued. Canada is so unaccustomed to fame, that it will take any sort of it that it can get, he seems to imply” (447). Michel argues that Canada was unsatisfied with a civilian role in the expedition and many Canadians were eager to participate in Britain’s military engagement. Like Telford’s poem that describes the Canadians’ river work in militaristic terms, in Nix’s “The Voyageur’s Grave on the Nile,” the poet infuses the description of the voyageur’s burial with the language of military custom. The speaker instructs “comrades” to “[t]hrow a flag over him” (6) and “[b]ury him as he lies,/ Warrior-like dressed” (9-10). The descriptions of the boatmen in militaristic terms evince efforts to define them as citizen-soldiers, thereby attaching a military identity to the Canadian nation.

In Roberts's Petrarchan sonnet "Khartoum," the poem laments the loss of General Gordon, but a collective speaker thanks the siege at Khartoum for revealing the empire's resolve:

How still the one a thousand crowds outweighs,—  
 Still one man's mood sways millions,—one man's doom  
 Smites nations;—and our burning spirits own  
 Not sordid these nor unheroic days! (11-14)

The anaphora in the poem—the repetition of "still" in the first two lines and "one man's" at the beginning of two phrases—emphasizes the continuity of the Empire following the death of General Gordon. The litotes in the poem's final lines further underscores the idea that Gordon's death did not diminish the heroism of the British Empire.

With a similar elegiac poetics, Frederick George Scott also mourned the loss of General Gordon in "Requiescat: General Gordon" (1885), when he eulogizes the fallen British hero:

O Thou twice hero—hero in thy life  
 And in thy death—we have no power to crown  
 Thy nobleness; we weep thine arm in strife;  
 We weep, but glory in thy life laid down. (1-4)

Scott's litotes in the second stanza emphasizes Gordon's isolation at Khartoum:

There comes no voice from Egypt, none did stand  
 Beside thee fall'n; as who the winepress trod,  
 Thou wert alone; thy face is hid in sand,  
 And thy last moments in the ear of God. (5-8)

Scott does not glorify the Canadians who travelled to the Nile, for “none did stand” beside Gordon, and he “wert alone” with his face “hid in sand.” Scott’s biblical allusion is to Isaiah 63:3: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me.” The image of Gordon’s dejection and comparison to Christ’s lonely sacrifice contrast the legacy Gordon leaves behind. Scott’s description of Gordon dying in the natural world emphasizes the significance of his death for the spiritual world:

Saint! hero! through the clouds of doubt that loom  
 O’er darkling skies, thy life hath power to bless;  
 We thank thee thou hast shown us in the gloom  
 Once more Christ’s power and childlike manliness. (21-24)

Whereas the bodies “hid in sand” prompt Roberts to turn to the Canadian nation, in Scott’s poem, Gordon’s death at Khartoum confirms the power of Christianity for the collective speaker. Scott’s poem concludes with an image reminiscent of the Christ-like posture of General Wolfe below dark clouds in Benjamin West’s painting *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770), which connects Gordon to Canadian history and hero-worship. Scott’s depiction of Gordon as a martyr further establishes the legitimacy of the British expedition.

Stephen M. Miller explains that in late-Victorian culture, “[m]artyrdom for empire was elevated to a new level. Charles Gordon, in particular, who died at Khartoum while defending the interests of the empire, took on an almost mythical status” (33-34). Like the authors who compared the Papal Zouaves to the Crusaders, authors who responded to the Nile Expedition attempted to position it as a Christian mission. In “Campaigning in the Soudan” (1896), Canadian journalist Charles Lewis Shaw, who

went on the Nile Expedition, depicts Gordon as a martyr when he writes that he “laid down his life for England’s sake” (224). Shaw also calls Gordon “the Great Christian Knight of the nineteenth century” (qtd. in “Canadian on the Nile” 5). In Machar’s poem “Khartoum” (1885), titled identically to Roberts’s tribute to General Gordon, she mourns the death of the General, for “England’s noblest blood / Had drenched the desert sands!” (7-8). Machar also suggests a link between the fight for Khartoum and Christian missionary work. Machar writes, “The Christian knight, most dear to Britain’s heart— / As faith outweigheth gold— / Had fallen— [...]” (9-11). Machar, like Scott, explains Gordon’s death in Christian terms:

But patient! for we know God’s great designs  
 Are wrought not in a day;  
 Through clouds and darkness still His purpose shines  
 And shall shine on for aye. (17-20)

The “clouds and darkness” in Machar’s poem, like the “clouds of doubt” and “darkling skies” in Scott’s elegy, do not cast doubt on God’s existence. The heavy Christian imagery is significant because of the death of Gordon at the hands of Muslim troops. Although thoughts of Empire and hopes for adventure inspired some participants, other volunteers for the Expedition viewed it as an opportunity for the West to civilize the East; the men believed they were going on a civilizing mission (Michel 237). Thus, it was necessary for these authors not only to confirm the strength of the Empire and the rising prominence of the Canadian nation, but also to assert the strength of the Christian worldview.

In addition to the pro-Imperialist and patriotic poetry, several literary responses to the Nile Expedition indicate Canada's ambivalence about the overseas service. Michel quotes from "The Nile Expedition," published by *Grip* editor (and likely the poem's author) J. W. Bengough on 27 September 1884, to demonstrate that *Grip* was critical of the war and did not believe Canadians should risk their lives for the dangerous expedition. As Michel points out, the poem about "a Canuck named Bill Boyle" (1) presents the badgering Bill receives to enlist, for "they kept talking right at" (5) and "pounded it into" (9) him that he should go:

Then of "England" they talked to Bill Boyle  
 And the "glory" he'd win up the Nile—  
 He said, "glory's all right but I don't have to fight—  
 I shall hang on to life for a while!" (13-16)

The dialect poem mocks the rhetoric of imperial service because Bill rejects the notion of fighting for "England" and "glory." The poem concludes with Bill's refutation of a British identity, for "[w]hen they found he'd no taste for the Nile, / "No good Briton are you!" Replied Bill, "That is true," / "I'm the growth of Canadian sile! [sic]" (22-24).

Another dialect poem, Drummond's "A Canadian Voyageur's Account of the Nile Expedition: 'Maxime Labelle'" (1897), differs from the celebratory and Imperialistic poems on the Nile Expedition because Drummond's speaker reveals an interest not in the celebration of Empire, but the financial compensation from the Nile Expedition: "So Joe arrange de whole beez-ness wit' Queen Victoriaw; / Two dollar day—work all de tam—dat's purty good l'argent!" (17-18). Rather than emphasize a commitment to Empire, this voyageur looks for the financial benefits of guiding forces on

the Nile; “the poet surely intends the naïve and mercenary voyageur to be the brunt of the joke” (Pollock 116). Grace Pollock recovers Drummond’s neglected poetry in her article “William Henry Drummond’s True ‘Canayen’: Dialect Poetry and the Politics of Canadian Imperialism” (2003). Pollock notes how Maxime Labelle, the poem’s speaker, “expresses a humorous irreverence for British soldiers and imperialist ambitions even in the midst of supporting Queen Victoria’s colonial war in Egypt” (115). Drummond’s dialect poems reflect “the romantic temptation to seek out and exalt the peculiar and the quaint” (Berger, *The Sense* 143), and mock the French Canadians’ perceived simplicity. For example, the speaker is unable to appreciate the foreign environment:

De gang she’s travel, travel, t’roo many strange contree,  
 An’ ev’ry place is got new nam’, I don’t remember, me,  
 We see some fonny t’ing, for sure, more fonny I can tell,  
 But w’en we reach de Neel Riviere, dat’s feel more naturel (29-32)

Whereas some of the voyageurs remarked upon seeing the world’s wonders, such as Egypt’s pyramids, Drummond mocks the French Canadian’s intelligence when the speaker remarks on the “fonny t’ing” he saw and cannot remember the names of the towns along the way. Drummond satirizes the fact that the voyageurs did not serve in a military capacity, for the speaker does not even seem to understand the military context: “[b]ut w’ere’s de war? I can’t mak’ out, don’t see no fight at all! / She’s not’ing but une Grande Piquique, dat’s las’ in all de fall!” (81-82). Drummond’s adoption of the French-Canadian English voice enables him to critique the fact that the voyageurs are fighting in a war that does not seem at all warlike.

In the short story “The Homecoming of Ovide Bouchette” (1899), Henry Cecil Walsh complicates the notion of the soldier’s return. As in Drummond’s habitant poems, Walsh satirizes the perceived provincialism of rural French Canadians by means of his characterization of Ovide Bouchette, a French Canadian who participated in the Nile Expedition. Walsh satirizes the importance of the Nile Expedition, hyperbolically describing how at home, Ovide was the head of the house, “in Egypt, in the stern of a boat, he had as absolutely ruled some of the British army as if he, a god, had descended from the clouds to do it” (7). Walsh mocks Ovide’s belief in the insufficiency of the commissariat during the expedition, believing that it “was weak in Quebec onions and tobacco” (8). Upon his return, Ovide was “exhilarated” that “his feet pressed a road that would lead him past onions enough to give the whole British army a breath” and his eyes glistened at the plots of tobacco, “a joyful sight” (Walsh 9). From a hilltop, Ovide saw that “in contrast to the hard ochreous tints of Egypt [there was] a wide sloping reach of country, fielded like a checkerboard, dotted with old colonial farm-houses, dressed in the gold and green and crimson hues of autumn, and bounded by a bright streak—the silvering Ottawa—and the far-off, low-looking, purple Laurentian mountains beyond” (Walsh 10). Walsh’s description of the Quebec countryside reflects the nostalgia that characterized late nineteenth-century writing in Canada as “a result of increasing urbanism and encroaching modernity” (Bentley, *Canadian Architexts* 89). Ovide’s desire to return home for Quebec’s agricultural products and his loving description of the landscape—his “rural longing” (Bentley, *Canadian Architexts* 89)—contribute to the story’s problematic depiction of French Canadians as regressive.



Ovide's joy upon surveying the landscape after his return is disrupted when, upon returning home, he is met with mystified silence; someone accidentally throws a tomato at him, to which an offended Ovide gives "a slight, stiff bow and a half-military, half-civil salute—sternly puzzled over his queer, unaccountable reception, that none should answer him, all stare, and one even fling at him—turned and left with a precision that suggested the martial atmosphere out of which he had just come" (Walsh 14). Ovide's "half-military, half-civil salute" reflects a sense of mockery at the civilian nature of the expedition. The thrower of the tomato believed that Ovide was "a spirit," for "[t]he news came that you were dead—drowned!" (Walsh 15). Later in the story, Ovide explains that it was "out of Alcide Bourette's boat, not [his], that the officer fell. Alcide could no more swim than fly, yet he jumped in after him" (Walsh 17-18). The immediate confusion upon Ovide's return foreshadows the ensuing dramatic irony. When Ovide returns to his house, he cannot find his wife and children, so his friends have to walk him to the home of Ferdinand, whom "had lost his wife" three years ago "in his prime, and fairly prosperous" (Walsh 21). Ovide's wife does not "greet[] him with fervor," but instead "weakly put him from her with a shudder, and then sank down upon her knees" (Walsh 22). Ovide mistakes her shuddering for elation, and the dramatic irony continues when Ovide thanks Ferdinand for taking care of his wife and children while he was away.

After his speech, Ovide's wife was crying "and rocking to and fro upon her knees, with great catching sobs, like to one in the bitterest of grief" (Walsh 24). Ferdinand reminds Ovide that everyone thought he was dead, and the narrator explains Ovide's realization: "He had returned to find himself regarded as a dead man, his wife married again, and his children under a step-father's roof. This, then, was his homecoming"

(Walsh 30). Ovide's son describes his father's time in Egypt as "helping soldiers to fight" (Walsh 25), which emasculates Ovide in addition to his cuckolding. The son's comment also reflects how, when the Canadian contingent was announced, some newspapers were disappointed "that Canadians would be going as boatmen, saying that they would not win much glory packing supplies over the rapids like 'army mules'" (Michel 335). Ovide was "conscious of the one sapping, thumping idea that dead men—dead by false report—should sometimes remain dead" (Walsh 30). Walsh does not present Ovide as a battle-tried hero from the Sudan, but instead as a pathetic character. Ovide's son believes that Ovide will return to Ferdinand's house "with some of the soldiers to help him that he helped" up the Nile to kick Ferdinand out of the home and asks his father when he will return "for good" (Walsh 31). Ovide answers by walking away from his family after asking his son to pray for him. The story concludes with the recovery of Ovide's deceased body from a fallen tree at a lumber camp on the Mattawa, "[a]nd that was how Ovide Bouchette, feet first in a baggage car, came home for good" (Walsh 32). The ironic "homecoming" of the story's conclusion is another example of Walsh undermining the importance of the Nile Expedition by means of a racist depiction of French Canadians as pathetic and simplistic.

Nearly a decade after Gordon's death, Machar writes about Gordon's trials in "Ten Years' Captivity in the Soudan," published in *The Week* on 26 January 1894. She highlights the way in which a collective "we" "still remember the eager fitting out of the expedition, its enthusiastic start, the long months of suspense, during which we watched its terribly slow progress—the hoping against hope—until the close of the tragedy and the fate of the hero were known beyond a doubt" (Machar 202). In the article, her review

of Joseph Ohrwalder's book *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan Being an Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahdiism and of Subsequent Events in the Sudan to the Present Time* (1891) reveals Machar's hyperbolic assessment of Gordon's stand at Khartoum:

we can look into beleaguered Khartoum and see Gordon, surrounded, harassed, almost heartbroken, by treachery everywhere, yet bearing himself always as the hero he was, and still putting an unwavering trust in God, and in the expected succor which arrived, alas! just two days too late! Seldom has a sadder, more heroic story been written in blood and tears! It is a picture which redeems much of our modern faithlessness—worthy of being set side by side with the *Morte d'Arthur*, or the quest of Sir Galahad. (Machar 202)

Machar elevates Gordon's story to the status of Arthurian legend and compares him to Arthur's most virtuous knight, Sir Galahad; the depth of feeling Machar conveys in the passage demonstrates her level of engagement with the Nile Expedition.

In *The Week*, Alice Jones's series "Nile Vignettes" (1895) features short descriptions of her travels in the Nile region aboard the Thomas Cook and Son vessel *Rameses*. She describes the passengers' descent into the cataract in four boats: "It was inexpressibly weird and desolate, those black, tortured, twisted rock forms—that tumult of waters—the wild, brown figures that leaped, and dived and swam among the rocks and rapids" (873). Jones personifies the cataracts and intensifies their activity with her use of asyndeton and polysyndeton: the "black, tortured, twisted" quality of the waters is contrasted with multiple conjunctions connecting the active verbs "leaped," "dived," and "swam." This hyperbolic depiction heightens the sense of the Canadians' expertise when Jones writes, "[t]hey say that these cataract Arabs were perfectly astounded by the river

lore of the Canadian voyageurs. They had always been so certain that no one save themselves could understand *their* cataract, that to see strangers calmly take possession and management, was a great blow to them” (873). Jones juxtaposes “the tumult” and “wild” waters with the Canadian voyageurs’ ability to navigate them “calmly.” Her appeal to anonymous authority—“[t]hey say”—and use of the third person perspective portraying the Canadian voyageurs’ skill from the Arabs’ perspective emphasizes the voyageurs’ success on the Nile, and suggests that the Canadian boatmen impressed the local community. The idea that the local residents could be “astounded” by the Canadians’ knowledge of the Nile—by their “river lore”—mythologizes the voyageurs. Moreover, the ease with which the voyageurs overcame the Nile in Jones’s account indicates a presumption of racial superiority. Jones’s passage about the Arabs’ perspective of the voyageurs gestures at the complex racialization at work during the Nile Expedition. In Frederic Villiers’s “Twenty Years on the War Path: X: Dongoloa” (1900), his metaphoric language dramatizes the Canadians’ accomplishments on the Nile. It is noteworthy that Villiers—a British war correspondent—remarks on the Canadian voyageurs in his memoir. He writes, “[w]hat a quaint fleet that was as it stood out in full sail from the Sarass [sic] levée, the Camel Corps<sup>19</sup> cheering from the shore as the Canadian *voyageurs* steered their English brethren safely past the porphyry rocks which looked like huge black teeth in the dead white sand on either side of the narrow pass that enters the Sarass [sic] basin” (358). He personifies the rocks, contrasting their “huge

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<sup>19</sup> The Camel Corps was made up of British Infantry and Cavalry who were mounted on camels to allow transport across the desert if it were necessary in rescuing General Gordon. The Nile Expedition marked the first instance in which the British army mounted camels, a strategy the army used again in the First World War (Gleichen 2).

black teeth” against the “dead white sand,” a juxtaposition of colours that highlights the capabilities of the Canadian voyageurs. The responses above reveal attempts to define Canada by decades-long interest in the Nile Expedition that range from ambivalence to fascination, and reveal efforts to define link international military service with Canadian nationhood.

### 1.3 “Going Native” on the Nile: Indigenization and the Nile Expedition

In *The Campaign of the Cataracts*, Butler praises the Indigenous boatmen’s skill, noting particularly “those quick down-strokes that seem to be the birthright of the Indian *voyageur* alone” (141-42). Here, Butler valorizes Indigenous prowess, isolating the specific skills of Indigenous boatmen. The reverence for the particular skill of the Indigenous boatman is interesting because, although “the Indians [were] essential as fur traders to the early economy and of less value thereafter” (Goldie, *Fear* 5), this incident in Canada’s history suggests the opposite: Indigenous boatmen were extremely valuable to the British in this overseas expedition. The British highlighted Indigenous boatmen’s skills by using their service in the first international conflict for the Empire in which Canadians participated.

The Indigenous background of many of the Canadian voyageurs proved to be quite a fascination; the fact that Indigenous voyageurs travelled to the Nile because of their unique skill seemed to overshadow the voyageurs failing to rescue General Gordon. Archer notes that the fact that “troops leaving India and the West Indies should be intercepted and conveyed to Egypt was a less striking circumstance than that many

children of ‘Red Indians,’ the Cree and Iroquois half-breeds, should be seen quietly and confidently steering through the land of Nubia to the Land of the Blacks” (249). Louis Jackson, a veteran of the Nile expedition from Kahnawà:ke, records that, near Dongola, “[t]he natives came rushing out of their huts with their children, goats, and dogs and stood on the beach to see the North American Indian boatmen” (150). Jackson distinguishes among the voyageurs, for he suggests the local community rushed to see the “North American Indian boatmen,” which suggests the boatmen were intriguing to locals in Northern Africa. This passage also inverts the exoticism that typically informed Western constructions about the East. The responses to the Indigenous boatmen demonstrate the complicated racial hierarchies evident during the expedition. Jackson continues:

We sailed from Alexandria on February 6, 1885, well-pleased with what we had seen in the land of the Pharaohs and proud to have shown the world that the dwellers on the banks of the Nile, after navigating it for centuries, could still learn something of the craft from the Iroquois Indians of North America and the Canadian voyageurs of many races. I cannot conclude without expressing my satisfaction at the handsome treatment accorded us by the British government, and should our services be of assistance in the proposed fall campaign in Egypt, they will be freely given. (157)

Jackson’s pride about the expedition is directly linked to a demonstration abroad of successful river navigation, for he is “proud to have shown the world” his craft. In his Preface to *Our Caughnawagas in Egypt* (1885), T. S. Brown writes:

There is something unique in the idea of the aborigines of the New World being sent for to teach the Egyptians how to pass the cataracts of the Nile, which has been navigated in some way by them for thousands of years that should make this little book attractive to all readers, especially as it is written by one born and bred in Caughnawaga, who the quick eye of an Indian has noticed things unnoticed by ordinary tourists and travellers. (132-33)

As Jace Weaver has pointed out, Brown's Preface, in which he remarks on Jackson's narrative, reflects the "rhetoric of novelty," a concept that Robert Warrior used to refer to the way in which Indigenous productions are framed as new or unique (125). Like Jones's presumption of racial superiority over the "cataract Arabs," Brown invokes essentialist logic and relies on common tropes such as the "quick eye of an Indian" to suggest that there is something inherent in Indigenous peoples that makes them particularly suited to rapid river navigation. Brown's remark also recalls Butler's appreciation of the "quick down-strokes" of the Indigenous boatman. These stereotypic depictions of the Indigenous boatmen objectify them and exemplify attempts to justify using Indigenous labour for imperial pursuits.

To recall the previous section, Keith's characters in *The Silver Maple* try to "out-Canadian" each other. The notion of Dan Murphy attempting to "out-Canadian" the "wildest river driver of the Ottawa valley" indicates an effort at indigenization, whereby Keith depicts Murphy's attempt to approximate the skill of Indigenous boatmen as more "Canadian." Keith also thematizes Indigeneity to highlight the way in which one might "out-Canadian" another. In particular, Keith depicts Canada's participation in the Nile Expedition through one of her character's indigenization. Terry Goldie has developed this

term in Canadian literary criticism, elaborating on indigenization as the process “through which the ‘settler’ population attempts to become as though indigenous, as though ‘born’ of the land” (“The Man”). In *The Silver Maple*, Keith links Canada to Egypt’s ancient history by means of a process of indigenization, whereby navigating the Nile River—being a Canadian voyageur in Egypt—makes Scotty Indigenous. Keith focuses particularly on the possibility of distinguishing Indigenous voyageurs from the other Canadian boatmen on the Nile by physical appearance. An exchange between a “subaltern”<sup>20</sup> named Bobby and his companion highlights this attempt to distinguish the Indigenous from the other boatmen: “‘Indians be hanged!’ [the companion] exclaimed merrily. ‘More than half those fellows are no more Indians than you are. Jove, it does a fellow’s eyes good to see something from home. I’m going to have a chat with them’” (313-14). Keith plays here and later in the conversation with the concept of Métis or mixed heritage, but also reveals the anxieties about the lack of proficiency in navigating the Nile revealed by some of the white boatmen on the excursion. For example, John M. Cook from Cook and Sons tourist company who believed that once the Canadian boatmen became disciplined on the river, they were “really first-class boatmen” except for “those who had come out more for the fun of the thing than anything else” (qtd. in Michel 364-65). The lengthy exchange continues:

“Surely, as I was born and brought up in Canada I’m likely to know a red Indian from myself now, am I not?”

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<sup>20</sup> In the context of Keith’s novel, “subaltern” refers to a junior officer in the military.



The subaltern looked annoyed. “I think you’re mistaken this time,” he said with some dignity; “perhaps an odd one or so may be white, but the majority are the real thing. Look at that big fellow there, now. I’ll bet two to one he’s a full blood, anyway.”

The other glanced at the man indicated. Scotty’s face and arms, always brown, had become almost copper-coloured in even his short exposure to the Egyptian sun, and his lithe, muscular figure, leaning easily against the tree, was not unlike that of the stalwart Caughnawagas from the St. Lawrence, but as the young naval officer looked at him he laughed derisively. (314)

Obviously, Keith is exploiting the misrecognition that is associated with mixed identity for the scene’s comedic irony, relying on problematic terms such as “the real thing” and blood quantum rhetoric such as “full blood.” She indigenizes Scotty by means of his physical description; he was “almost copper-coloured” and his figure “was not unlike” the boatmen from Kahnawà:ke. The subaltern is challenged to ask the man his nationality and promptly addresses the voyageur: “‘I say, Canadian,’ he said somewhat stiffly, ‘here’s a gentleman who says you’re not an Indian. Just tell him politely that he’s mistaken, please’” (315). Scotty does not realize he is being addressed, but before he can reply, Dan, one of Scotty’s friends from Canada who has also joined the voyageurs, prevents him from answering. Dan’s “red hair and Hibernian features could have left no doubt even in the subaltern’s mind as to his nationality,” and he “had been listening, with huge enjoyment, to the conversation. He had risen to his feet and was saluting with grave respect” (315). Of course, Dan’s features point to his Scottish nationality; Scotty’s Scottish heritage is clear from the eponymous given name. Dan says: “‘Anybody can see

he's an Indian. He belongs to one of our worst tribes—the Blood-drinkers, they call themselves. His name's Big Scalper. And sure,' he added, lowering his voice fearfully, 'it's the bloodthirsty brute he is, an' no mistake!'” (315). For the duration of the expedition, “Scotty was known throughout the column as Big Scalper, the fiercest Indian from the Canadian wilds” (320).

The representation of Indigenous people as “Blood-drinkers” and scalpers is severely problematic because it reinscribes and perpetuates racist stereotypes. It is also significant to consider the way in which indigenization operates in this passage. While Scotty is away from Canada, he “goes native.” The trope of “going native” is usually discussed in Canadian criticism as an example of the outsider integrating into Canadian culture, and manifesting traits associated with Indigenous peoples. Michel examines \ Shaw's “Random Reminiscences of a Nile Voyageur” (1893) in which a character also “goes native,” but he only gestures toward the topic in Keith's novel in a brief footnote. In this case, Scotty is not described as manifesting the traits of Arab culture, but, rather, the Indigenous peoples of his home country. This particular depiction of “going native” follows several examples in literature and popular culture in which a character exhibits the “fierce” behaviours accorded to Indigenous tribes—as described above—in a war-like setting.<sup>21</sup> Further, although many Indigenous men attended the expedition, in Keith's novel, they are incidental to the story other than as they figure in relation to Dan and Scotty and are not fully fleshed out as characters. Rather than focusing on an individual voyageur from Kahnawà:ke, Keith instead indigenizes Scotty. Keith's depiction of “the

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<sup>21</sup> A popular example of the trope of going native in the context of war is found in *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

ignoble savage” renders the Indigenous caricature non-threatening in this context, because the “fiercest Indian” is, in fact, not Indigenous, and is also not fierce. Keith’s novel plays upon the stereotype that the Scottish were more likely to “go native” than the English, which is evident in John Richardson’s *Wacousta* (1832), for *Wacousta* is also Scottish.

Scotty finds himself in a skirmish with part of the Sudanese army when he hears a familiar voice shout down the river:

Scotty’s heart leaped; he uttered a strange, weird yell—“Oro, Oro, woo-hoo!” It was the long, fierce battle-cry of Glenoro school. If Dan were in Egypt that would bring him, he knew!

“Oro! Oro!” came the answer; and like a sandstorm across the desert came the company of voyageurs, Dan at their head, uttering the blood-curdling war-whoop with which he had so often awakened the echoes of the Canadian swamps. (331-32)

Scotty does not seem “fierce,” but, rather, is in need of rescue. Dan intervenes with a “blood-curdling war-whoop”—the description of which is reminiscent of stereotypes of Indigenous and Scottish warriors, for “oro” is a Scottish sound—and then the Sudanese army retreats. As Goldie points out, “[t]erms such as ‘war-dance,’ ‘war-whoop,’ ‘tomahawk,’ and ‘dusky’ are immediately suggestive everywhere of the indigene” (*Fear* 10). Again, Keith’s indigenizing of her white characters is what enables their victory.

Upon returning home, Scotty is invigorated by the Canadian landscape:

His quiet mood did not last long. The Canadian air was getting into his blood again. A sudden whirr and flash, where a host of red-winged blackbirds arose in a

cloud from the road, proved too much for him. He leaped from the buggy, yelling like a madman, and for the rest of the journey was quite beyond the limits of reason. He sat in the vehicle only on rare occasions, and spent his time scrambling over fences, tearing into the woods and back again, chasing squirrels and whooping like an Indian, until his father privately questioned Scotty as to the effect of the Egyptian sun on the brain. (336-37)

Keith connects Scotty's sense of being overwhelmed by Canada's natural world with her character's indigenization, for, as Goldie points out, "the indigene's closeness to nature is used to justify an emphasis on the indigene as land" (*Fear* 19). However, Keith reminds us that Scotty does not indigenize: she suggests that Scotty's indigenization in the Sudan does not work to his advantage back in Canada. Upon returning home, Scotty is "yelling like a madman" and "beyond the limits of reason" and continues to act "like an Indian." This disjuncture in the way that Scotty indigenizes easily outside of Canada, but cannot do so in the country, is suggestive of the desire and disavowal that Alan Lawson argues characterizes settler-colonial indigenization. As Lawson states, "[t]he movement into indigenous space must be asymptotic: indigeneity must be approached but never touched. This produces in the settler an anxiety of proximity. The self-indigenizing settler has to stop just short of going completely native" (27). When Scotty returns home, the continuation of his behaving "like an Indian" becomes problematic for his family because he approaches Indigeneity too closely, to the point where his father problematizes the effect of the Egyptian sun (Keith 337).

Similarly to Bellemare and Butler, Keith equates participation in an overseas military expedition with an increased fondness for Canada, and its natural wonders in

particular. Scotty is “revelling just as much in all the dear familiar sights” and feels “how good it was to be a son of the north land, to live in this garden of lake and river, forest and meadow, and see it come to life afresh each year” (Keith 337). When Scotty sees Lake Oro for the first time upon his return, “he realised solemnly that, though he might be called English, Irish, Scotch, Indian, Egyptian, what not, he was altogether and entirely and overwhelmingly Canadian” (337). The list of national identities in this passage works to accumulate the nationalities without distinction. In contrast, the successive use of the coordinating conjunction “and” at the end of the passage emphasizes Scotty’s Canadian identity. Keith’s novel indicates that participation in the Nile Expedition began to solidify a sense of national identity—and one that is “overwhelmingly Canadian.” Both expeditions inspired Canadian writing and national mythologies around overseas military participation. When Canadians attended the South African War, there was no longer an ancient empire to connect with, but rather, authors began to frame Canada as distinctive within the British empire or even as its own empire, and began to construct their own historical narrative.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Canadian Poetics of the South African War

This chapter examines the Canadian poetic responses to the South African War that exemplified the ways in which Canadian writers negotiated Canada's identity at the time. Before the war, the cultural milieu in Canada had demonstrated "the utility of history for inculcating national sentiment" and the "deeply felt need to create a cohesive national heritage" (Berger, *The Sense* 99). Despite the significance of First World War literature in Canadian literary scholarship and identity formation, this dissertation suggests that identity defining South African War literature proliferated in Canada both during and after the war. In relation to international war poetry, Malvern van Wyk Smith argues that "the Boer War marked the clear emergence of the kind of war poetry which we have come to associate almost exclusively with World War I" (ix). By the same token, the topics, themes, and styles that characterize Canadian First World War poetry appear earlier in responses to the South African War. In *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture* (2003), Steve Attridge draws on Paul Fussell's argument about the First World War and its literary nature to point out how "[e]arlier writings about the Boer War also contributed significantly to popularizing representations of warfare as inherently 'literary' events" (50). Attridge characterizes British South African War poetry as "a practical activity, a marshalling of images to further a common cause rather than a linguistic search for *gravitas*" (111). Similarly, Canadian poets seized upon the war as an opportunity to champion the imperialist cause.

Beyond this practical element of the war poetry, however, Canadian poetic responses to the war also reflect the sense that it was a chance to negotiate a Canadian identity within the imperial framework. Bridgette Brown extends Benedict Anderson's argument about the degree to which print capitalism constructed the national imaginary to reveal how it "also included imperial connections" and how "ideas of Canada were fluid and dependent on cycles of representation and production outside of its borders" (38). In his discussion of colonial war poetry, van Wyk Smith writes that "it was in Canada that loyalist poets most persistently ravaged the muses" (85). Referring to "A Page of War Poetry" in the Toronto *Globe's* 4 November 1899 edition, van Wyk Smith describes all the poetry on the page as "patriotic doggerel" (85). van Wyk Smith's dismissiveness causes him to ignore the editor's attestation to the effects of the South African War on Canadian poetry: "[o]ne of the immediate results of the South African war, so far as Canada is concerned, has been the stimulation of the home poetry industry. As a consequence over-production has resulted and the market is seriously glutted" (5). The author describes being "surrounded by an army of poets" and admits to publishing both "good" and "bad" poems that were representative of the submissions ("A Page" 5). The author's militaristic metaphor indicates the degree to which poetry allowed Canadians the opportunity to create the foundations of a national literature, in addition to expressing imperialist thought or concepts of nationhood. In his memoir *I Remember* (1946), W. A. Griesbach recalls that the Canadian contingent "seemed to have quite a few" poets in South Africa (259). The Governor General of Canada, Lord Minto, believed that a Canadian contribution to the War effort should be "official and reflect the country's size and importance, since its value was symbolic, not practical" (Miller, *Painting the Map*

43); such emphasis on the symbolism of Canadian participation entailed that the war easily became the stuff of poetry.

The South African War galvanized Canadian writers and enabled the discursive construction of Canadian identity as ontologically militaristic. In reference to “services, sermons, and other activities” in Canadian churches during the South African War, Gordon L. Heath explains that these discourses “connected with the war effort were acts of self-invention of a national consciousness” (xxii). It follows, then, that Canada’s literary responses to the South African War are also sites of the nation’s self-fashioning. Part I of the chapter underway examines Canadian imperialism and the themes, motifs, and characteristics of Canadian South African War poetry. The chapter’s second part considers Robert W. Service’s “The March of the Dead” (1900) in the context of John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields” (1915) to argue that Canadian responses to the First World War poems that define Canadian military and national identity rely on the poetic imaginings of South African War writers. The overlooked importance of South African War poetry and the erasure of the War’s memory in constructions of Canadian identity expose the fragility of Canada’s war memory and highlight the prominence of the First World War in Canadian consciousness.

## Part I: Canadian Imperialism and Canada’s South African War Writing

Sara Jeanette Duncan’s *The Imperialist* (1904) is the best-known Canadian response to the South African War and it has received the most critical attention of any South African War literature by a Canadian writer. The novel reflects the complicated nationalism that writers were working through during the South African War and is an important entry



point into Canadian South African War poetry. Ajay Heble points out Duncan notably makes an “explicit connection between the imagination and imperialism” (412). He argues the novel also represents Canada in the process of decolonization because *The Imperialist* is a nationalist narrative looking forward to the country’s coming of age as a nation. Whereas Heble argues that Duncan “legitimizes our involvement in overseas wars by suggesting that such involvement is for our own good” (409-10), in “‘The Silent Flag in the New Fallen Snow’: Sara Jeannette Duncan and the Legacy of the South African War” (2010), Peter Webb highlights the novel’s “dark thread of ambivalence—about imperialism, national identity, politics, and war” (76) that makes its classification as simply imperialist or nationalist challenging. Brown has usefully elaborated on the significance of the South African War in *The Imperialist*, noting the way in which the War reveals “Canada’s maturation and prowess in the empire” (264).

Webb encourages critics to see the importance of *The Imperialist* as a Canadian postwar novel that reveals the social and political impact of the South African War. As Webb puts it, “Canadians are forced to acknowledge the limits of militarist discourse and imperialist ideology as foundations of a progressive national vision” (76). He argues that “Duncan’s interest in the war was more social and political than military” (77), but the novel reveals that militarism also invades these spheres. For example, Duncan describes Mr. Winter’s ability to “arrive at an estimate of the position of the enemy,” adding that he had a “readiness to do justice to their equipment,” and that his vanity was soothed by the enemy’s “open admission that you are worthy of his steel” (196). Alfred Hesketh, a South African War veteran, describes how he will be “on hand for the fight” (204) in reference to the political contest. An edition of the newspaper was called “Stand to Arms, South

Fox” (265). Duncan’s military metaphors reveal that politics, society, and militarism are not mutually exclusive in postwar Canada. Duncan describes how, while at dinner with Mr. Hesketh, the ladies “kept up a gallant line of attack” in steering the conversation (204), indicating that Duncan even viewed social customs in militant terms, and suggesting the importance of reading the South African War as influential upon Canadian literature.

The novel’s ambivalence relates to the characterization of a nation that was grappling with British imperialism, Canadian colonialism and nationalism, and annexation to the United States. As Donna Pennee notes, the novel’s grappling with these “isms” is predicated on whiteness. Pennee writes that “the novel repeatedly figures social, emotional, political—and religious—relations between individuals and families through the market’s language of profits, losses, speculation, investment, and debt” (35)—and one might add military relations as well. She continues, “[t]he fact of Mother Beggarlegs’ presence in the novel points us to the rise and management of capitalism through African slavery in the Americas, to an absence of difference among the European empires and subsequently an absence of difference between Canada and the US” (36). In addition, the presence of Mother Beggarlegs points to the “absence of difference” in most histories of the South African War, in which “[o]ver 100,000 [Black people] became directly involved in the struggle as scouts, spies, guards, servants and messengers, and in a wide range of other occupations with the white armies” (Warwick 4). Mother Beggarlegs’s marginalization in the novel also represents the near omission of Black South Africans from memories of the War.

In the context of the South African War, imperial nationalism appears in poems that reflect jingoistic support of England and Empire in addition to emphasizing Canada's unique contributions. As James Doyle observes in "Canadian Poetry and American Magazines, 1885-1905" (1979), Canada's relationship with Britain and as a member of the Empire were questions discussed at length in Canada, "which provided Canadian poets and novelists with some of their most essential and most distinctive matter" (Doyle n.p.). Canadian literary responses to the South African War reveal the "complex dialectic of imperialism" (Doyle) that characterized Canadian life at the time of the war. Canadian writing on the South African War certainly exemplifies Carl Berger's argument about the dualistic nature of Canadian nationalism at the time. In the "Preface" to *Poems and Songs on the South African War* (1901), Douglas J. Borthwick highlights the notion that imperialism was a form of nationalism for Canadians at the time of the South African War; he considers his anthology "one grand galaxy of Patriotism" and posits that "Canada may well be proud of her position in the British Empire; and in sending forth those Contingents of her brave sons to South Africa, to uphold 'The Old Flag,' and fight and die for the integrity of the same" (5). Of crucial importance for its quantity and variety of Canadian South African War poetry, Borthwick's text establishes an example of what the term "Patriotism" meant for Canadians during the South African War. In this context, the term referred to the nation's demonstrations of imperial loyalty.

As already seen, Berger points out that Canadian imperialism involved two ideas—nationality and imperial unity—that were interconnected: "Canadian imperialism rested upon an intense awareness of Canadian nationality combined with an equally decided desire to unify and transform the British Empire so that this nationality could

attain a position of equality within it” (*The Sense* 49). Many Canadians “valued the British connection for reasons of power as well as sentiment” (Berger, *The Sense* 260). For the imperialists, Berger points out, “the imperial system was the vehicle through which [Canada] would attain nationhood” (*The Sense* 260). Writing about the First World War, Steve Marti and William John Pratt argue that “[t]he paradox of imperial nationalism—contributing to an imperial war effort while still maintaining a distinct national identity—was the crux of wartime mobilization in the dominions” (12). Prior to the First World War, Canada’s role in the South African War exemplified this very paradox. The War heightened a contingent of Canadians’ allegiance to Britain, as Alfred S. Johnson notes in 1900: “[a]nyone who knows anything about Canada knows that Canadians, as a whole, are not only intensely loyal to the Crown, but [are also] supremely contented to remain under the imperial system” (91). Johnson argues that Canada’s attachment to Britain even grew during the South African War, pointing to “the almost universal sympathy with Britain in the present struggle” and “the enthusiastic volunteering of many times more men than were needed to make up the various Transvaal contingents” (91). Johnson’s comments attest to the importance of the South African War in crystallizing imperial unity in Canada.

In his study of British war poetry, Attridge explains the contradictions of patriotic poems that responded to an imperial war:

The empire was not compatible with a transcendence of patriotism of the kind [G. K. Chesterton] espoused and to persuade British men in South Africa that they were fighting for their country was only to compound the contradiction inherent

in the circumscribing qualities of patriotism and the expansionist doctrine of empire, which was a “sort of heathen notion of a natural law.” (109)

This contradiction is all the more prevalent in Canadian responses to the war, which attempt to link Canadian participation with nationhood while continuing to assert the importance of Canada’s participation as its commitment to Empire. Attridge outlines how Chesterton “identified the contradiction in a patriotism which adhered to empire, and it is this contradiction which is apparent in much of the popular poetry of the war” (110). For Canadians at the time, patriotism entailed precisely this contradiction: allegiance to Empire and zeal for full Canadian nationhood were not mutually exclusive. George Munn’s “A Canadian Patriotic Song” (1900) exemplifies this seemingly paradoxical nationalism:

Though much we love our native land,  
 The Britain of the west,  
 Yet more we love our motherland,  
 Rock-built on ocean’s crest;  
 She is our own,  
 Her Queen, her throne,  
 Her honor we’ll defend,  
 ’Gainst wrong and might,  
 We’ll fight for right  
 And Britain to the end. (21-30).

The “patriotic song” to which the poem’s title refers is “Canadian” insofar as it is British.

In *From Quebec to Pretoria with the Royal Canadian Regiment* (1902), William Hart-McHarg's use of "Canadian patriotism" denotes Canadian pride in the imperial connection; in describing Canadian soldiers who died in South Africa, Hart-McHarg writes that "[t]he foundation on which will be reared the splendid edifice of an Imperial British Empire is cemented by their blood, and their names will be handed down to posterity as an undying example of Canadian patriotism. They bore the brunt of the campaign; they are its Heroes. To them be the honour and the glory" (262). Similarly, William George Beers articulates Canadian blood loss in South Africa with Imperial unity: "Canada has spoken out her meaning to the world from the banks of the Modder and in the trenches of Paardeberg. She has put the blood-seal of her sons on the cause of Imperial unity" (125). In these and similar examples, it is clear that the British Empire was "the context for Canadian national and literary aspiration" (Bentley, *The Confederation Group* 92).

## 2.1 "Be the old flag unfurled!": Pro-Imperialist Poetics

Many Canadian responses to the South African War can be classified as pro-Imperialist poems. Elizabeth S. MacLeod's imperative in "The Olden Flag" from *For the Flag, or, Lays and Incidents of the South African War* (1901) demands the kind of loyalty that exemplifies the dualistic nature of Canadian patriotism common for English Canada at the time. She writes, "Forget not ye the olden land / Though cherishing the new" (39-40), and MacLeod casts the Empire as the guarantor of freedom in Canada:

Wave on, Oh flag of Empire! wave  
O'er mountain, rock and stream;

Where wholesome fealty rests secure  
 Beneath thy fervent gleam.  
 For, while the maple reddeneth,  
 While surges swell the sea,  
 Thou'lt guard the freeman's sacred rights,  
 In country of the free. (49-56)

MacLeod suggests that “the maple reddeneth” because of the Empire’s protection as the “guard [of] the freeman’s sacred rights” (55), demonstrating Berger’s earlier point about Imperial protectionism. MacLeod annotates “The Olden Flag” with the following account of imperialism in Canada:

Enthusiasm such as has swept over Canada with the basis of sympathy for Britain, is a surprise to even those loyalists whose fond dreams of imperial federation were not expected to develop at least during their generation. Men who declared ten years ago that imperial federation was but a dream are caught up now and borne along on such a tide of enthusiasm as they can hardly understand. (88)

As MacLeod demonstrates, the shifting nature of imperial sentiment in Canada indicates that there was not an insular understanding of the nation. In “An Effigy of Empire: A *Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Canadian Imperial Nationalism During the Second Boer War” (2017), Andrew Bretz argues that “[a]ny unique Canadian identity was, for the purposes of the war, subsumed under the imperial identity” (37), and suggests that “identification with the imperial project” came “at the expense of Canadian difference/identity” (37). However, as MacLeod’s poetry demonstrates, imperialism was

an important feature of Canadian national identity before and during the South African War.

Reverend J. R. Newell connects imperial expansion to the land in South Africa. In “Lines on the War” in *Poems and Songs on the South African War* (1901), reprinted as “Lines” in Newell’s *Poems and Songs* (1904), Newell suggests that “...freedom’s price is havoc and the grave;— / And many a heart, with hope now beating fast, / Shall rot in foreign wilds when all is past!” (14-16). Despite the foreboding proclamation, Newell reassures his readers that these deaths are not in vain, for life will emerge from war deaths when mourning has concluded:

Yet from that soil shall spring in after years-  
 A harvest of requital, such as brings  
 Joy to the reapers, when the mist of tears  
 Has passed away for ever on the wings  
 Of fluttering darkness, and a day appears  
 Of ceaseless progress... (17-22)

The mourning of “mothers, wives, and sweethearts” (10) will eventually turn to “joy” because of the “harvest of requital.” By means of the trope of fertilization, Newell suggests that the dead bodies will regenerate the South African landscape and yield a bounty that engenders “boundless empire, and a world at peace” (24). Empire is the compensation for those who “[s]hall rot in foreign wilds.”

As D. M. R. Bentley notes in *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets, 1880-1897* (2004), one of the most prominent poets of the day, William Wilfred Campbell, “espoused the dying cause of British Imperialism with a didactic fervour” (14).



Campbell's poems "Show the way, England!" and "Mafeking" in *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Campbell* (1905) exemplify this vehement imperialism. "Show the way, England" responds to Ada Bartrick Baker's "Canadians to the Front!" (1899) published in the London *Spectator*. Campbell's refrain "Show the way, England!" echoes the refrain "Show the way, Canada!" that begins and ends most of the stanzas of Baker's poem. Both poets appeal to the higher virtues for which Britons or Canadians should fight in the war. Baker writes:

Now, for the dawn comes  
 To far-reaching Africa.  
 Plant we the standard,  
 Inaugurate justice,  
 Establishing peace. (30-34)

Like Baker, Campbell also appeals to the virtues of peace and justice in "Show the Way, England!":

Forward to justice,  
 Freedom and right,  
 Onward to glory and  
 Wisdom's increase  
 We will follow you,  
 Sons of the might of you,  
 Smokeward to battle  
 Or sunward to peace. (61-69)

Like many pro-Imperialist poets writing about the South African War, Baker and Campbell appeal to virtues of peace, justice, or freedom in addition to advocating for Empire. Campbell links Canadian military participation explicitly with Canada's imperial duty when he writes that "[l]oyal Canadian[s]" (87) are "[s]ons of the sons of you, / Back of the guns of you" (88-89). Not only does this militaristic metaphor indicate the degree to which Campbell connected Canadian nationalism with imperial military service but it also points out how Campbell's vision of loyalty in battle or peace is particularly masculinist. Campbell defines Canada by negation when he rhymes "[w]e are Canadian" (105) with "[n]ot of the alien" (100), thereby emphasizing Canadians' likeness to or affiliation with Britons, which resonates with Baker's poem when she attributes this connection to Wolfe's heroism:

You became part of us.  
 Wolfe was our hero, then,  
 He it was won you:  
 Now you are of us[.] (5-8)

Baker emphasizes Canada's Britishness in order to argue that Canadians can exemplify to the Boers what imperial loyalty can achieve. The poem's epistrophe—its repetition of lines that end in "us"—draws attention to this imperial bond. She writes:

Teach these bold trekkers,  
 Strong men and sturdy,  
 How to be one with us.  
 Somewhere in them, too,  
 Good blood is stirring. (Baker 18-22)

Baker's didacticism about the potential of the Empire is clear in this passage, and she continues to link Canadians to the Boers by suggesting that just as France is "in [Canadians'] veins still," the Boers have the "[b]lood of old Huguenots— / Best sons and daughters / France e'er gave birth to" (23-25). This emphasis on imperial fraternity echoes in Campbell's poem when he reiterates the familiarity between Canada and Britain:

Trust your child, Canada,  
 She will be with you,  
 Shoulder to shoulder,  
 Gun to your gun:—  
 She will reply with you,  
 Fight for you,  
 Die with you.  
 So wide to the world,  
 Be the old flag unfurled!  
 Show the way, England! (Campbell 144-53)

The structuring epistrophe of the poem—the lines ending in “you”—emphasizes Canada's allegiance to Britain. Campbell's final rhyming couplet not only chimes with the final line from Baker's poem, but also echoes her sentiment of international expansion through imperial fraternity: “And so shall we cherish / A great bond of brotherhood / Girdling the world” (46-48). The parallel in Campbell's poem suggests that Canada's role in the war will prove the nation's equality with England. The line “[s]houlder to shoulder” evokes a physical equality much different from the traditional

depiction of England as the full-grown lion with its colonial Canadian cubs, or Mother England and her children. The repetition of “with you”—a transition from “of you” earlier in the poem—emphasizes the equality between England and Canada.

In “Mafeking,” Campbell writes that during the siege, “[h]earts that knew one duty” fought and suffered “for England, for the glory of England’s name! / To fight and suffer and struggle, but never that one great shame, / To yield old England’s honor unto the world’s wide blame!” (34-37). The exclamations of Britain’s “glory” and “honor” here speak to the moments in Campbell’s work that Bentley argues are “remarkable and frequently under-appreciated” despite “their verbal energy, their historical imagination, and the sheer force of their commitment to the belief that, thanks in great measure to the British Empire, humanity as a whole is becoming ever more civilized and spiritualized” (*The Confederation Group* 210). Campbell’s belief in the British Empire as a civilizing and spiritualizing force is evident in his poem “[These we give to the Empire]”:

Yea we must pay the awful fee,  
 To keep the Empire peace by sea,  
 To keep the truth by land;  
 That all the world go hand in hand,  
 And men our brother men, once more be strong and free. (18-22)

Campbell constructs the Empire as peaceful, united, and true, and argues that Britain will continue to stand “[g]reat guardian of the world’s great peace” (33). Further, Campbell associates these ethical values with the sea and land, inherently connecting British Imperial expansion with Victorian values by naturalizing the comparison.

Whereas “Mafeking” responds to British losses at the Battle of Mafeking so does not specifically mention Canadian contributions, another of Campbell’s poems “Our Bit of ‘The Thin Red Line’” explicitly highlights Canadian commitment to Empire. The poem highlights how the nation “send[s] [troops] forth from our ‘True North,’ / For sacred bond and sign” for “[w]e are Britons from brine to brine” (17-18, 20). This last line echoes “Mafeking” in which Campbell writes that England’s soldiers are its “bulwarks from brine to brine” (46). Campbell insists that “Canadian hearts are there” and though might “stand or fall, though we go to the wall, / Canadian hearts are true” and will not only stand for “our own birth land, / But . . . die for the Empire too” (23-28). The repetition of “Canadian hearts” emphasizes Canada’s autonomy; however, the cause is to represent not merely Canada but also the Empire. Campbell’s essay “Imperialism in Canada” (1904) reflects his consideration of Canadian Imperialism as a necessity for Canadian independence. He writes, “I will not deal with the patriotic side of Imperialism more than to say that I feel we are all loyal British subjects as well as Canadians. I must insist, however, at the start, that the true Imperialist is as good a Canadian as any” (173). Campbell believes Imperialism the “only means by which there will ever be a real Canadian nation” not only because otherwise it will be Americanized (173), but also because it is impossible to live without Canadian interests outside of the country (175). Campbell’s earlier “Return of the Troops” (1900) reflects a similar Imperialism, for in it he notes that Canadians can hear “[t]he voice of Empire calling” (22) and “sleep far off in alien earth, / Who died for Britain’s glory” (31-32). As in Newell’s poem quoted earlier, the “alien” burial ground is the price of imperial allegiance and the glory of the Empire. “Return of the Troops” evinces significant expressions of national pride that extend

beyond those in the other two poems. The alliterative “Canadian heroes hailing home” (1) have returned “with the glow / Of all the fame [they]’ve won us” (19-20). Campbell’s poem ends with a focus on the nation, because it is “here in their own loving north / Where maples leaves are falling” (61-62) that the soldiers will be “ennobled in a people’s love” (Campbell, “Return of the Troops” 71). As Campbell’s poems reveal, Canadian patriotism and loyalty to Empire are not mutually exclusive.

Threats of American usurpation or notions of commercial union with the United States also led to strengthened imperial sentiment in Canada. In *Canada and Imperialism, 1896-1899* (1965), Norman Penlington views support of the British in the South African War as an example of the enthusiasm for the Empire that resulted from anti-Americanism (213), a view supported by A. M. Belding in his story “An Experiment in Neurology” (1905). In the story, Nathan Winfield, Junior of Boston suffers from a nervous condition, so his father sends him to Cliff Harbour in Canada as “a tonic and corrective,” in the era of the “rest cure” (Belding 293). The narrator explains that the difference between New Englanders and provincialists—that is, Nova Scotians—is largely political, for the provincialist “is intensely British in all his views and aspirations” (Belding 297). It had never occurred to Winfield “that a Canadian could desire a better fate for his country than annexation to the United States” (Belding 297). When a group of men were discussing the South African War, Winfield asks, “[w]hat possible interest [...] can you people have in seeing England gobble up the country of the Boers?” (Belding 297). An “athletic young fellow who had seen service in South Africa” responds, “[t]he same interest, mister, that England would have if the Americans tried to gobble up Canada” (Belding 297). Belding’s soldier refers to one aspect of imperialism in Canada and a motivating

factor for Canada's support of the South African War: British defense of Canada from annexation to the United States.

## 2.2 Canada as Empire

In addition to conventional tropes that celebrate British Imperialism in Canada, Canadian writing on the South African War reveals the burgeoning independent spirit within Canada. In *The Boer War: Its Causes, and Its Interests to Canadians* (1900), E. B. Biggar emphasizes Canada's role in the imperial war, but he considers the "unusual interest to Canadians" in South Africa apart from the imperial politics, including "its commercial development and its possibilities as a field for Canadian trade" (3). Biggar's book not only focused on Canada's role as a member of the Empire, but it also specified why Canadians should have a personal interest in the South African War. Descending "to a lower plane," he highlights Canada's commercial reasons for "seeing British ideas prevail in South Africa" (30): "Our manufacturers are now beginning to seek foreign markets, and under the rational rule of Great Britain, a large trade development awaits Canada there. South Africa is the counterpart of Canada" (30). Biggar focuses on the economic imperatives of the war in South Africa, stating that

the Canadian exporter is still asleep to the possibilities of that land. It is time we woke up to this, for the trade connections ought to be as close as the political fraternity, and the sending of the Canadian regiment will tend to strengthen the bonds, both in a commercial and political sense. (31)

Biggar's book is one example of the degree to which focusing on Canadian interests were not mutually exclusive from Imperialism; he concentrates on Canada's prospects in the

international economy while highlighting the importance of British rule in South Africa. In Brown's analysis, she considers the degree to which Canadian texts that consider Canada's imperial dynamics aside from its relation to Britain "tilt[] the centrist vision of imperial power away from the metropole, to instead illuminate connections across empire's peripheries" (29). Biggar's interest in South Africa for Canada's gain is an example of these "transperipheral connections" (Brown) during the South African War.

The Minister of Militia from Canada during the South African War, Frederick William Borden, depicts Canada's maturation into a nation in the Empire: "Canada has thrown off her swaddling clothes and stands forth as a full-grown member of the family which makes up the Empire" (qtd. in S. Brown 29). A column in the 23 December 1899 issue of *Saturday Night* (Toronto) emphasizes Canada's willingness to act in more than a colonial capacity with its hyperbolic commitment to "cheerfully furnish ten thousand troops" for the second contingent, for which the nation will pay the expenses "and be benefited thereby, insomuch as every Canadian will learn the self-reliance and self-respect of being something more than a ward of the Empire" ("Things in General" 1). A. H. Chandler's "A New Power in the World" clearly reveals the notion that Canada became a world power because of the South African War. The poem's first line quotes Sir Wilfrid Laurier who, in the House of Commons on 13 March 1900 after the Battle of Paardeberg, stated that "a new power has arisen in the west" (qtd. in Chandler 1). Chandler calls the nation's "rapid progress" "[t]riumphant" (2), for Canada has revealed its "valour" "[o]n Afric's veldts, withstood the trying test, / Of steel and shell, with England's fighters best" (4-5). Constructions of Canadian participation in the South



African War depicted Canada's own imperial aims, and relied on tropes of progress that suggested Canada was evolving out of its diminutive role in the Empire.

W. Sanford Evans's book *The Canadian Contingents and Canadian Imperialism: A Story and a Study* (1901) explicitly links Canada's participation in the South African War with Imperialism in its very title. Evans resorts to superlatives to describe the mood in Toronto on Pretoria Day, which celebrated the British capture of Pretoria in June 1900: "It was the most spontaneous ebullition of pure good spirits the Canadian public ever experienced" (25). Significantly, Evans also evaluates the degree to which Canada's involvement in the South African War was important to the nation, and concludes that the popular enthusiasm about the Canadians' success and the organized manifestations of popular support of the Canadian troops, such as the "Patriotic Fund," demonstrate the significance of the Canadian contingents. Evans argues that by the time troops returned to Canada, celebrations in crowded streets and enthusiastic exhibitions had become a "national attitude" because of previous celebrations such as Pretoria Day, which meant that "[t]he chord of Canadianism had been set vibrating in every heart" (260, 323). Evans concludes: "It may safely be said that British Imperialism has been strengthened; but it is also true that the other great element in the national life, Canadianism, has been at least as greatly strengthened; and a new element, anti-Imperialism, has been brought into existence" (328). With his musical metaphor of the "chord of Canadianism," Evans claims that Canada's role in the South African War encouraged independence.

## 2.3 War and Canadian Nationhood

In addition to celebrating new battle victories, Canadian writers also turned to previous conflicts to construct the mythology of the South African War as pivotal to Canadian nationhood. In Chapter One, it was revealed how Canadian writers connected the Papal Zouaves' expedition to Rome and the Nile Campaign to the history of ancient empires. Similarly, Canadian writers responding to the South African War also connected the nation's participation in this overseas campaign with ancient history. Marquis writes:

The Spartan boy it is said, had to learn the names of the heroes of his native city who fell at Thermopylæ; it would be well if Canadians could at least turn when occasion demanded it to the names of those who died in the first war in which Canada showed herself an active, vital part of the Empire. (Marquis iv)<sup>22</sup>

In addition to connecting Canada's activity in South Africa with that of an ancient empire, writers also linked the nation's efforts to Canada's history. In *The Queen's Wish* (1902), Joseph Watson writes that it was to the Canadians "the credit was immediately due that the white flag on the anniversary of Majuba Day fluttered over the Boer lines at Paardeberg," and rhetorically asks, "[m]ay we not take to heart the belief that the blood shed on that and other battlefields in South Africa may, like that shed by your fathers in

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<sup>22</sup> In this passage, Marquis refers to the importance of nominative recognition for Canada's war dead. Vance also discusses what he calls "the cult of the service roll," which he defines as an obsession with listing soldiers' names who had "joined the colours" (116). As Vance explains, "[i]n contemporary accounts of the North-West Rebellion and the Boer war, the identity and individuality of the soldier were paramount concerns" (116). Vance argues that the effort that went into assembling nominal rolls during the Great War "suggest that they were central to the nation's attempt to construct a memory of the war" (119). Marquis's attention to observing the names of the war dead in the Preface and in the "honor roll" in the appendix also demonstrates this effort at mnemonic construction.

1775 and 1812, weave fresh strands in the cord of brotherhood that binds together our glorious Empire?" (342). (Watson refers, of course, to the invasion of Quebec in the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 as past instances of British-Canadian military history).

Similarly, P. M. McEachern draws upon Canada's role in the War of 1812 to exemplify Canadian loyalty to Britain in "Canada to the Empire" (1899), turning back to "Ogdensburg of yore" where "[a]lliance, priest and pastor swore, / And crucifix and broad claymore / Did vie in Loyalty" (9, 10-12). The traditional metre of McEachern's poem, its iambic tetrameter, establishes the traditional mood of the poem that recalls British-Canadian loyalty:

We come from Abraham's ancient plain,  
From Queenston Heights and Lundy's Lane  
And as we march our one refrain,  
Is loyalty to Thee. (4-7)

McEachern's regular rhyme structure relies upon chain rhyme to link the final sound of the trimeter in each stanza throughout the poem, such as "we" (4), "Thee" (8), "loyalty" (12), and "community" (16); the sonorous regularity of the consistent AAAB/CCCB rhyme scheme underscores the British loyalty the poem thematizes. Drawing upon past instances of British-Canadian war heritage enables McEachern to assure Britain that "[e]ven so to-day, we firmly stand, / All creeds and classes, hand in hand" (13-14), which suggests that Canada has gained equality because of its participation in the South African War in part due to the nation's steadfast loyalty prior to it. George Graham Currie's "Farewell!" (1899), a sonnet dedicated to the first Canadian contingent upon their

departure from Quebec on 31 October 1899, also invokes Canada's military origins to encourage the Canadians in South Africa: "In foreign climes 'tis yours to guard a name / Blood bought on Abram's plain for chivalry" (7-8). Currie inverts the Plains of Abraham to "Abram's plain" for the exigencies of rhythm, which is an inversion resonant from Thomas Cary's "Abram's Plains: A Poem" (1789).

Edward Fields's "Poetry, On the Departure of the First Canadian Contingent for South Africa" (1899) demonstrates how the South African War also serves as a means by which to return to and celebrate past Canadian historical occasions, such as Wolfe's victory at Quebec. Fields writes that in the "grand old city, Quebec" he hopes "our boys will do / As Wolfe did on the Plains of Abraham" (17, 23-24). MacLeod's "The Olden Flag" (1901) also draws on previous heroes in Canada's past, for she refers to the "land of Bruce and Nelson! / Ho shades of Wolfe and Brock!" (27-28) to dispute the idea that any "one of Britain's brood / Would yield to myriad foe" (31-32). Linking the South African War with past military history cements Canadian military identity as ontological.

Frederick G. Scott's poem "From Canada," written in March 1900, connects Canada's participation in South Africa with the nation's genesis. He writes:

Mother and Queen, from the golden West,  
 We offer in love at the foot of thy throne,  
 All we can give thee, our dearest and best,  
 Flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone,--  
 Take them, Queen of the brave and free,  
 They come in their love to die for thee. (1-6)

The biblical allusion in this, the poem's first stanza echoes "[t]his is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" of Genesis 2:23, but whereas the biblical passage refers to God's creation of woman, Scott's chiasmic adaptation refers to Canada's male soldiers. In the poem's final stanza, Scott writes, "[w]e give thee our dearest, our bravest, our best" (27). The structure of these successive superlatives emphasizes the importance Scott attributes to Canada's soldiers for the Empire. In Scott's vision of the nation, the "dearest," "bravest," and "best" citizen is the male soldier. Scott's biblical allusion to the creation story and his poetic offering to the Queen suggest that the nation is founded on Canada's male soldiers in the South African War. Attridge notes how British war poets "championed the soldier as protector of the nation" (108); Scott's poem exemplifies that in Canadian responses, the soldier figured not only as protector but creator of the nation.

In "A Song of Canada" (1900), George Munn argues that the South African War engendered nationhood:

We are a nation now,  
 Strong, brave and free;  
 We to no tyrants bow  
 With craven knee.  
 We are a gallant band,  
 Brave of heart, strong of hand,  
 Aye for the right to stand  
 And Liberty. (1-8)

Scott's sonnet "The Return of the Canadian Troops from South Africa" (1900), which was published as "On the Return of Our Troops" in *A Hymn of Empire and Other Poems*

(1906) and J. Douglas Borthwick's *Poems and Songs* (1901), also articulates Canada's action in South Africa with nationhood. Its opening lines—"The seal set on our nationhood are these / Strong men, returning victors from the war" (1-2)<sup>23</sup>—are of considerable interest on several counts. For Scott, the Canadian soldiers returning from the South African War are a metaphor for national becoming. Nationhood as Scott has envisaged it here is particularly masculinist, for his metaphor's tenor is the victorious "[s]trong men" (2). As in "From Canada," Scott grounds his version of the ideal nation on maleness. Scott writes, "Up to the battle's very front they bore / Our country's honour, till with every breeze / Fame sang their valour round the seven seas" (3-5). Rather than emphasizing the honour that the country provides for the Empire, as was a common theme in poems on the South African War, Scott highlights the Canadian "honour" and "fame" that result from the nation's efforts in the South African War. Scott continues, "[f]or us they braved death in the cannon's roar, / For us their comrades died and nevermore / Will see the loved homes 'neath our maple trees" (6-8). The anaphora at the end of the octave highlights the sense of community created because of Canadian participation in the war by means of Scott's repetitive first-person plural pronoun "us." He reiterates a sense of the collective by use of the first-person plural possessive "our" that qualifies the Canadian symbol the maple trees, which reinforces this communal sentiment.

Like Charles G. D. Roberts in his call to action in "Canada" (1885), Scott also demands god-like action of Canadians in this section of "On the Return of Our Troops":

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<sup>23</sup> In Borthwick's anthology and earlier editions of the poem, Scott punctuates the lines as follows: "The seal set on our nationhood, are these / Strong men returning victors from the war;" (1-2).

Throw wide thy gates, O Canada, throw wide  
 The portals of thy gratitude; these men  
 Have roused the God in us. Now cast aside  
 All littleness of aim. With courage high  
 And loftier purpose, to thy tasks again,  
 And carve thine own illustrious destiny. (9-14)

Scott's apostrophic imperative in the first line of the sestet implores action, alluding to Isaiah 26:2 to encourage the nation to strive for greatness. The poem's repetition of the phrase in the first line of the sestet at its end emphasizes an expansive nation. Scott's use of the imperative encourages the nation to strive for greatness. The exhortative conclusion of the sestet suggests that an "illustrious destiny" (14) awaits Canada because of the "loftier purpose" (13) the country can achieve as a result of its participation in the war. Scott's poem is arguably the most accomplished poetic example of the affirmation of nationhood that stemmed from Canada's participation in the South African War. In *Canadian Hymns and Hymn Writers* (1908), A. Wylie Mahon writes that Scott's "beautiful sonnet on the return of the Canadian troops from South Africa is worthy of a place amongst the best work of the kind in modern literature" (55). Despite declarations of the importance of Scott's poem, it vanishes from sight once the First World War is identified as the site of Canadian nationhood.

Another poem that describes the importance of the war for Canada, William Critchlow Harris's "City and Veldt" (1900), focuses specifically on the enthusiasm in Halifax upon the return of the first contingent of Canadians:

The blazing torch, the surging, shouting throng,

The wild hurrah, the deafening, roaring din,  
 The screeching rocket, and the brilliant glare  
 Of dazzling light along the uproarious street,  
 The rippling laughter of light-hearted girls,  
 The measured tramp of strong, deep-chested men,  
 The sailor, soldier and the citizen—  
 Old Halifax, at night, gone wild with joy. (1-8)

The return of the “strong, deep-chested men” suggests that Canada has achieved fully realized masculinity because of the war, as in Scott’s poem. Harris’s cacophonous depiction of the celebrations suggests that the men’s return lends a particular sense of history to the Canadian city by his use of the affectionate “Old Halifax” in his personification of the city as wild and joyful. The writing of Critchlow, Scott, Munn, Fields, and others represented Canada’s participation as an example of national unity, collective will, and nationhood.

In Bengough’s tribute to the returned troops “The Return of the Contingents” from *In Many Keys* (1902) he states the historical importance bluntly. He assures “Britannia” that the welcome to the troops

[i]s more than mere pageant  
 Passing and vanishing!  
 This is historical.  
 Deep in our tablets,  
 High in our citadels,  
 The names of these heroes



We'll keep 'yond forgetting; (166-72)

Bengough attests to the historical importance of Canadian participation in the war, and concludes his poem with the lines “[w]e will remember them— / We will remember them!” (196-97), which echo forward to Laurence Binyon’s oft-recited First World War poem “For the Fallen” (1914). Bengough’s repeated emphasis on the importance of memory becomes a painful irony when set in the context of its repetition in First World War poetry; moreover, the rewriting of the necessity of remembrance reveals the palimpsestic nature of Canadian war writing.

## 2.4 Writing War

Caroline Alexander observes that “the Boer War, in which 22,000 British troops died, had taken place safely out of sight, in faraway South Africa,” adding that, “[a]s Richard van Emden points out in *Boy Soldiers of the Great War* (2005), ‘Britain’s colonial conflicts had been described but not seen, drawn but hardly photographed’” (Alexander 663). van Emden’s observation reminds us that public distance from the war’s events meant a reliance on literature of the war for descriptions of its truths—descriptions that imbued the war with a particularly metaphoric power. Alexander points out that the press at the time romanticized and glorified war as a grand adventure. MacLeod recognized the symbolic potential for Canadian writers. In *For the Flag, Lays or Incidents of the South African War* (1901), she quotes Harry Francis Prevost Battersby, a correspondent for the *Morning Post* during the South African War, who wrote that “[w]ar makes a reality of many metaphors” (70). Citing Berger and S. M. Beckow, Bentley points out that “the relationship between Canadian literature (or the absence of it) and Canada’s national

aspirations (or colonial status) was a topic of continual and heated discussion between Confederation and the First World War” (*The Confederation Group* 41). It is not surprising that the South African War elicited responses from the nation’s writers, for it was a subject that saw the convergence of this relationship. The belief in Canadian literature’s place in creating a national consciousness lies in a German Romantic nationalism in which “literature, especially poetry, is an essential ingredient of national consciousness and cohesion” (Bentley, *The Confederation Group* 40). At the time, many believed that, paradoxically, “only a distinctive Canadian literature could validate Canada’s nationality and that only the full achievement of that nationality could produce a distinctive Canadian literature” (Bentley, *The Confederation Group* 16). The South African War proved to be the occasion through which Canadian authors sought to demonstrate that Canada would have a distinctive literature because of the nation’s achievement in the war.

In the two decades prior to the South African War, writers in Canada attempted to reconcile their desire for a lofty cosmopolitanism with the importance they attached to Canadian nationalism and local subjects. Canada’s involvement in an international event such as the South African War provided writers with the occasion to write poems on a subject that infused the local with the cosmopolitan. The war as a literary topic was inherently cosmopolitan and nationalist, for it allowed Canadian authors to extol the values of Canada and virtues of Canadians in the context of the international war. As Brown points out, “the debate about Canadian literature revealed a desire to see national writing constructed through the Dominion’s interconnectedness with global events” (81). Brown turns to Glenn Willmott’s identification of imperialism “as the infrastructure that

facilitated global flows of media, mobility, and economic activity, and print as the vehicle that conveyed these new developments to a Canadian readership,” and points out that he “omits the specificities of the [South African] War years as the profound event that exemplifies how external affairs intruded into lived, everyday experience” (194). As Brown highlights, “[m]ore than any imperial conflict before, Canadians engaged in, supported, debated, and responded to the [South African] War, and they did so through print coverage” (194). Writing about the notion that the romance genre no longer conveyed Canada as a significant nation, Brown notes “there was a desire to record factual accounts to reflect [the nation’s] prowess. [South African] War reports did just this” (45). Brown uses the term “transperipheral production of literatures” to describe the degree to which Canadian writers were responding to the international event of the South African War within an expansive publication infrastructure (303); however, her narrow focus on *The Canadian Magazine*’s role in fostering a national literary tradition during the War leaves its role in the broader discursive construction of Canadian literature as ontologically militaristic deserving attention.

A keen interest in Empire resulted from Canadian participation in the South African War, resulting in new books and literary works related to Canada’s relationship to the Empire at the turn of the century. As Evans observes,

[t]hose who fell were hardly cold before they were stripped by those who would build metaphorical foundations of empire with their bones; and others so far forgot themselves as to dilate upon the value of such things as a national advertisement, being sure that henceforth our immigration literature would be in greater demand and our food products more popular.

They were willing to make a blood-and-bones poster out of their heroes.

(578)

By means of a coarse reference to the “cold” dead Canadian bodies and their bones, Evans reveals his critique of the literary uses to which the fallen were put. He clarifies that despite the “thoughtless,” quick responses that took advantage of Canadian deaths, “with the great mass, who said nothing, there abides a sense of proved worthiness” (578). Evans’s irony speaks to his disappointment with the conversion of military sacrifice into profit, and the silence from the masses.

Of course, the war also provided authors with an opportunity to profit from the ready-made subject matter. In a letter to his brother, George Drummond writes:

I have been thinking of that splendid poem of yours, “Strathcona’s Horse.” I think by a little rigorous action now you can get a great advert out of that. Why not sit down at once and write a polite note to Sir Arthur Sullivan [of famed Gilbert and Sullivan] [. . .] and say to him that if he thinks this poem (from a Canadian pen) to his liking and that touched etc by his musical genius it might be made to ring around the Imperial circle—and the proceeds of the sale of the song may bring in revenue to the “Tommy Aitkens” fund—I believe he would join you in it—he can only say no—and he is unlikely to do that—Any publisher would be glad to bring out the song for such an object. (qtd. in Lyons 121)

In addition to providing an occasion for material gain from literary production, the South African War presented Canadians with an opportunity for distinctive cultural expression. Drummond’s hope that the poem, if set to music, would “ring around the Imperial circle” indicates the desire for an international market and fame for Canadian writers.

The January 1900 edition of the *Bookseller and Stationer* (Toronto) attests to the literate public that was engaged in reading and writing about the war. John S. McClelland hoped that the war would “furnish material for an infinite amount of writing, good, bad, and indifferent” (1). He also commented that “[i]nterest in South Africa is taking a more intelligent form, and books are more in demand” (McClelland 2). In the Preface to *Poems and Songs on the South African War* (1901), Borthwick demonstrates a significant attempt to forward a national literary identity from Canada’s military identity, believing that his collection was “well worthy to be preserved in the homes of every Canadian” (5). For Borthwick, the South African War was an opportunity to begin popularizing a national literature. Similarly, MacLeod indicates that the South African War was inspiration for the nation’s writers: “The text of Lord Robert’s [sic] farewell order to the army,” she argued, “is eloquent enough to stir the enthusiasm of to-day’s leader writers” (84). In a May 1901 column in the *Canada Educational Monthly*, Samuel Moore expressed the belief that Canada’s role in the South African War would generate new writing:

To do full justice to the Canadian heroes a book would need to be written, but no doubt, when the history of the Dominion is more fully described, the historian will record their names high up on the scroll of fame, and show to the world that [] soldiers of Canada are to be classed on a par with the Irish and Scotch for bravery and heroism on the battlefield. (178)

Moore indicates that the South African War provided Canada with the worthy heritage it lacked.

Several sources reveal a direct link between the South African War and its influence on a national literature. Their authors seized on constructing a canon around the military engagement. In a letter to the poet William Henry Drummond on 8 January 1900, Duncan Campbell Scott, like Campbell, a member of the Confederation Group of Canadian poets, explains how the war in South Africa affected his writing because it disproportionately occupied his mind. He writes:

But does it not seem petty to write of one's own concerns when this war is going on so badly.

I do not think I am ever quite free from the sense of it, a feeling of apprehension regarding it—I frequently wake up in the dead of night and say to myself now the sun rises on those camps in South Africa and what will this day bring forth. But Courage! I hope you are well and that you make verses now and then for us to admire. Do not neglect it. (qtd. in Lyons 113)

While encouraging Drummond to write, Scott directly links the war and writing in this letter, suggesting that successful war verse could compensate for his fears and anxieties about the war.

In Katherine A. Clarke's "Welcome Home," the poet indicates that the actions in South Africa of the unnamed soldier in the poem will inspire future writing: "With your deeds will future pages / Of Canadian History glow" (3-4). Margaret Yarker similarly suggests that the written preservation of Canada's history is dependent upon the nation's South African War losses when she writes in "Our Dead" (1900) that "sons have bled / To light the page historic with their name" (3-4). She continues:

They witness for us, and their names are set

Indelible against the scarlet seal  
 In that great bond where Empire's sons are met,  
 Inscribing unity for common weal. (5-8)

Yarker's metaphor suggests a connection between Canada's war dead and writing; the names impressed into the "scarlet seal"—an authenticating mark on a document—cement Canada and England's imperial relationship. Returning to the first two lines of F. G. Scott's "On the Return of Our Troops," which read "[t]he seal set on our nationhood are these / Strong men, returning victors from the war" (1-2), the metaphor's vehicle, the seal, functions slightly differently to Yarker's seal. Whereas in Yarker's poem it is the "heroic dead" (1) who will ensure the "inscription" of Canada's commitment to the British Empire, in Scott's poem, the returning troops affirm Canada's nationhood. Scott's metaphor reminds us of the constructedness of the link between the South African War and nationhood because the war is explicitly connected to Canadian letters.

In "The Poem of Pretoria Day" (1902), Bengough goes so far as to claim that the frenzied celebrations of Pretoria Day were poetic, for the people were "[i]nspired as truly as bard ever was" and "[w]rote in wild characters" the "[s]ongs, handshakes, antics, capers, sweat and noise, / A poem of joy that night and all next day! / For was it not a poem? (61, 62, 63-65). For Bengough, poetry is a metaphor of military success and celebration. Although Bengough admits there was boisterous celebration and shouts of "Down with Kruger," he characterizes the majority of the crowd as "[t]he nobler base on which our nation rests" because a "soft-toned, woman's voice / Which muttered 'Poor old man, I feel for him,' / Went deeper than the surface-fun" (93, 90-92). This expression of empathy for Paul Kruger in "The Poem of Pretoria Day" thus reflects some ambivalence

toward the war as well, revealing Bengough's attention to the complexity of Canadian opinions on the South African War.

In his dispatches *With the Guns in South Africa* (1901), E. W. B. Morrison comments on Canadian culture, for he hopes "that this war will stimulate somebody to write some distinctively Canadian songs. We feel the want of them out here. The Maple Leaf [that is, Alexander Muir's song "The Maple Leaf Forever" (1867)] is all right in its way, but the Canadian Tommy does not take kindly to its somewhat stilted phraseology" (194).<sup>24</sup> Rather, the Canadian "yearns for something to express his weariness for home and the girl he left behind him, and it is rather humiliating to have to appeal to the American muse for the wherewithal to express the longing" (194). Morrison's text is significant especially for his plea for specifically Canadian forms of cultural output because of the South African War and his indications of the fears of American cultural domination during the period. In "Canada, My Country" published in *Poems and Songs on the South African War* (1901), M. H. B. of Sherbrooke, Quebec seems to answer Morrison's call and suggests that the South African War led to the Canadian song he is singing:

Oh the Song that now is ringing  
 From the Northland, broad and free,  
 Is a bonny one for singing,  
 And its lilt comes down to me;

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<sup>24</sup> Miller provides an illustrative anecdote of a group of fifty-four prisoners the Canadians captured in late May 1900 on their way to relieve Pretoria. The prisoners were singing their national songs, when one of them claimed to be a pro-Boer from Toronto who was fighting with the Boers. When asked to sing their own Canadian songs, none of the Canadian guards could think of any (*Painting the Map* 237-38).



It is “Canada, My Country!”  
 How the full tones swell and grow,  
 For our heart’s deep love is in them,  
 And the World shall hear and know. (73-80)

The War created the “swell[ing] and grow[ing]” Canadian pride and patriotism.

Similarly, G. M. Fairchild, Jr.’s “To the Canadian Contingent” published in Borthwick’s 1901 anthology highlights Canada’s distinctiveness within the Empire because of the nation’s unique war song:

We’ve rallied round the old flag, we leave our native land.  
 Singing our own Canadian war song.  
 We’re going to help old England on Africa’s sunny strand.  
 Singing our own Canadian war song. (1-4)

Fairchild, Jr.’s poem alludes to Reginald Heber’s “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” (1819), an imperial favourite, while emphasizing Canada’s cultural distinctiveness. This literature reveals, then, the attempt to shape Canadian identity around the particular martial virtues that Canadians demonstrated in the War and to produce a national literature that was reflective of these values, whereby the South African War became a catalyst for Canadian canonization.

## Part II: “Shall the grave be all our gain?”: Death and Mourning in Canadian South African War Poetry

After the jingoistic celebrations of Empire resounded through the nation, Canadian writers who responded to the South African War were forced to confront death and mourning. As Sergeant C. Relf of the British regiment the Second Devonshires stated,

“[w]ar must be endured to realize it” (qtd. in MacLeod 64). In addition to reflections on Empire and nation, Canadian writers penned their responses to war’s darkest realities. Some of the responses foreshadow the degree to which First World War writers would grapple with communicating the harsh realities of war. In *“G” Company, or, Every-day Life of the R.C. R: Being a Descriptive Account of Typical Events in the Life of the First Canadian Contingent in South Africa* (1901) Russell C. Hubly discusses the contradictions of war. He contrasts the face of a dead comrade that shows a “beautiful stillness of peace” (79) in death with one that “lies on his back in his own blood. [. . .] A frown of pain [...] frozen on the brow” so that “death appears [...] hideous” (80). Even though “[a]ll day long the chills continue to trickle up and down your back,” Hubly explains, “next morning you cook your breakfast over a dung fire just as before, and instead of an imaginary trickle you feel a real trickle up and down your back” (80). As some writers of the First World War eventually would, Hubly puts into stark relief the horror of war. Part II will examine Canadian ambivalence and opposition to the war, which were often related to the complicated race relations demonstrated in Edward William Thomson’s “The Swartz Diamond,” a short story published in the November 1902-April 1903 issue of the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (New York) and republished in the second edition of Thomson’s *Old Man Savarin Stories: Tales of Canada and Canadians* (1917). Next, the section examines F. G. Scott’s, John McCrae’s, and Stephen Leacock’s reflections on the costs of Imperial war before moving to women’s poetic responses to the war and mourning during the South African War. Finally, the section will engage with Robert W. Service’s “The March of the Dead”

(1900) to discuss poetry about the South African War that anticipated Canadian writing about the First World War.

## 2.5 Ambivalence, Opposition, and Dissension

The variety of nationalistic expressions within—and in some cases, beyond—the imperial framework reflect the fact that Canadians grappled with the war’s justification, its ethics, and its relevance to Canada. Despite the dominant expressions of Imperialism, national opinion was divided on the South African War—an ambivalence expressed with classic Canadian self-restraint in several newspapers. The farm community tended to disagree with Canadian participation, for many farmers identified with the Boers, “with whom they claimed to share race and creed, describing the Boers as cousins who were worshipping the same God and pleading the righteousness of their cause at His feet” who were “bravely defending their homelands” (Miller, “Loyalty” 314). German and Irish Canadians opposed the War, and French Canadians voiced the most unified opposition to it. To them, “colonial wars were seen as dubious adventures, promoted by a powerful and insidious British political movement called imperialism, which threatened to dismantle the liberal colonial settlement based on self-government, liberty, and diversity” (Miller, *Painting the Map* 27). French Canadians also believed their traditional values and institutions were threatened by “imperialism’s emphasis on economic reorganization, social reform, and national regeneration” (*Painting the Map* 28). Henri Bourassa, Member of Parliament, argued in the House of Commons: “The doctrine is new to me that under the British flag and under the Canadian flag, we should go and broaden people’s minds with dum-dum bullets” (qtd. in Dyer and Viljoen 157). Here, Bourassa

refers to the Boer's use of "dum-dum" bullets that expanded upon impact, indicating how he believed the war was counterintuitive and dangerous.

As Miller explains, "[i]mperialism aroused fear and suspicion, and consolidated French-Canadian opposition to imperial adventures, particularly colonial wars, which might serve as a pretext to initiate imperial federation" (*Painting the Map* 28). The French-Canadian press "regarded the conflict as just another imperial brush fire," disagreed with possibly precedent-setting Canadian participation, "and viewed the public pressure to participate as a sinister imperialist conspiracy to subvert Canadian autonomy and impose its agenda of linguistic, religious, and cultural homogeneity" (Miller, "Introduction" 24). Of those who served in South Africa, only three percent were French Canadian (Dyer and Viljoen 172). Berger explains that "[t]he zest with which imperialists had supported the South African war was proof to [French Canadians] of the essentially colonial-minded character of English Canada" ("Introduction" 3). In addition to their opposition to colonial adventures that supported imperialism, some French Canadians also sympathized with the Boers because they were, like them, "a minority trying to preserve their national identity against the corroding influences of an alien culture" (Miller, *Painting the Map* 28).

In *The Boer War and Canadian Imperialism* (1987), Robert Page not only identifies the concerns about the long-term implications of Canada's contributions to Empire, but locates in Quebec and elsewhere the supporters of Imperialism such as those who criticized Laurier's lack of zeal. "French-Canadian nationalism evolved in opposition to [Imperialism]," argues Page: "[i]n the process Laurier was challenged in his own Quebec base. [...] In addition, the Boer War in Quebec was symbolically linked for

French Canadians to their own conquest in 1759” (22). Like Page, Sanford W. Evans presents an understanding of French-Canadian sentiment, clears French Canadians of any blame in terms of disloyalty, and clarifies that “compared with the people of British stock, the element of Canadianism is with them relatively stronger and the element of Britishism relatively weaker” (*The Canadian* 15). He continues, “[t]hey have not, and cannot be expected to have, the same intimate affection for things British” (Evans, *The Canadian* 16). On occasion, French-English tensions over the war became violent: in Montreal in March 1900, the militia was called out over three days of rioting between French and English students after English students from McGill began celebrating the Paardeberg victory (Dyer and Viljoen 172; Miller, *Canada’s Little War* 47). The Montreal Flag Riot of 1900 illuminated tensions between English and French Canadians regarding English Canada’s imperial loyalty and French Canada’s nationalism.

The complexities of the South African War’s identity politics are well exemplified in Thomson’s “The Swartz Diamond.” The story does not figure in Brown’s analysis of Canadian literary responses to the South African War, but like the texts that, she argues, demonstrate the “transperipheral connections” during the War, the story reveals the quintuplication of the imperial dynamics of Canada’s participation in it. First published in an American magazine, its English-Canadian author sets the story in a unit of mounted Canadian soldiers with fifteen French Canadians; the frame narrative sets up British-Canadian Sergeant McTavish’s narration of the story of Emanuel Swartz, a Boer “burgher,” or “white citizen,” who enters the Canadians’ tent during the South African

War.<sup>25</sup> Swartz tells the men a story of his cousin Vassell, who unknowingly shot a valuable diamond into the kidneys of Matakít, a character most often referred to not by his name but by the racial epithet “Kaffir.”<sup>26</sup> Vassell mistook the rough diamond for an elephant bullet when he reached into his pouch to load his weapon to fight off Matakít and other Black people who were rushing the Boers’ camp, having mistaken them for Englishmen. The frame narrative also enables the complexity of Thomson’s engagement with the War, for he voices Swartz’s opinion that it was “a needless war,” a comment that makes him seem as if he “sank into sad reverie” (67). Although it is possible to read Swartz’s comments as Thomson’s veiled critique of the War, the story’s depiction of the Boers’ ensuing deception of the Canadians and Matakít’s dehumanization at the hands of the Boers paints them as vindictive enemies. Thomson also satirizes the Boers because he includes a trope characteristic of some South African War fiction, “the image of the good Boer” (Weinstock 33), for Vassell repeatedly relies on biblical scripture to justify his interest in Matakít. In order to avoid suspicion about the fact that the diamond is lodged in Matakít’s body, Vassell quotes the scripture to explain the urgency with which he keeps Matakít in his care. Furthermore, Vassell cites scripture to indicate how his faith prohibits him from ending Matakít’s life by removing the diamond, for he “had been merciful as commanded by the text” (Thomson 69), and in this manner, Thomson caricatures Boer Christianity. Swartz asks the Canadians, “[y]ou have been told that we

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<sup>25</sup> “Swart” means “black” in Afrikaans, and is linked etymologically to “schwarz,” which means “black” in German (*OED Online*).

<sup>26</sup> The word “kafir,” sometimes spelled “kaffir,” means “non-believer” or non-Muslim in Arabic, but it was regularly used to describe Black Africans. Although the term was regularly used during the colonial period in South Africa, the term is currently considered to be “derogatory and offensive” (*OED Online*). Additional references will be substituted.

Boers think nothing of killing [K-words]?” (Thomson 61). He clarifies, “all Swartzdorp could tell you that my cousin Vassell could scarcely let [one] out of his sight” (61). Here, the story’s irony highlights the Boer’s hypocrisy, for Vassell did not protect Matakít because he was merciful or because Matakít’s life had value, but only because he wanted to save the diamond.

“The Swartz Diamond” demonstrates the way in which, during the South African War, a Black South African was more valuable as a scientific curiosity than as a human life. Thomson exposes the othering and objectification of the Black body, for the doctors in the ward are interested to see if Matakít’s body will heal from the wounds to his kidneys; as opposed to helping Matakít, the doctors want to study him. If they operate on him, “medical science might forego valuable knowledge which it might gain if they didn’t operate an hour before he was quite out of danger by the wound” (Thomson 66). Until Matakít becomes a subject of scientific study, he is rarely addressed by name in the story. Matakít is only valued when his incorporation of a diamond literally makes him valuable. Swartz describes how Vassell was afraid to leave Matakít alone with the doctors because he did not want them searching his “diamondiferous clay” (Thomson 66). Swartz explains how Vassell took Matakít out of the hospital at the point at which the doctors believed they could no longer investigate him from the outside; Swartz comments how Vassell did “not know whether they really meant to vivisect [—to dissect while alive—] [Matakít]” (67; *OED Online*). Describing the doctor’s investigation with a term typically reserved to describe operations performed on animals reveals the continued denial of Matakít’s humanity.

Weinstock explains that in most South African War novels, a Black character is portrayed as “little more than an all-but-invisible part of the landscape or the furnishings” (41). In Thomson’s story, Matakít is referred to as “wild” (63, 65, 67, 68), a “black beast” (68), as having “howled” (63, 68) and “roared” (63), and as having bellowed “like a buffalo bull” (63). The repeated descriptions of Matakít’s animality are examples of the ways in which “Africans are often shown . . . as parts of Nature” in South African War writing, for authors depict them as “close to Nature because they are savage” in these constructions (Weinstock 75-76). No less troublingly, the narrator’s descriptions of Matakít’s body as “diamondiferous clay”—a play on “carboniferous,” meaning “coal bearing” (*OED Online*)—reveal Matakít’s ensuing dehumanization. Furthermore, “clay” is a material that can be moulded to yield to its creator’s will, suggesting the perceived malleability of Black people to their owners’ desires, an example of what Tiffany Lethabo King argues are “theorizations of Black enslaved bodies as unanchored and malleable” (103). Thomson’s depiction of how Swartz describes Matakít’s animality and dehumanization also aim to undermine Boer claims to the land and to demonize the Boers as greedy and hypocritical.

The description of Matakít’s “diamondiferous clay” can also be read as a metaphor for one interpretation of the War in South Africa that holds that British settlers were only invested in the nation because of the value of its natural resources. Diamonds were discovered in 1867, and by the time of the South African War, James Belich observes, “the Transvaal was the world’s leading gold producer and had attracted £75 million of foreign investment” (380). Matakít only became valuable to Vassell when he discovered it was a diamond and not a bullet with which he had shot him. Ironically,



Matakit's subjectivity emerges upon being studied as a non-being, or a "diamondiferous" object. This story literalizes the commodity value of Black bodies because Matakit is not valuable unto himself as a human being, but because his body can literally be mined for a "precious" resource. Thomson undermines Boer claims to the land when Swartz associates Matakit's body with it. Swartz indigenizes Matakit with the suggestion that his body is of the earth and thereby able to be searched or mined. The extraction of the country's natural resources was a motivating factor for continued British presence in the area. Weinstock points out that Black men in contemporaneous South African War fiction "are almost invariably menials . . . or *kraal*-dwellers from whom white characters purchase, steal, or take as gifts, food and shelter" (39). Weinstock's commentary on the use of the Black body in the economy of war illuminates the trope of blackness and animality in the story. In the frame narrative, the story of Matakit's valuable body also enables the eventual purging of the Canadian camp by the Boers.

In addition to the commentary on South Africa as a site of economic interest in terms of potential resource extraction, Thomson's story provides a critique of the Boers' use of Black South Africans for slave labour. Swartz explains how Vassell was "fond of money" (61), and when describing Vassell's relationship to the diamond, Swartz states that he "has had it constantly near him for eleven years. He has handled it frequently..." (Thomson 61). Thomson complicates the binaries of master/slave; indeed, Vassell's need to protect the diamond—and by proxy Matakit—begins to enslave Vassell himself because of his constant preoccupation with the diamond's security. When Matakit "became sure Vassell would not let him be hurt much he wantonly abused the patience of

even his devoted baas<sup>27</sup>” (Thomson 68). Whereas Vassell’s other Black farm labourers sleep outside of the home, Vassell moves Matakita inside. Swartz explains how Vassell locked Matakita in a room with iron bars on the windows to prevent the other Black labourers who worked on the farm from killing him, for “such was their jealousy of the wild man honored by a bed in the house of the baas, while their own Christian bones had to rest in the huts and the sheds” (Thomson 67). In fact, the labourers became deadly afraid of Matakita, believing he had somehow entranced Vassell because of Vassell’s differentiated treatment of them. Moving Matakita into the home reveals the hypocritical treatment of the “Christian bones” of the other slaves and disrupts the hierarchies of the Boer-African relation.

In addition to its portrayal of the treatment of Black South Africans, “The Swartz Diamond” is also noteworthy for bringing into relief the racial tensions between English and French Canadians in the story. The narrator notes that Lieutenant Deschamps, one of the French-Canadian soldiers, respected Sergeant McTavish more “because [he] was of another race” (Thomson 60), and Thomson registers criticism of the French-Canadian soldiers partly by writing their dialogue to approximate a French Canadian’s English dialect, in a similar fashion to Drummond’s habitant poems. The fact that Swartz’s narrative distracts the French Canadians from the marauders that surround the tent and take the French Canadians’ horses and supplies sets them up as gullible and naïve; indeed, Swartz describes them as “such good listeners—[they] had ears for nothing but [his] story” (Thomson 69). Swartz tells the story to the men in the tent with a face “as

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<sup>27</sup> In South Africa, “baas” meant “a master, employer of labour” and was “a form of address” (*OED Online*).

having been one of such pity as the deaf perceive in other men's faces" (Thomson 67). Of course, the story's description of pity and mockery of the hearing impaired is shameful in its attempt to further suggest the men's naivety. Swartz also explains that their "senses were trained but to the narrow spaces between Canadian woodlands" (Thomson 68), and as he tells them, their "ears were not trained to the veldt" (69), pointing to the Canadians' displacement in South Africa. Even when the Canadians realize the Boers outnumber them and have stolen their supplies, they are still interested in the fate of the diamond in the story. Lieutenant Deschamps "whimsically" protests that it "is not fair" that Swartz will not finish the story before they leave the tent, for he "[has] interest in de story, and [he] want[s] to know how she end" (Thomson 69). Thomson also points out the reader's complicity because the reader is possibly as guilty of wanting to know the fate of the diamond without regard to the loss of Matakít's life, gesturing toward the reader's complicity and ignorance of the violent colonial dynamics of the war. Swartz explains that, after Vassell became a war prisoner and Matakít died, Vassell's wife buried Matakít deep in the ground according to Vassell's instructions. Thomson satirizes the Boer's Christianity again at the conclusion of the story because Swartz states that he is on his way to Matakít's burial grounds and will be his "resurrection" (70). Thomson refers to the language of Christian eschatology in describing Swartz's plan to unearth Matakít's body in order to profit from the diamond, thereby mocking Boer piety. The story exposes the complicated interactions in the South African "contact zone" (Pratt 4) during the South African War by dramatizing colonial hierarchies and race relations.

## 2.6 Imperial War Loss: “Lonely,” “Unmarked,” and “Untended” Graves

In addition to ambivalence and French-Canadian opposition to the South African War, even some in English Canada opposed it and considered it murderous. “The Shame of Canada,” a manifesto written in Montreal in March 1900, illustrates the visceral opposition to the war felt by some English Canadians as well:

Do not permit yourselves to be any longer misled and deceived by the lying politicians, the prostitute venal press, and those who, like that miserable creature, the ‘Rev.’ F. G. Scott of Quebec, who desecrated his calling by administering the sacred rites to men going forth to murder their brothers, call on the FATHER OF ALL MEN to bless the murderers and the cause in which they are engaged.

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN! STOP THE WAR AND ARREST THE MURDERERS. (n.p.)

This sign of protest of the war indicates the degree to which some English Canadians voiced public dissension for the country’s role in the War, and the extent to which Canadians were grappling with the ethics of imperial war loss.

Scott’s “A Voice from Canada (To an English Pro-Boer)” (1901) is a veritable rebuttal to those who criticized the war effort. His poem demonstrates the use of poetry to respond to debates in international affairs. Scott poses successive rhetorical questions in each of the poem’s first four stanzas to confront pro-Boer opponents of the War. He apostrophizes a “babbling Pharisee, / Scribe, hypocrite” (1-2) to ask if “we / Love, any more / Than you do, war?” (2-4):

Think you those hearts are steel  
 Who, for the common weal,  
 Thus lay down all  
 At duty's call? (13-16)

Scott's rhetorical question implies that defending the Empire does not make one hard of heart. He then appeals to the Christian narrative of sacrifice to emphasize that supporting the war effort does not mitigate the emotions of war loss:

You talk, but do not share  
 The heavy load we bear  
 Of sundered ties  
 And sacrifice.

That far-off lonely grave,  
 Where sleep the sons we gave,  
 Looms in our sight  
 By day and night. (17-24)

In the first of these passages, "sundered ties / And sacrifice" are treated metaphorically only as a "heavy load." In the second, Scott demands "peace" from the critics of the British war effort. Scott refers to two of the most challenging aspects of overseas war: the distance from the soldier's grave, and the fact that mourners cannot visit it when he describes the "far-off lonely grave" (21).

John McCrae, who served as a soldier in the South African War before working as a physician in the First World War, points out the costs of Empire in "The Builders of

Empire” (1901). McCrae’s article reflects on the surreal meeting of an imperial fraternity in South Africa and presents a sobering reflection on the costs of imperial brotherhood, including when “the pinch of poverty is felt,” and how “tempers grow short in a direct ratio” (73). In a perhaps surprisingly comedic tone, McCrae sarcastically mentions “[t]wo hundred thousand tickets for the lottery!” held by men from across the Empire who arrived at Table Bay near Cape Town for

Victoria crosses and unmarked graves, scorching months to guard a bridge by a dry river bed, or day and nights by the throttle of a crazy, overworked engine on a road with few signal lights, and many a lifted rail—to die to the high-tension-wire ping of a .303, to the roaring screech of a 96-pounder, or quietly by pestilence.

(67)

McCrae describes how the men “sweated through the Karroo desert, to a running accompaniment of heat, sand, hunger and thirst” (68), thereby commenting on the difficult conditions upon which many Canadian soldiers remarked. During the South African War, “mortality ... stare[s] the campaigner in the face, if only by the feet that project from the passing ambulance, by the dead horse that obtrudes his stiff legs upon the near horizon, or the homely bullock that lies in the middle of the road, cast off where he fell, to await his death” (McCrae 73). Although McCrae insists that he does not want to “dwell” on the negative sides of war, his descriptions of the South African War disclose war’s darker realities and depict South Africa as inhospitable. McCrae sardonically depicts death’s omnipresence in South Africa, exposing the sordid details typically unknown to non-combatants on the home front.

McCrae explains the inglorious aspects of the South African War when he sarcastically reflects on the nonhuman costs of war:

Empire consists not only in Courts and Parliaments, in brotherly speech of nations across seas, in diplomatic oaths of alliance, but in poor cattle that drag their heavy wagons in pathetic silence until they die in the yoke, and gallant horses that bear the labour and heat of the day, in a struggle that was none of their making, for glory that cannot appeal to them, until they, too, get honourable discharge from the service of the King. (73)

The “marks of the Empire” are even found on “the hoof of that skeleton that lies offensively in your path” (73), observes McCrae.<sup>28</sup> His description of war’s impact on nonhuman lives serves as a metaphor for the ignoble treatment of the common soldier. McCrae’s description strips away notions of war’s glory or a soldier’s nobility by equating “poor cattle” with imperial soldiers, thereby exposing war’s often-overlooked effect on animal lives while espousing an anti-imperial sentiment. His ironic tone anticipates criticisms of the First World War and later conflicts whose ecological impacts accumulated alongside—and paralleled—war’s human toll. McCrae’s comment that “there are a thousand things that speak of the cost of war” (73) in the field amplifies “the cost in lives, human and other” (73) that “echo, even at home, in the rows of boyish faces, that appear week after week, in the illustrated magazines, with the inscription

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<sup>28</sup> To demonstrate the cost of the South African War on animal lives, Miller explains how Canada’s two mounted battalions, the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Canadian Mounted Rifles, were left with only eighteen out of 375 Canadian horses and thirty three out of 376 horses, respectively, by the War’s end (*Painting the Map* 33). An unbelievable 326,073 British horses died from October 1899 to May 1902 as a result of the war (Swart 349).

‘killed at--,’ or ‘died of wounds,’—in sickening regularity, that speak of gaps in the stately homes of England, and, by inference, of other gaps, tenfold, in her cottages” (73-74). McCrae compares war’s effect on the lower classes, observing how for every member of the upper classes killed and named in newspapers, there are ten lower-class soldiers who receive no mention. Before scores of war dead had lain in Flanders fields, the South African War dead engendered McCrae’s comparison of the disproportionate effects of war on the poor; he anticipates the class criticisms modernists would make of the First World War that would appear in later texts, such as Charles Yale Harrison’s *Generals Die in Bed* (1930).

McCrae reflects on the landscape of imperial war loss when he describes attending a church service in South Africa:

The same evening, I attended service in the Cathedral; everything seemed exactly as it would be at home, save for the kharkee-coated men who filled the church,—not entirely “valiant dust that builds on dust”; there was a strange appropriateness that one of the hymns should be

“Conquering kings their titles take  
From the foes they captive make,”

for, stretching over the hill from the south wall in long dark rows, lay two thousand graves, where men slept that King Death had led captive, who were done with kingdoms and republics; men whose message goes to the Empire, by the voice of a new colony that they have won by blood,—“O stranger, go thou and tell our people that we are lying here, having obeyed their words” (74).



Quoting from Kipling's "Recessional" (1897)—"valiant dust that builds on dust"—McCrae suggests the terrible consequences of political rhetoric and ideology. When he refers to South African War graves lying "in long dark rows," McCrae not only expresses the debasement of heroic death but also anticipates his famed line "[b]etween the crosses, row on row" (2) in "In Flanders Fields" (1915). Based on his later use of prosopopoeia in "In Flanders Fields," it is not surprising that he alludes to what is arguably the most famous poetic example of war dead calling out to the living: the epitaph to the Spartans at Thermopylae. McCrae's response to the South African War anticipates Canada's most famous war poem that emerged from the First World War. His protomodernist perspective, in which he questions world order because of his confrontation with imperial war death, indicates that South African War writers responded to the horrors that modernists would later seize upon as representative of the First World War.

Among one of the characters in Stephen Leacock's sketch "The Extraordinary Entanglement of Mr. Pupkin" in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) is Judge Pepperleigh, whose son Neil rides drunk with the Missinaba Horse to join the Third Contingent for South Africa (161). Ironically, Judge Pepperleigh does not know of his son's misbehaviour; he adds Neil's picture in uniform to the dining-room pictures of the Fathers of Confederation, beside which he also adds pictures of South Africa "and of Mounted Infantry and of unmounted Cavalry and a lot of things that only soldiers and the fathers of soldiers know about" (Leacock 163). The humorous eclecticism in this catalogue of military photographs highlights why Mr. Pupkin, "a fellow who isn't military," is afraid to enter Judge Pepperleigh's house to court his daughter, Zena Pepperleigh. Gerald Lynch rightly points out that the narrator is more concerned about

Judge Pepperleigh's love for his son than his son's misdemeanours. Lynch notes the probability that "Neil is to be considered, in view of Leacock's toryism and Imperialism, as a partly positive figure: he died in service to his country in the Boer War [SS 156], which means he died fighting for 'the Empire' that Leacock loved" (102). Brown argues that "Neil is elevated to the status of nation-maker, as his actions symbolically reflect Canada's national maturation" (197). However, Leacock was opposed to British war policies toward the second half of the South African War, and, rather than represent Neil as a war hero, he depicts him as a drunken cavalryman.

Brown writes that, "[w]hile the War did not receive sustained attention in Leacock's early writing, he was a well-known imperialist who wrote on topics of imperial federation" (216). Leacock's imperialism did not equate with unquestioned support for the War, however; in fact, Leacock's characterization of Neil connects to his disappointment in the later stages of the War. The mistreatment of the Boers by the British helped propel Leacock's championing of an independent Canada within the Empire. He believed in a nationalist imperialism and the War "could only have reinforced his views of the necessity for Canada to find a more secure and independent position within the British Empire" (Staines and Nimmo 26). While he was touring South Africa in January 1908 presenting lectures for the Rhodes Trust, Leacock wrote about the War in a letter to his mother: "I think it one of the most accursed things that was ever done" (54). Leacock reflects his Toryism in his opposition to the South African War, and He also criticized British counterinsurgency measures like the concentration camps:

In the concentration camps 20,000 women and children died. What do you think of women huddled into tents with the corpses of their children sometimes two

days old in the tent with them. I know of a mother who made a coffin for her little children out of the sides of biscuit boxes and tried to bury it herself in the sand.

Yet these same people sent word out to their husbands never to surrender. While this was happening here, drunken fools shouted in London and Toronto the celebration of Mafeking and Pretoria: It was one huge crime from start to finish, organised and engineered by a group of plutocrats and tyrants and carried on as ruthlessly as the wars of an Asiatic conqueror. And that is the British Empire!

That imperialism! However,—no use worrying you about it. (54)

Leacock's characterization of a drunken Canadian soldier in the South African War resonates with his depiction of the "drunken fools" shouting in London and Toronto, thereby presenting a critique of the conflict. The fact that Neil rests in "an untended grave somewhere in the great silences of South Africa" (Leacock 162) suggests that his sacrifice is unrecognized.<sup>29</sup> The anonymity, neglect, and desolation of Neil's "untended" resting place imply Leacock's beliefs that the conflict did not live up to his esteemed perception of the British Empire. Brown argues that by having Judge Pepperleigh hang Neil's photograph beside Kitchener's, "Leacock places violence in full view of the reader, just as he does with Neil and the Judge's behaviour, in order to silence criticism of it" (236). However, Leacock did not condone Kitchener's policies of violence. Although Leacock was an imperialist, his disdain for the policies that guided the British during the second half of the War reveals Canadians' critical engagement with events in

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<sup>29</sup> Leacock's depiction of the "untended grave" is a near prognostication of Canada's care for its South African War graves, for in April 2004, after reports of South Africans looting Canada's war graves in South Africa, Veterans Affairs admitted "it has no idea of the state of its war graves" there (Wattie A5).

South Africa, and the active negotiation of Canada's imperial relationship even during and shortly after the War. Leacock's alarm at the ruthlessness of the British imperial policies in South Africa reveals the impossibility of full-fledged, consistent support for the war. Brown writes that "[i]n a sleight of hand trick, Leacock directs the readers to a distant, faraway space that eulogizes a Canadian son to forestall criticism of both the war and violence, in order to uphold Canadian participation in imperial expansion projects" (232), but as his letters reveal, Leacock was critical of the War.

Leacock's description of the lonely grave resonates with Adeline Johnson's "The Soldier's Death" in *Poems and Songs on the South African War* (1901):

Out on a sun-scorched plain, away beyond the ocean wave,  
 On Africa's far distant shore there is a soldier's grave;  
 No weeping willows wave above, no drooping flowers grow,  
 But in that lone, unshaded spot a soldier's form lies low.

Unvisited, untended, yet the one who's sleeping there

Had used to know a sister's love, a mother's tender care. (1-6)

Johnson's description of the "far distant shore" of Africa (2) and the repetitive negation in the description of an "[u]nvisited, untended" (5) grave resonate with Leacock's concerns about the isolation of Canada's war dead. Similarly, the Reverend J. R. Newell's "Our Soldiers' Return" from Borthwick's collection and republished in Newell's *Poems and Songs* (1904) as "The Return" commemorates the Canadians "who sleep in nameless graves— / A glorious band—beyond the sea" (11-12). Newell continues, "[a] nation's progress hence shall be / Their everlasting monument" (15-16).

Newell's belief that Canada's war losses in the South African War are a sacrifice for national progress delimits his concern over the anonymous war graves. In addition to these poems, the responses by Scott, McCrae, and Leacock demonstrate the variety and complexity of Canadian responses to the South African War.

## 2.7 Women's Wartime Loss

Canadian poetry on the South African War reveals that women were active participants in dissenting discourses about the War. In "War" (1901), Katherine A. Clarke highlights imperial duty: "For banner and Queen and nation / They fight, for their country's good, / [. . .] / For Britain as Britons should" (13-16); however, Clarke also minimizes the glory of imperial war when she emphasizes that wartime duty is conditional on a woman's wartime plight:

But what of the other story,—  
 The suffering, the dead, the loss,  
 Dark shadow of war's great glory,  
 Her Crown is the nation's cross.  
 Sons, husbands, fathers and brothers,  
 Whom vict'ry can ne'er restore,  
 The weeping of wives and mothers  
 For those who return no more. (17-24)

The lack of conjunctions in the poem escalates the scale of loss; the line "[t]he suffering, the dead, the loss" mounts the emphasis on the "[d]ark shadow" of war and shores up sympathy for its "other story." Clarke's use of metonymy in the line "[h]er Crown"

creates an alliterative connection to the metaphoric “nation’s cross,” suggesting that the glory of war is at the expense of the nation’s dead. Clarke emphasizes women’s losses by cataloguing male relatives: women mourn “[s]ons, husbands, fathers and brothers” (21), not soldiers. Moreover, she repeats this refrain in “Britain’s Lost Sons” (1901) when she writes of “[f]athers, husbands, sons and brothers lying cold, amid the slain, / Whom their daughters, wives and mothers hope ‘gainst hope, to see again” (5-6). She also begins the poem with a focus on women’s loss:

Britain’s weeping, weeping, weeping, for the flower of youth and strength,  
 Women lonely vigil keeping till despair kills hope at length.  
 Many homes are dark and dreary, many hearts are sad and sore,  
 Tired eyes with watching weary for the loved, who come no more. (1-4)

Clarke positions female subjectivity at the centre of the nation by suggesting that the nation’s weeping subjects are the women keeping vigil. Rebecca Campbell argues that “[b]y appropriating the language of sacrifice—and locating women within war narratives—nineteenth-century feminists used the sacrificial and liminal conventions of battlefield literature to imagine a *female* national subject as well” (105, emphasis in original). Clarke balances her support of the Empire with a focus on women’s war losses and reveals the diversity of women’s war responses, making them complex subjects highly attuned to discourses of the war.

In a similar vein to Clarke’s “War” and “Britain’s Lost Sons,” Emily McManus’s “At Modder River” (1900), referring to the Modder River in South Africa which was the backdrop for many South African War battles, reflects a nostalgic tone that emphasizes a woman’s sorrow in losing her lover in South Africa:

Last year he stood where lyric boughs  
 And April spells had hold on him;  
 Last year he whispered lover's vows—  
 Now Afric clods lie cold on him. (1-4)

The anaphora of the passage emphasizes the poem's nostalgic tone, for McManus's repetition of the phrase "[l]ast year" highlights what the woman once shared with her lover. In the first stanza's cacophonous final line, the representation of death whereby the lover lies under cold "Afric clods" diminishes the ideal of a soldier's noble death. "A grateful country names his name, / [and b]rave words are writ in praise for him" (5-6), according to McManus, but as in Clarke's "War," the conditional mood detracts from a country's celebration or a soldier's praise. McManus writes, "[b]ut one lone maid, unheeding fame, / Doth sorrow all her days for him" (7-8), thus presenting the reader with a picture of loneliness and isolation, not the emphasis on the collective good or unity that many poets suggest is a result of the nation's participation in war. McManus's construction of the Modder River differs from many poems in which the Modder River symbolizes Canadian success at the Battle of Paardeberg. "At Modder River" suggests that the fame brought about by war's heroics does not negate one woman's sorrow.

Like McManus's and Clarke's poems, Low's "The Coming of the *Roslyn* [sic] *Castle*" and Letitia McCord's "SS. *Roslyn* [sic] *Castle*" (1901) focus on the theme of women's suffering in connection to war loss. The poems refer to the *SS Roslin Castle*, a ship that arrived in Halifax on 8 January 1901 after transporting the Second Contingent home from South Africa. Lieutenant Francis Hubert Clifford Sutton and Sergeant-Trumpeter Leopold James Stewart Inglis of the Royal Canadian Dragoons died of enteric

fever aboard the *Roslyn Castle* during the ship's passage to Halifax after their South African War service. The wife of Lieutenant Sutton did not learn of her husband's death until she boarded the ship to welcome him home from Cape Town (Gerson and Davies 338).<sup>30</sup> A lengthy passage quoted from a 9 January 1901 article in the *Gazette* (Halifax) and reprinted in Gaston P. Labat's compilation of news articles, speeches, and poetry *Le Livre D'Or (The Golden Book) of the Canadian Contingents in South Africa* (1901) describes the women waiting to receive the returned ship:

When the booming of guns announced to those who had anxiously watched for some sign of the transport since Monday that the *Roslyn Castle* was sighted, the quarantine steamer and a tug raced down the harbor to meet her. On board the tug was a large party of ladies, some of whom were the wives of the returning officers. The moon was just rising, as the *Roslyn Castle* came within sight, and by its faint light the party on board the tug were enabled to see a flag flying at half-mast from the transport's after peak. Long before the tug came within hailing distance of the steamer the doctor's boat had reached it, and turned back to order the captain of the tug to put back to shore. The ladies on board piteously begged the doctor to tell them who was dead before they started back. On the doctor's boat was the Reverend Father Sinnett, who gently broke the news to Mrs. Sutton, one of the ladies who made up the light hearted party aboard the tug, that her husband, Captain Sutton, had died two days before the transport reached port.

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<sup>30</sup> Carole Gerson and Gwendolyn Davies name the Lieutenant who died on the ship "T. H. C. Hutton" (338).



[...] She had only been married eight years when her husband answered his country's call to arms, and left her for South Africa. (Labat, "Appendix" 3)

As will be seen, both poets relied on the article's evocative narration of the ship's return, exemplifying the way women were keenly attuned to the war news.<sup>31</sup> The interplay between the poems and the above passage also serves as an example of the fact that early Canadian newspapers commonly serve as source material for Canadian authors.<sup>32</sup>

In Low's "The Coming of the *Roslyn Castle*," the sonnet's octave introduces the poem's conflict, describing the ship's return and the women waiting with the knowledge that the ship is displaying the signal that there had been death on board:

Out of the night, all silently she came,  
 And far above, the moon, a pure, pale flame,  
 Lighted her pathway, on the pathless sea;  
 While low upon the mast hung silently  
 The symbol of some sorrow. Far beneath  
 The waiting women watched with bated breath,  
 And in that awful moment anguish poured  
 On each white soul, and voiced itself to God: (1-8)

The poem's steady iambic pentameter reflects the movement of the ship across the water.

The multiple alliterative phrases also create a rhythmic regularity by means of the

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<sup>31</sup> Both poems misspell "Roslin" as "Roslyn," an error clearly carried over from the source text.

<sup>32</sup> A discussion of the unacknowledged use of Canadian newspapers such as the *Deseronto Tribune* appeared in Neta Gordon's and Alicia Robinet's "Copying Code: The Undocumented Use of Historical Sources in Itani's *Deafening*." Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English, Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Carleton University, May 2009.

repetition of “path” in “pathway” and “pathless,” which contributes to the euphonious sound of the poem that belies the harsh reality of what the ship is carrying. The poem’s repetition of “silently” also creates the gentleness in mood that masks the ship’s carriage of death. Low creates a gendered parallelism of the silent, feminine ship and the silent “waiting women [who] watched with bated breath.”

The sestet offers only a partial resolution:

“Not mine! Not mine! Let it not be my own.”

Wild, while they waited came the sad sea’s moan,

And then the name was whispered, and one life

Lay widowed of all love, and joy and light,

And one gay heart took up grief’s lasting cross;

But every woman’s soul had suffered loss. (9-14)

Low continues the euphonic alliteration from line six of the poem in the lines “[w]ild, while they waited came the sad sea’s moan, / And then the name was whispered, and one life / Lay widowed of all love, and joy and light” (10-12). In “the sad sea’s moan” (10) that precedes the voicing of the dead soldier’s identity, she naturalizes wartime losses by means of the euphonious and alliterative lines that personify the sea. Like Clarke, who highlights “[t]he weeping of wives and mothers” (23), Low also underscores a collective grief. Despite her emphasis on the solitary “one life” (11) or “one gay heart” (13) of the new widow, it is a communal loss on which Low focuses for “every woman’s soul had suffered loss” (14). This line unites women around war loss, suggesting the universality of women’s wartime suffering. “The Coming of the *Roslyn Castle*” concludes by remarking on the other forms of community created because of Canada’s losses in the

South African War. In Low's sonnet, loss does not have a redemptive power, and life is not sacrificed for love of God or country.

McCord also responds to the deaths of Lieutenant Sutton and Sergeant-Trumpeter Inglis aboard the *SS Roslin Castle* that transported the troops back to Halifax in her poem "SS. Roslyn [sic] Castle" (1901). Like Low, McCord mobilizes personification to contrast nature's mourning with the women waiting for the ship to come to port. The "sky is draped in mourning" (1) and the "dark, low clouds seemed weeping" (3) and "[f]loating to the wind's low knell" (4). McCord compares the wind to death bells, which envelops the image of the ship in a somber mood. The poem's repeated negation highlights the women's misconception about the incoming ship, for "the watchers could not tell" (2) and "[t]hey could not see through the darkened glass / The ensign as pall on the bier[.]" (5-6). The poem's enigmatic tone mirrors the position of ignorance of one who remains on the home front. As in Low's poem and the news article in which the moon lights the ship, in McCord's poem, the poet relies on the symbolism of the moon to create an uneasy mood; its "tender face" (10) lights the waiting crowd by "[s]hedding soft light down / On signal staff and citadel [i.e. the Halifax Citadel]" (12-13). The moonlight leads to McCord's rhetorical questions about a woman's loss and a man's death:

But what of her, whose only hope,

Like fragile boat is tempest torn,

Wrecked on the rocks—forlorn.

And what of him? Though on his breast

Victoria Cross may never rest,

Still this fond hope has she

That now the victor's crown  
 On that loved brow will be  
 Through all eternity. (24-32)

A reversal of the typical metonymic trope of a ship as female, McCord's simile compares the woman to a "tempest torn" boat. The caesura at the dash in the stanza's third line highlights the woman's abandonment, a singularity of subjectivity that resonates from the "one lone maid" of McManus's "At Modder River" and the "one gay heart" that lay widowed in Low's poem quoted above. McCord concludes "SS. Roslyn Castle" by restoring the agency of the lost trumpeter:

Another comrade—  
 Committed to the deep,—  
 The wind-like trumpet  
 Calling waves to weep  
 O'er him who often blew  
 The trumpet, ere the fight renew,  
 May he at the last trumpet call  
 Enter the rest prepared for all! (33-40)

As in Low's poem in which "the sea's sad moan" personifies the ocean's mourning for the lost soldier, here the trumpet calls the weeping ocean to mourn for the dead trumpeter. The repetition and phrase "last trumpet call" at the poem's climax allude to the "last trump" that will sound at the Day of Judgment in First Corinthians (*KJV* 15:52). Given that Inglis's burial at sea complicated the traditional Christian burial, the poem's conclusion indicates McCord's hope for Inglis's Christian afterlife. The poets reveal that

a war poem—with its expression of lost love, its sorrow, its mourning—can also be a love poem. Whereas poems such as F. G. Scott’s define Canadian nationhood begotten by maleness, South African War poems by Clarke, Low, McCord and other women reveal the gendered experience of war loss, and their investment in defining—and interrogating—the meaning of the War for Canada.

## 2.8 War Poem as Palimpsest: The Limits of Canadian War Memory

Writing about British South African War poetry, Steve Attridge explains that “some of the Boer War poets anticipated a major theme in World War I poetry in the recognition that it was not the distinguished hero but the ‘undistinguished dead’ which constituted the major casualties of war, and in which even national identity is effaced as Briton and Boer are indistinguishable in death” (108). Brown argues that the South African War is “a moment *preceding* literary modernism” (17) but she does not significantly consider Canadian South African War poets’ contributions to the literary movement. Yet it is essential to consider Canadian poetry and its place in defining the South African War’s significance to Canada and Canadians as will become evident in a discussion of Robert W. Service’s “The March of the Dead.”

Although Brown briefly mentions Service’s “The March of the Dead” in her Introduction, she does not provide the analysis the poem deserves. Service published the poem in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* in July 1900 prior to its publication in *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907). (At the time, Service was living in Cowichan, British Columbia). Although Service did not enlist in the South African War like he would later do in the

First World War, “it is significant to note that [...] on 15 November 1899, his brother Alick became a prisoner of the Boers alongside Winston Churchill. While Churchill made his famous escape, Alick remained a prisoner in Pretoria for the next two years” (Mitham n. p.). In “The March of the Dead,” the poet celebrates the end of the war, the “triumph so sweet” for which “everyone was shouting for the Soldiers of the Queen” (1, 7). Service’s poem remarks on “the glory of an age . . . passing by” (8), but it interrogates the notion of a glorious war.<sup>33</sup> “The March of the Dead” contrasts with many Canadian poems on the South African War that celebrate the war for Canada’s imperial or national achievements; it focuses on the war losses as opposed to Canada’s gains. As Peter J. Mitham argues in “Mossback Minstrelsy: The British Columbia Verse of Robert W. Service” (1996), the poem “shares in the emerging horror of modern battle and anticipates the verse Service published during the First World War in *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (1916).” After “The March of the Dead” begins by declaring that “[t]he cruel war was over” (1) and that the soldiers were returning from war, a voice announces that it is “the Army of the Dead” (16):

They were coming, they were coming, gaunt and ghastly, sad and slow;  
 They were coming, all the crimson wrecks of pride;  
 With faces seared, and cheeks red smeared, and haunting eyes of woe,  
 And clotted holes the khaki couldn’t hide. (17-20)

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph Allen “Country Joe” McDonald recorded Service’s poem “The March of the Dead” on his album *War War War* (1971). McDonald resurrected Service’s South African War poem on an album that is interpreted in the context of Vietnam War protests, which demonstrates the poem’s relevant anti-war position.

The repetition of “they were coming” imitates the sustained beat of an army’s march; its relentlessness mimics the continual approach of the dead soldiers. However, the irregular metre of the succeeding line disrupts this steady beat, which together with the cacophonous adjectives, signals the incongruity of the army of the dead with a traditional army.

The poem interrupts the celebration of the end of the war and the returning soldiers by the oncoming “Army of the Dead.” The first spectral speaker in the poem demands mourning from the living: “Tear down, tear down your bunting now, and hang up sable black” (15). The imperative mood conveys the command for the living to commemorate the dead. The collective voice of the dead speaks in the poem:

“We’re the men who paid the blood-price. Shall the grave be all our gain?

You owe us. Long and heavy is the score.

Then cheer us for our glory now, and cheer us for our pain,

And cheer us as ye never cheered before.” (29-32)

In this stanza, the collective voice refers to a social contract that the living owe the dead, a theme expressed during the First World War in Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier” (1915), which as Joel Baetz argues, “encodes public mourning as a form of compensatory exchange” (53), and McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields” (1915), where Baetz suggests that there is a “difficulty of maintaining a balanced economy of mourning” (61). Baetz argues that Brooke “insists on the mutual or reciprocal benefits of mourning publicly” (57). Prior to Brooke’s emphasis on the importance of public acts of commemoration to compensate for First World War losses and McCrae’s ambivalence about such potential, Service’s language of the economies of war—its “blood-price” and what citizens “owe”—

mitigates the possibilities of recompense for British losses during the South African War. The truncated grammatical structure in the terse line “[y]ou owe us” (30) belies the enormity of the debt owed to the war dead. The repetition of the demand to “cheer us” (31-32) creates the effect of an urgent, accumulating necessity of commemoration.

Discussing Abel Gance’s First World War film *J’accuse* (1919), in which the dead rise from their graves to discover whether or not their sacrifices were in vain, Jay Winter writes that the “vision of war in which the dead were central figures” had “turned [the war] from a celebration of patriotic certainties into the exploration of eternal themes of love, death, and redemption” (17). Similarly, Service’s spectral army in “The March of the Dead” joins the parade to demand remembrance from the living. The poem is reminiscent of Thomas S. Denison’s “The March of the Dead Brigade” published in the May to October 1898 issue of *The Century* (New York), which also features soldiers as “phantoms in parade” (5). “The March of the Dead” also anticipates the ethereal figures in First World War film and literature, such as the spectral voice that speaks in McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields.” Service’s poem foresees the perception of the world as “composed of survivors perched on a mountain of corpses” (Winter 17) following the First World War; the speaker presents a frightening depiction of the Army of the Dead, building on the lines already quoted to characterize their ghastliness:

O, the clammy brow of anguish! the livid foam-flecked lips!

The reeling ranks of ruin swept along!

The limb that trailed, the hand that failed, the bloody finger tips!

And O the dreary rhythm of their song! (17-24)



The repeated “O” and the cacophony in the lines quoted above register the speaker’s fear at the realization of the afflicted state of the Army of the Dead that approaches him. The internal rhyme of “trailed” and “failed” (23) as well as the rhythmic iambic heptameter contrast with the ghastly depiction of the disfigured dead soldiers. Mitham argues that Service “achieves a sympathy for the victims of war,” but the “livid foam-flecked lips” (21) elicit more horror than sympathy. As Paul Youngquist writes, “[v]iewed not as the nation-at-arms but as bodies in combat, a mobilized people is a gathering of cadavers, its politics a meritocracy of blood” (175). “The bodily effects of war do not remain contained to the battlefield” (Youngquist 170) in “The March of the Dead,” but are paraded as the gathered cadavers of the South African War to undermine the celebratory performance of welcoming the returned soldiers.

Neta Gordon relies upon Paul de Man’s explanation of the way in which the use of prosopopoeia “deprive[s] those absent or dead of their reality, their voice” (30). Gordon explains that “[t]he voice of the dead, de Man shows, is always hidden in a figuring (and disfiguring) mask, so that, crucially, it is the mask that becomes the reality, creating the figuring (and disfiguring) fiction of the face behind it” (30). de Man’s metaphoric interpretation of prosopopoeia’s disfiguration of the dead is relevant in the context of Service’s depiction of literal disfigured soldiers. In Service’s poem especially, the voice of the dead “makes the impersonating mask the reality, whereby the dead become undead: they cannot be put away and cannot be put to use” (Gordon 33). Service’s depiction of the South African War dead challenges the possibilities of making a usable commemorative function of the “limb that trailed” and “hand that failed” (23). Whereas Youngquist argues that ingenuity with prostheses after Waterloo meant that the

“cultural project of embodiment put wounds to work as sites and symbols of nation and empire” (181), Service’s poem highlights the failure of war wounds’ nationalist or imperial symbolism, for they are instead sites of trauma. This corporeal failure takes on greater resonance when it echoes forward in the final stanza of McCrae’s poem:

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
 To you from *failing hands* we throw  
 The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
 If ye break faith with us who die  
 We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
 In Flanders fields. (10-15, emphasis added).

The reappearance of the image of failing hands in McCrae’s poem indicates the palimpsestic nature of Canadian war writing. The war poem as palimpsest—in which “the original text has been effaced or partially erased” (*OED Online*) before it has been overwritten—captures the failure of Canadian commemoration whereby Service’s image of the “hand that failed” is effaced and then overwritten by McCrae’s “failing hands.” McCrae’s overwriting evinces the loss of Canadian South African War memory and the failures of commemorative reconstruction of the dead soldiers. In McCrae’s iteration, the image of hands that are “failing”—not yet “failed”—indicates how the later poem was used to continue motivating the troops to turn struggle into victory during the First World War. The repetition of the failing hands in McCrae’s poem points to the importance of the South African War in shaping Canadian commemorative practices and demonstrates the malleability of Canadian war memory.

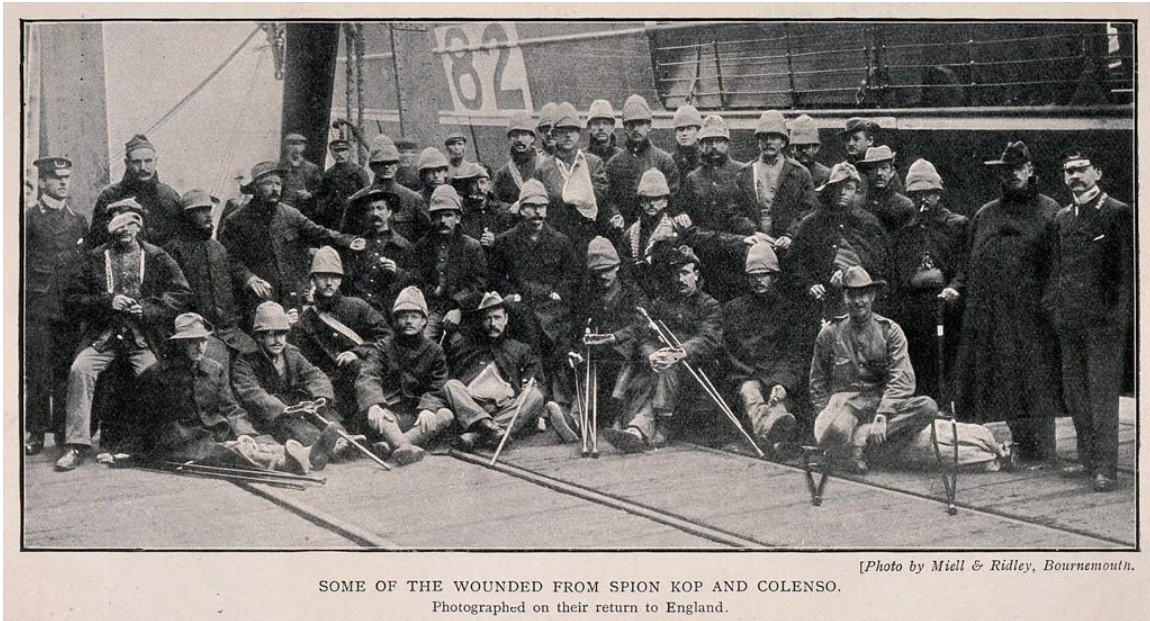
In reference to Service's First World War collection *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (1916), Baetz argues that it "is full of poems about wounds and mangled bodies" (88) that "focus on the isolated and fragmented soldier" (83). Even prior to his Great War collection, Service draws attention to the injurious effects of war on the male body at service to the Empire. In "The Christmas Card" (1899), Service juxtaposes the pathos elicited by an Officer placing a small child's Christmas card on his deceased father's body with the image of the father's "mangled limbs" being placed into a common war grave in South Africa (18). Many war poets relied on the soldier-as-lover trope to illuminate war losses, but Service draws attention to the soldier's identity as a father to portray the profundity of war loss and destruction. The undelivered Christmas card symbolizes a child's lack. In "The Christmas Card," Service also describes the war landscape in which the captain finds the dead soldier as disfigured; the "ghastly crest" is "[a] shapeless, shattered thing of blood and clay" (5-6). Because of the ambiguous article "a," one may also read the "shapeless, shattered thing" as the soldier's dead body, foreshadowing the ironic passivity of modern poetry that would respond to the First World War. Service's description of the blood and clay is reminiscent of Byron's description of the aftermath of the Battle of Waterloo in Canto 3 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: "The earth is cover'd thick with other clay, / Which her own clay shall cover, heap'd and pent, / Rider and horse,—friend, foe,—in one red burial blent!" (242-43). Service's allusion to the "blood and clay" of Byron's poem sets his critique of the South African War in the context of Byron's dismay over the carnage at Waterloo. Whereas Baetz attaches ambivalence to some of Service's portrayals of brokenness in his First

World War poetry, Service's South African War poetry is also unequivocal in its depiction of war's destruction of the male body.

In addition to illuminating the commemorative impossibilities of the disfigured war dead, the marching, speaking, and singing army that Service resurrects in "The March of the Dead" animates the war dead in such a way as to highlight anxieties over the disabled male body and "the desperate existence of the returning wounded" (Cormier 77). As Wendy Jane Gagen explains, "[a] fear of something being worse than death was a recurrent theme in the Great War," and the "[f]ear of becoming impaired, of the loss of normative corporeality and physicality, struck at the heart of masculine identity" (529).<sup>34</sup> In "The March of the Dead," the dead soldiers announce their military lineage: "We're the men of Magersfontein, we're the men of Spion Kop, / Colenso,—we're the men who had to pay. / We're the men who paid the blood-price. Shall the grave be all our gain?" (Service 27-29). Service catalogues only the names of the battles at Magersfontein, Spion Kop, and Colenso at which the British experienced defeat. His choice to list Spion Kop followed by Colenso is suggestive of the caption to a 1900 photograph by British photographers Harry Miell and Martin Ridley, which reads "[s]ome of the wounded from Spion Kop and Colenso. Photographed on their return to England" (see Fig. 1).

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<sup>34</sup> Hubly's account of the South African War also reveals the terror associated with wartime disability. He describes a man "with both legs shattered above the knee. [. . .] Think what it must be to lie, day after day, looking into the black, black future, to know that you will always be a burden to friends" (72). Hubly tells of another comrade who "never more should behold the light of day. A mauser had shot away his nose and right eye, while the left was so badly injured as to render sight impossible" (Hubly 72).



**Fig. 1: “Boer War: a group of wounded war veterans at the docks in England.”**

**Miell and Ridley, 1900. *Wellcome Collection*,**

**[wellcomecollection.org/works/k6wzt5v2](http://wellcomecollection.org/works/k6wzt5v2).**

In the context of the failed hand of Service’s “The March of the Dead,” the hand-covering sling at the centre of the photograph becomes the image’s focal point. In the poem, disability is a “metaphorical signifier” (Mitchell and Snyder 222) of the limits of the war’s celebratory potential. As André Cormier writes of the disabled war veteran, “[t]he wound becomes a contemporary measure for human sacrifice, a piece of the so-called ‘normal’ body given up for the nation. Such sacrifice becomes problematized when imperial campaigns like the Boer War and Crimean War compel commonwealth nations into deforming themselves on the battlefield for Britain” (80). As “The March of the Dead” and “The Christmas Card” demonstrate, prior to the First World War, Canadian poets expressed their anxieties about the effects of war on the male body.

Gordon points to the “aggressive stance” of McCrae’s use of prosopopoeia “that can interrupt and problematize the logic of both elegy and sacrificial narrative” (30). Just as the speaker interrupts the elegiac mood in “In Flanders Fields” because the dead “shall not sleep” (McCrae 14) if the living comrades and citizens do not continue to “fight,” Service undercuts the logic of sacrifice in relation to the South African War when the spectral army emphasizes the debt owed to them. They say to the living, “[y]ou owe us. Long and heavy is the score” (30). Service’s speaker seems unable to satisfy the approaching dead as he fears their continued march: “They were coming in their thousands, O, would they never cease! / I closed my eyes, and then—it was a dream” (39-40). Before he realizes the marching army is part of his dream, the speaker’s fear of the continued approach of the dead reflects Mitham’s argument that “the horror present in ‘The March of the Dead’ is coherent with post-war feelings of shame at the excessive loss of life incurred.” Furthermore, the speaker’s fear exposes “the complex manoeuvring required for a community to make productive use of their dead” (Gordon 30). Making productive use of the war dead has proven more difficult for Canada’s remembrances of the South African War than the First World War, reflecting Benjamin Hertwig’s response to the Afghanistan War in “Poem for the Dead After War” in *Slow War* (2017):

the dead are not  
useful:  
                  they are  
                  dead.

Gordon argues that in McCrae’s poem, “[t]he dead are not a separate, distanced reality but a figured interruption that imposes on the present as well as on the power of the poet

to assert a compensatory argument” (31). The “figured interruption” of the dead in Service’s poem is made literal when the caesura marks how the speaker is interrupted from his dream, and thereby does not actually pay a “blood-price.” Baetz aptly characterizes the military men of Service’s First World War writing:

[b]roken, delusional, conflicted, or wistful, Service’s servicemen, the wounded or conflicted selves that populate his work, are caught firmly in the grip of debilitating collective fantasies, intermittently aware that the militaristic dream is always and only a dream or hopelessly longing for the safety of a redemptive community that does not materialize. (67)

In “The March of the Dead,” the “militaristic dream” of a community celebrating an imperial war is undermined by the nightmare of the broken bodies that fought for it. As Youngquist writes, “[t]he wounds of war become sites of national incarnation, apertures of flesh that graft the nation” (177). However, the inability of Service’s speaker to make use of the deformed dead suggests that the wounds are not an example of “honorific national deformity” (Youngquist 176) and are not productive of national identity.

In “The March of the Dead,” the gruesome depiction of the war dead continues to haunt the reader long after the speaker awakens from his dream. The speaker does not represent “disability as an experience of social or political dimensions” (Mitchell and Snyder 222) but as an horrific nightmare from which he gratefully awakens. While seeming to bring the disabled, dead soldiers out of the margins by means of the trope of prosopopoeia that gives them voice, the speaker’s awakening—ironic because it is when he “close[s] his eyes” (40)—relegates the disabled soldiers back to the periphery, effectively closing his eyes on the deformed men. According to Cathy Caruth, “the

dream, as a delay, reveals the ineradicable gap between the reality of a death and the desire that cannot overcome it except in the fiction of a dream” (95). Thus, the speaker’s realization that the dead soldiers’ approach “was a dream” (40) does not assuage its horror but lays bare the trauma the South African War enacted on thousands of young men. As Baetz writes of Service’s First World War verse, “[h]is soldiers and citizens are concerned chiefly with the strength of the militaristic body in all its forms, and they are aware at times of its notable deficiencies” (92). “The March of the Dead” reveals the limits of commemorative recognition of South African War losses in Canada by its depiction of a disfigured, dead army, that even in a dream cannot be compensated.

After the speaker realizes that the return of the dead was a dream, the town continues its triumphal celebration; however, the final stanza ends uncomfortably with an image of those who remained in South Africa:

There was music, mirth and sunshine; but some eyes shone with regret:

And while we stun with cheers our homing braves,

O God, in Thy great mercy, let us nevermore forget

The graves they left behind, the bitter graves. (45-48)

In Service’s poem, public commemoration of the returned soldiers—the “homing braves” (46)—is contingent on remembrance of the unreturning war dead. Baetz writes that “In Flanders Fields” “lays bare the separation of the living and the dead instead of trying to ignore or manage it” (63), and likewise, the symbiotic relationship Service establishes between the war dead and the returning soldiers lessens the possibilities of celebratory commemoration. The deliberate understatement by negation in the line “let us nevermore forget”—which is reminiscent of the line “lest we forget” in Rudyard Kipling’s



“Recessional” (1897)—highlights the need for remembrance. The negation in Service’s revision of Kipling’s line is characteristic of the tone of the poem. The enjambment that connects the stanza’s penultimate line to the final line links “nevermore forget[ting]” with the soldier’s graves, which connects remembrance with war loss instead of glory. The apostrophe in the same line registers a similar request for mercy that ends Kipling’s poem, which concludes, “And guarding calls not Thee to guard. / For frantic boast and foolish word, / Thy Mercy on Thy People, Lord!” (28-30). As early as 8 June 1907, Service was compared with Kipling (Baetz 68); his poems “are written in the Kipling style of expression [with] . . . a distinct quality of Canadianism” (Hal. 11). However, the repetition in the final line of “The March of the Dead” extends beyond the prayer for mercy in “Recessional.” Baetz explains that, in some of his First World War poems, Service expresses “dissatisfaction with the militaristic communal fantasy” (92). In fact, Service abandoned narratives of communal sacrifice prior to the First World War; in “The March of the Dead,” the war graves in South Africa are not monuments to communal sacrifice or heroic glory, but rather, “bitter graves.” By concluding the poem with the idea of “bitter graves,” Service suggests there is no equilibrium in the “economy of mourning” (Baetz 61), offering no resolution to the morbid question “[s]hall the grave be all our gain?” (29). In its use of prosopopoeia, depiction of the disfigured soldiers, and the paradoxical need for war remembrance, Service’s poem foreshadows the irony and horror that would characterize some responses to the First World War.

## Chapter 3

### 3 The Panegyrics of Paardeberg: Commemorating the Battle of Paardeberg in Canadian South African War Writing

In April 2017, Canadians commemorated the centenary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the First World War battle in April 1917 long envisaged as Canada's "baptism of fire" on the international stage. The recirculation of militaristic tropes that articulate Canadian identity with Canadian militarism after Vimy prompts one to reconsider the ways in which the Battle of Paardeberg (February 1900) was similarly constructed as a Canadian victory during the previous British imperial war, the South African War, which lasted for 36 months from 1899 to 1902. Canadians commemorated their dead from the Battle of Paardeberg Drift until the end of the First World War, leading Richard Foot to consider the anniversary of the end of the Battle of Paardeberg—the 27<sup>th</sup> of February—Canada's "first Remembrance Day" ("Paardeberg Day" n. p.). The Statutes of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) list "Paardeberg Day" on 27 February as one of the "Festival Days" that "shall be observed by all members of the Order wherever dispersed" (39). Paardeberg Day preceded "Vimy Ridge Day," which was celebrated on 9 April. Carman Miller points out this similarity in his comparison of the two battles in "Framing Canada's Great War: A Case for Including the Boer War" (2008), in which he calls the Battle of Paardeberg "the Boer War's equivalent of Vimy Ridge" (14). Miller catalogues the similarities between the social memory of both battles; the degree to which Canadians constructed Paardeberg and Vimy as Canadian victories and moments of national development deserve Miller's call for closer attention. Furthermore, the literary responses

to the Battle of Paardeberg also warrant further study. This chapter returns to contemporaneous descriptions of the Battle of Paardeberg Drift to demonstrate the parallels between the construction of Canadian identity after Paardeberg and Vimy Ridge, and to illustrate how international war commemoration became a Canadian practice during the former battle. In doing so, the chapter seeks to modify the widely held view that the First World War was the defining event in Canadian identity and interrogates the mythology of Vimy as the moment of national becoming.

The chapter reveals the strikingly palimpsestic nature of the Canadian responses to Vimy Ridge and the Battle of Paardeberg. Jonathan F. Vance draws attention to the parallels between the iconic image of a soldier holding aloft his hat or rifle that circulated in First World War artistic representations and the Canadian soldier holding his helmet aloft in Richard Caton Woodville's *The Dawn of Majuba Day* (1900) that depicts Royal Canadian Regiment soldiers celebrating Canada's participation at Paardeberg, and the monument to the South African War in Ottawa whose soldier also holds his helmet above his head (See Fig. 2).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In "'It's just like the resurrection': The Boer Surrender to the Canadians at Paardeberg" (2000), Cameron Pulsifer includes a copy of the print of James Princip Beadle's *The Victors of Paardeberg* (1902), which also depicts soldiers celebrating the Paardeberg victory with raised helmets and flags.



**Figure 2: Richard Caton Woodville, *The Dawn of Majuba Day* (1900), Royal Canadian Regiment Museum, author's photo.**

Vance points to the influence of South African War images on memorialization of the Great War, but the rhetorical similarities between the battles in both wars that Canadians constructed as distinctly Canadian victories deserve further examination. When describing how Vimy marked “the ‘birth of the nation’” (3), Tim Cook writes that “[n]o one would attribute that original story to the battles of Ridgeway, Paardeberg, or Ortona, to Normandy, Kapyong, or the Medak Pocket. Vimy is unique” (*Vimy* 4); however, many Canadians attributed the nation’s origin story to Paardeberg in the battle’s immediate aftermath. Cook writes that “[a] symbol’s decline within a society usually occurs when the symbol is no longer useful to that society” (*Vimy* 383). Indeed, the use value of Paardeberg declined after the First World War and especially after the Vimy Pilgrimage in 1936, when, “[i]n the shadow of the Vimy Memorial, the battle [of Vimy Ridge] was recast as an iconic, nation-changing event” (Cook, *Vimy* 272).

It is imperative to consider the significance of the fact that Walter Allward constructed each of the principal monuments to the Battle of Paardeberg and the Battle of Vimy Ridge; Jacqueline Hucker cites the monument to the South African War, constructed between 1903 and 1910, as one of Allward’s early works that revealed his importance as a new Canadian artist prior to the construction of the Vimy Memorial (281). Hucker describes the South African War memorial, a monument supported by public subscription, which was planned as the focal point at the end of the new University Avenue uniting Queen’s Park with Toronto’s downtown. It was a lively composition of allegorical and contemporary figures arranged at the base of a seventy-foot (twenty-one metre) granite column and crowned by an elegant angel of victory” that “captured the

spontaneous pride in Canada's first overseas military engagement" (281). (See Figure 3).



**Figure 3: South African War Memorial, Toronto, Ontario, author's photo.**

The female figure, *Winged Canada*, holds a crown and a sword atop the granite pillar of the monument, and below stands a Canadian infantryman and mounted rifleman with a young mother in between (Cook, *Vimy* 193). The figures on Allward's statue might be more striking today for their stillness amidst the busy intersection where they stand, but it would be difficult to argue that the viewing subject looks upon them with as much recognition and reverence as one would have at the monument's completion in 1910.

Although the Battle of Paardeberg does not have the same currency in the contemporary national consciousness as the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the commemoration of Paardeberg occupied the thoughts of the Canadian writers who responded to the war in its immediacy. Miller notes how the Canadians' participation at Paardeberg "created an instant legend" ("Framing" 14). Like the myth of national unification that originated because of Canadian participation in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the Canadians' success at Paardeberg became a means by which the nation's writers could claim that the South African War was a unifying experience for Canada. In *With the Royal Canadians* (1900), Stanley McKeown Brown, the correspondent for Toronto's *Mail and Empire*, calls the Canadian Contingent the "Canadians of Paardeberg," (105) indicating how the nation became analogous to the site of battle. This synecdochic link between the Canadian soldiers and the nation is repeated in reference to Vimy; Vance writes, "[w]ith the provinces represented by battalions from across the country working together in a painstakingly planned and carefully executed operation, the Canadian Corps became a metaphor for the nation itself. This allowed the battle to be construed as a demonstration of Canada reaching maturity as it stood united in a common cause" ("Battle Verse" 271). Hark back to Paardeberg, after the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the Canadians were called "the

Canadians of Vimy.” Moreover, Clair W. Hayes’s 1918 novel *The Boy Allies with Haig in Flanders* is subtitled “The Fighting Canadians of Vimy Ridge.” Like the myth of national unification that originated because of Canadian participation in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the Canadians’ supposed success at Paardeberg afforded the nation’s writers the opportunity to establish the South African War as a unifying experience for Canada.

As Bernd Horn and Ronald G. Haycock explain in “The Primacy of National Command: Boer War Lesson Learned” (2006), “the battle at Paardeberg was hailed as a Canadian victory. In the national psyche, it was only overshadowed as a triumph of arms by the far bloodier Canadian battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917” (167). In addition to overshadowing the earlier battle, Vimy Ridge was constructed as a Canadian victory in similar terms to the construction of the Battle of Paardeberg as a particularly Canadian success. In its centenary promotions of 2017, the Vimy Foundation argues that Vimy “solidified Canada as an independent nation” (“Vimy 100”). Similarly, an editorial proclaimed that the “list of dead [at Paardeberg] is the blood-written character of Canada’s admittance to the ranks of nations” (“At the Editor’s Desk” 74). Both claims specify the battles at Vimy and Paardeberg as producing Canadian nationhood. The article claims that “while to-day many Canadian hearts are torn with grief, and sorrow fills many a Canadian home, the nation is richer and stronger; its character is tinged with a deeper hue and its life will be fuller and nobler by the death roll of Paardeberg” (“At the Editor’s Desk” 74). Furthermore, representations of both battles suggest that Canada was crucial in the victories and fought as a unified nation. This chapter will explain how the sites of both battles—Vimy Ridge and Paardeberg—were described according to what Rebecca Campbell terms the “military-aesthetic appeal of high ground” (32) in her



analysis of Vimy Ridge. This chapter will also explore accounts from the battles that highlight the Canadians' warrior spirit, in contrast to recent efforts to downplay Canada's martial identity in the nation's memory. Representations of both battles reveal a Canadian need to pronounce an identity that is anti-militaristic but prides itself on its battle victories. Finally, the chapter will comparatively analyze accounts of the Canadian burials at Paardeberg by early Canadian writers such as Annie Mellish, Elizabeth S. MacLeod, William Hart-McHarg, and Charlie Tweddell. These accounts of commemoration at Paardeberg praise the Roman Catholic war chaplain Reverend Father O'Leary's tenderness with both Protestant and Catholic casualties, rely on the pastoral to describe the Canadians' graves, and emphasize the collectivity of the Canadian bodies laid to rest in them. Canadian writing about the immediate commemorative efforts after Paardeberg illustrates attempts to establish a national military heritage and reveals the nation's efforts to gain autonomy and distinguish itself from the rest of the Empire.

### 3.1 Canadians at The Battle of Paardeberg

Canadians turned to Paardeberg as a successful imperial moment that evinced their worth in the Empire. In *Canada at Paardeberg* (1986), Desmond Morton argues that Paardeberg should not be forgotten because it was "more than the turning point in a war which had so far humiliated British military power. It was also a foretaste of the military role Canada would play in the Twentieth Century" (8). He points out that although the Canadians at Paardeberg suffered from inexperience, accident, and misfortune, they "emerged as the fighting equals of their British comrades-in-arms," an accomplishment that "would be a heritage for Canadian fighting men in all the wars of our century" (26).

Canadians celebrated two battles in South Africa specifically for their role in the Boer defeat: Paardeberg Drift on 18 February 1900, and just east of Paardeberg Drift on 27 February 1900 (Miller, “Introduction” 39). As Miller explains, “[t]hese battles were the bloodiest engagements of Canadian arms in South Africa and the Canadian militia’s most costly battles since the War of 1812 against the Americans” (“Introduction” 39). At the first phase of the Battle of Paardeberg on 18 February, eighteen Canadians died and sixty-three were wounded (Miller, “Introduction” 39). On 27 February, “the Canadians’ fortuitous front-line placement in the final early-morning assault on [Boer General] Cronje’s demoralized entrenchment brought the Canadians exaggerated credit for the Boer general’s dramatic surrender with four thousand of his men” (Miller, “Introduction” 40). After this battle, thirteen Canadians were dead and twenty-nine were wounded (Miller, “Introduction” 40).

In a letter, Father O’Leary describes how “the Boers hoisted the white flag and surrendered, the best tribute ever given to Canadian worth and Canadian bravery” (qtd. in Labat 130). The British celebrated the victory at Paardeberg especially because they perceived it as vengeance for the Boers’ bitter defeat of the British at Majuba Hill during the First Anglo-Boer War nineteen years earlier, also on 27 February. In *From Quebec to Pretoria with the Royal Canadian Regiment* (1902), Hart-McHarg’s rhetorical question makes the connection explicit: “Who would have thought when reading the accounts of the British reverse at Majuba Hill, in February, 1881, that it was to be avenged by the Canadian militia nineteen years afterwards in the Orange Free State?” (131). J. R. Wilkinson’s poem “In the Surrender of Cronje” from *Canadian Battlefields and Other Poems* (1901) celebrates Boer General Piet Cronjé’s surrender on Majuba Day. In the

poem, the African sky grows “cool and calm” (57) and the stars “[g]lowed clear and warm” (59). Wilkinson’s use of pathetic fallacy highlights the Canadians’ demeanor prior to their direction to advance on Cronjé’s laager in order to represent the colonial troops as calm troops well prepared for battle. He writes:

All along their trenches the Canadians lay,  
 Sternly, calmly waiting the word:  
 The army and Empire shall own their worth,  
 For the honor on them conferr’d. (61-64)

In this stanza, Wilkinson’s long vowels in “[a]ll,” “along,” and “calmly” convey a sense of gravitas, and the polysyllabic “Canadians” gives special emphasis to the nation’s deed. Like Paardeberg, Vimy was also celebrated internationally as a Canadian success. In “Vimy Ridge and the Battle of Arras: A British Perspective” (2007) Gary Sheffield explains that “[t]he capture of Vimy Ridge is generally regarded in the UK as a solely Canadian success, where the British and French had previously failed” (15). Just as Vimy was worth all the more to Canadians because the French and British had failed to capture the Ridge prior to the Canadians’ participation there, so too was Canadian participation in the vengeance for the earlier loss of Majuba isolated as a crucial aspect of the victory at Paardeberg.

The hyperbolic celebrations of the Canadians’ role in the Battle of Paardeberg obfuscate the confusion at the battle. Albert Perkins of the Royal Canadian Regiment recounts an error at the Battle: the men were told to advance holding hands in the dark and had not moved far when “orders came whispered along to entrench” (qtd. in Dyer and Viljoen 167). Perkins continues:

We had only been at that a few minutes when again we got whispered word to advance. That order should not have been given.

We had gone about 100 yards when all of a sudden there was a blaze of rifles. We had walked right on top of the Boer trenches. In a flash we were on our faces hugging the ground. [. . .] To lift one's head would mean sure death. (qtd. in Dyer and Viljoen 167)

In Perkins's account, it was by *not* acting that Canadians survived this battle. As Gwynne Dyer and Tina Viljoen put it, "[t]he Canadians just happened to be in the right place at the right time" (167-68). Tweddell explains the confusion in his journal entry from that Tuesday, 27 February 1900: "a hellish fire was opened on us...At last away on the right we heard someone shout retire but we did'nt [didn't] quite understand whether it was retire or fire" (138), a sense of confusion that echoes in other Canadian accounts of the battle. Hart-McHarg explains how "someone called out in an authoritative voice, 'Retire and bring back your wounded.' This order was, of course, never issued by anyone in authority, and no one seems to know where it originated . . . G and H companies either did not hear the order to retire, or, hearing it, came to the conclusion that it was not authoritative and remained where they were" (129). Four of the six Canadian companies fled the battle that led to the Boer surrender on Majuba Day, but Canadians participated in creating a mythology around Paardeberg, even claiming that because the Boers knew the Canadians were in the trenches, the Boers decided to surrender (Miller, *Painting the Map* 112). In *Canada's Sons on Kopje and Veldt: A Historical Account of the Canadian Contingents* (1900), T. G. Marquis's account of the battle records an identical mistaken command that sent the four Canadian companies back to the trenches, some of whom

were injured by the Gordon Highlanders—a British Army regiment fighting with the Canadians at Paardeberg—who believed they were Boers (283). These accounts represent the chaos and confusion during the battle. Hart-McHarg describes how “[t]he whole air seemed to be filled with lead; we were shot at from the front and enfiladed from the donga [ravine] at the bend of the river on the left; it is a mystery that so many reached the bank” (112). Private Richard Rowland Thompson,<sup>36</sup> under the pseudonym Gerald Cadogan, writes that “men are falling in heaps everywhere—broken spirited—broken hearted—all that is left of them” (110). Cadogan’s repetition of the brokenness of the Canadians contradicts the hyperbolic accounts of Canada’s success at the battle. Rather than dramatize the Canadians’ cunning or courage, Tweddell earmarks the importance of the Boer surrender for the victory at the battle: “The position held by the Boer was impossible to take & had they not surrendered we would have had to starve them out” (139). In this statement, Tweddell does not attribute victory to Canada’s actions, but to the Boers’ surrender.

Largely unremembered in celebrations of Canada’s role at Paardeberg is the plague that swept through the British army there when the Boers sent their dead horses and oxen down the Modder River, which the British army used for drinking water. As a result, many Canadians and other British soldiers contracted dysentery from the poisoned water source. To return to “The Surrender of Cronje,” Wilkinson illustrates the condition of the Modder River as a means by which to emphasize the entrapment of the Boers after Paardeberg:

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<sup>36</sup> Thompson was the only Canadian to receive one of seven scarves Queen Victoria knit to bestow upon private soldiers for distinguished service (Miller, *Canada’s Little War* 45).

Thousands of dead animals and Boers float down  
 The swollen river's fetid breath;  
 There was no escape from their awful plight,  
 From that red avalanche of death! (45-48)

Wilkinson's personification of the unsavory Modder River contrasts typical glorifications of the victory at Paardeberg.<sup>37</sup> The rhyme of the life-giving "breath" with "death" is an irony that draws attention to the carnage in the river. The dissonance of the line "[t]he swollen river's fetid breath" (46) highlights the deathly scene, which contrasts strongly with the pleasing and celebratory expressions of Canada's participation at Paardeberg. Although lacking in charm, this depiction of the harsh reality of the Modder River is an attempt to underscore the Canadians' victory at Paardeberg because of the inevitability of the Boer loss, the plight from which there was "no escape." In *"G" Company, or, Everyday Life of the R. C. R.: Being a Descriptive Account of Typical Events in the Life of the First Canadian Contingent in South Africa* (1901), Russell C. Hubly argues that the reports of Paardeberg by soldiers in the newspapers demonstrated that the men saw the battle from "a different standpoint (or liepoint)" (70). He catalogues the "days and nights of anxiety, hunger, cold, wet, and misery" (75) that marked the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1900, and profiles disabled soldiers he sees at the battle. Rather than a

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<sup>37</sup> In *Drummer Hodge: The Poetry of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)* (1978), Malvern van Wyk Smith quotes comparable lines by Anthony Shipway Docking in his section exemplifying the "assaults on the muse" that the sheer volume of poetry on the South African War brought about:

Now we see the burnt out waggons; now see the gowns and goats—  
 While swiftly past the river banks enteric fever floats.  
 Half buried are the slaughtered, upon the Modder's brink;  
 There is death upon the waters, and fever in a drink. (qtd. in Wyk Smith 68)

description of the fortitude of heroic warriors, Hubly portrays the realities of Paardeberg. Hubly proclaims the men were different after the battle, for “[h]itherto [they] were boys in the stature of men” (73). Hubly personifies the Boer bullets as they attacked the Canadians: “‘Zing-ng-ng-z, your turn next,’ said the mauser, spitefully. ‘Ping-ng-ng-piss-ss-s-s, I got a hair out of you,’ said the ricochet, as it kicked up the sand. ‘Hiss-ss-ss-spit,’ said the dum-dum; ‘I did for your chum.’ And still I lay and waited until death was satiated, and only an occasional messenger flew by” (78). Hubly’s Joycean description of the *avant garde* being struck down at the battle reflects a protomodernism and style characteristic of ironic accounts of the First World War.

### 3.2 Canadian Contributions

Despite the confusion and the very real fear of the Canadians in the battle, contemporaneous accounts of Paardeberg suggest its importance to Canadians at the time. Hedley V. MacKinnon refers to the fame of Canada’s role at Paardeberg when he describes his choice to omit certain details from his memoir, *War Sketches: Reminiscences of the Boer War in South Africa, 1899-1900* (1900): “The general plan of attack is so well known that a description of it would only be a repetition of what everyone already understands” (21). MacKinnon’s frustration with his experience in South Africa is clear in his report of the failed leadership at Paardeberg that meant no Canadians received the Victoria Cross, “not because no one had earned it, but rather that the deeds of valor performed in our numerous engagements were never reported, and no effort was made to reward any of the boys for their heroism” (22). The contradiction between the official war record and MacKinnon’s estimation of the Canadians’ heroism

illustrates the post-battle construction of Canada's importance at Paardeberg and can be interpreted as a means of encouraging additional colonial military aid (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 45). In "Rifle Shooting as a National Pastime for Canada" (1900), William George Beers's speech to the Victoria Rifles Reserves Association in Montreal reprinted in the *Dominion Dental Journal* (April 1900), Beers's hypothetical comparison illustrates the value attributed to a hero of Paardeberg: "I would rather to-day be any one of our boys who fought at Paardeberg, even if I had come home with a wooden leg, and live in a poor house, than the wealthiest man in America" (125). His exaltation of a poor and disabled veteran of Paardeberg over a wealthy American illustrates that Paardeberg inculcated a sense of Canadian pride and was figuratively valuable.<sup>38</sup>

Marquis cites Canadian participation at Paardeberg as evidence of Canadian superiority in the British army:

[w]hen the news of this fight reached Canada a feeling of pride thrilled through the Dominion. . . . At first it was thought by some that many of the reports were colored by the correspondents, but from every quarter came the same enthusiastic despatches; for endurance and dash the Royal Canadian Regiment was without a superior in the British Army. (260)

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<sup>38</sup> Contrast Beers's contemporaneous estimation of a disabled Paardeberg veteran with Timothy Findley's construction of a disabled veteran of Paardeberg in his novel *The Wars* (1977): "[Sergeant-Major] Joyce had fought in the Boer War and had been left for dead in the battle for Paardeberg Drift. His jaw had been shattered and because there'd been no doctor it had been improperly set. It angled towards one side and his voice whistled up his throat and came out through his nose" (64). Findley's image of a lonely, neglected, and "shattered" soldier at Paardeberg and his critique of the lack of proper medical care during the South African War disrupts hero worship and dispels the contemporaneous nationalist narrative evident in Beers's account.



Marquis pronounces the specifically Canadian pride after Paardeberg, and continues, “[i]t was good to be a Canadian that week in Cape Town. The men from the Land of the Maple Leaf commanded a respect that was given to no other regiments” (347). Mellish also writes hyperbolically about Canada’s contributions: “[s]wiftly the news flashed over the wires of the brilliant charges made by the Canadians at Paardeberg. Canada was filled with pride that her representatives had upheld the honor of the Dominion and so faithfully discharged their duty to God and Motherland” (28).

The significance of Canada’s independence emerging on the international stage is a common theme in Paardeberg accounts; one writer in the *Massey-Harris Illustrated* commended the fact that the nation was joining countries that recognize that “their responsibility for the maintenance of freedom and justice extends beyond their own immediate borders” (“At the Editor’s Desk” 74). The article displays Canada’s commitment to imperial unity. Similarly, Cadogan describes the Canadians at Paardeberg as victors with other imperial troops:

they are falling back on the camp of the morning some two miles away and as the last few sputters [sic] of the rifles from the Boer trenches denotes—that the charge has been repulsed, and that the best blood of Canadian manhood has been shed together with that of Cornwall, yet at the same time betokens that shoulder to shoulder, Canada and Cornwall had that day written a page in the History of the World with the blood of her sons—which time itself shall never be able to eradicate. (111)

Cadogan’s superlative-filled description of Canadian bloodshed at Paardeberg hyperbolizes the loss of and as Canadian men. The metaphorical writing of world history

in blood links Canadian losses to the grander scope of world history. While Cadogan's expression "shoulder to shoulder" describes the troops fighting in proximity at Paardeberg, it also figuratively equates the Canadians with the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. The equation of Canada and the Cornwalls, and Cadogan's emphasis on Canada's manhood—conveyed by means of the passage's connective alliteration—elevate Canada's colonial position and suggest the Canadian troops' equality with the British regulars.

On Thursday, 15 February 1900, Tweddell recorded Brigadier Horace Smith-Dorrien's praise of the Canadians: "Brigadier S. Dorion [Smith-Dorrien] complimented our Reg. Saying that he was pleasantly surprised at the way we toughed the hard marches & left so few on the way. He went on to say that the Gordons who held the record in the British Army for marching left far more on the line of march than we did" (126). Tweddell highlights Smith-Dorrien's comparison of the Canadian troops and the British regulars, which is indicative of the attempt to depict the Canadians as superior to the regulars. Mellish quotes "a Boer" who purportedly said, "[w]e can stand shooting of the average British soldier, but your Canadians are regular fire eaters and know no fear," and another Boer's remark that "[i]t is easily seen now what nation is going to rule the world" (26). The repetition of these remarks reveals Canada's imperialistic aspirations, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier would echo these remarks when, after the Battle of Paardeberg, he said in the House of Commons that "that day the fact had been revealed to the world that a new power had arisen in the west" (1849) and, on 14 October 1904, he proclaimed that "the 20th century shall be the century of Canada and Canadian development" (qtd. in Wilson-Smith n.p.). Later in her collection, Mellish describes the Boers' "interest in Colonials

from Canada”: “[t]he men who forced General Cronje to surrender at Paardeberg and have so often since compelled the enemy’s forces to fall back and hurriedly retire before the advance, have earned no small reputation among the Boers and are always spoken of in terms of the greatest respect” (61). Mellish suggests that the Canadians were famous among the Boers to convey the notion that they had established an international reputation for their success in combat.

Norman Patterson describes Canada’s interest in the South African War in his column “The War and Canada” (1902):

They trembled with fear and joy when the name of Paardeberg burned in red letters upon the record, for their brothers and their sons were there. . . . They did not rejoice because Cronje was defeated, but because their sons had become men in the eyes of the world. It was not a question of whether the Boers were in the wrong or in the right, whether Lord Roberts was a greater general than Piet Cronje, but “How do we look in the eyes of the world?” (204)

Patterson was not alone in emphasizing the importance of Canada’s international reputation. Many constructions of the Battle highlight Canada’s success and the nation’s reputation at the battle. Brown expresses the importance of Paardeberg for Canada because it “made the name of Canada echo nobly around the world” (105). Like Patterson, Brown links Canadian military success at Paardeberg with an international military reputation. In “The Surrender of Cronje,” Wilkinson’s concluding stanza affirms Canada’s fighting success on the global stage, for he writes, “[a]gain they’ve heroically taught the world / How Canada’s sons can fight” (121-22). In “Gun-Shy Billy” from the collection *The Shagganappi* (1913), Pauline Johnson describes the immediate

commemoration of Paardeberg: “[w]eeks afterwards the newspapers rang with the glory of it all. The fame and the bravery of the Canadian regiments at the terrible battle of Paardeburg [sic] was known to all the world” (208). Johnson’s fictive account emphasizes the fame of the Canadians internationally.

Margaret Yarker also draws attention to the international audience of Canada’s participation at Paardeberg in her poem “A Nation’s Welcome” from her collection *Echoes of Empire* (1900):

... Our name ye bravely bore  
 Before the world on Afric’s distant shore,  
 To shine from Paardeberg’s unfading day,  
 Where Death stood scorn’d upon your dauntless way. (9-12)

Echoing the imperial hymn “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” Yarker suggests that Canadians’ participation at Paardeberg allowed them “[t]o shine” “[b]efore the world.” George Graham Currie’s “Well Done” (1901) is a “message from the people of Canada to their Contingent in South Africa, after Paardeberg and the Relief of Mafeking” (135). Currie links the Canadians’ successes at these battles to the annals of Canadian history:

We knew your valour. In your veins you bear  
 The chivalry of France—the Briton’ curries pride—  
 With names like “Cartier” or “Champlain” to guide  
 Or “Brant” or “Brock” to teach you how to dare. (5-8)

Currie connects the contemporary Canadian soldiers of Paardeberg to historic figures, alluding to Charles G. D. Roberts’s “Canada” (1886) when he mentions explorers Jacques Cartier and Samuel de Champlain:

O Falterer, let thy past convince  
 Thy future,—all the growth, the gain,  
 The fame since Cartier knew thee, since  
 Thy shores beheld Champlain! (Roberts 25-28)

Linking Canadians who fought at Paardeberg with military leaders such as Joseph Brant and Sir Isaac Brock places the participants of Paardeberg in the context of Canada's past military victories to expand the narrative of Canada's military feats. However, in the sonnet's sextet, Currie extends his poetic tribute beyond historical references to claim that Canada has exceeded these feats in South Africa,

But never did we dream that you might do  
 Such deeds as late have set us wild with joy:  
 Such fearless feats—fit boast for fabled Troy—  
 As give the palm of Paardeberg to you. (9-12)

The alliterative "palm of Paardeberg" emphasizes Currie's connection between the Canadians' efforts at Paardeberg and their reputation as victors. After mentioning past Canadian military heroes, Currie creates a parallel between Troy and Paardeberg, which elevates Canada's role at Paardeberg to the storied feats of Greek mythology on top of Canada's own historical narratives.

Similarly, Hart-McHarg lauds the work of G and H companies, noting how the front rank "acted as a covering party, the rear rank and Engineers worked like Trojans at the trenches" (130). In *Le Livre d'Or: The Golden Book of the Canadian Contingents in South Africa* (1901), Gaston P. Labat called Paardeberg "the Waterloo of the Boers through the heroic conduct of the Canadians" (57). Labat establishes a history of

conquest for Canada akin to British decisive victory over Napoleon. Canadian literary history reveals an effort to bolster national military efforts to map Canadian national identity onto British military history. Currie's poem's concluding quatrain suggests that it is not the war Canadians are revelling in, but rather, the honour Canadians have gained from Paardeberg: "We wait, impatient till the war is o'er, / To do you honour on your proud home shore" (13-14). William Wilfred Campbell's literary metaphor in "Return of the Troops" (1900) also celebrates the Battle of Paardeberg:

You got your chance, in letters large,

You retold Britain's story;

At Paardeberg's immortal charge,

You wrote our name in glory. (13-16).

Campbell's description of the "immortal charge" and its "glory" alludes to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854). Unlike the failure of communication that resulted in major British losses during this battle of the Crimean War (October 1853-February 1856), the confused orders and "immortal charge" at Paardeberg led to British success. Campbell connects Canada's participation at Paardeberg with historiography, illustrating the association between the Canadian military and literary identity that the South African War catalyzed. Further in the poem, Campbell writes about the memorialization of the Canadians who died in South Africa:

In marbled columns, side by side,

Britain—the glory-giver,

With all her mighty dead who died,

Will write their names forever; (53-56)

The image of the parallel marbled columns establishes an equivalency between Canadian and British deaths; Campbell demonstrates his imperial pride by the suggestion that Britain “[w]ill write their names forever,” inscribing Canada’s contributions to Empire in stone. Canadians honoured the men from Paardeberg with further transcriptions of national hero-worship: a transparency on the Parliament buildings read, “[w]elcome home heroes of Paardeberg,” which could “be seen a mile off in the snowstorm” (qtd. in Labat 71). The inscription of the “heroes of Paardeberg” on Canada’s Parliament Buildings represents efforts to nationalize the battle.

### 3.3 Baptism of Fire

In *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* (2020), Margaret MacMillan writes that “[w]ar was more often than not seen as an integral and necessary part of the emergence of the nation, as sanctifying it even” (93). Comparing the commemoration of both Paardeberg and Vimy reveals efforts to declare Canada’s nationhood and its sanctification by means of the framing of these events as Canada’s baptism of fire. The expression “baptism of fire” originated as “*le baptême du feu*” in B. E. O’Meara’s *Napoleon in Exile* (1822) in the context of Napoleon praising brave soldiers; then, in 1881, “baptism of fire” referred to Prince Louis Napoleon’s first exposure to enemy fire during the Franco-German War of 1870 at the direction of his father, Napoleon III (*OED Online*). This etymology demonstrates how the expression “baptism of fire” connects to the Napoleonic military legacy, notions of bravery, and sons fighting for their fathers. Although the Canadians at Paardeberg suffered from inexperience, accident, and misfortune, Morton argues, they “emerged as the fighting equals of their British comrades-in-arms,” an accomplishment

that “would be a heritage for Canadian fighting men in all the wars of our century” (26). Similarly, the promotional material for the Vimy centenary referred to the Battle of Vimy Ridge as “a seminal event in Canada’s history” (“Vimy 100”). Scholars of the First World War have noted the significance of the fact that at Vimy, it was the first and only time during the Great War that “all four [Canadian] divisions assaulted, shoulder to shoulder” (Cook, *Vimy* 61), thereby representing all regions of Canada. Cook quotes the official historian of the First World War Colonel A. F. Duguid who described Vimy as “almost exclusively a Canadian battle, for the first and only time all four of our divisions attacked simultaneously” (qtd. in Cook, *Vimy* 254). In response to Canada’s role at Paardeberg, the author of *Canadians in Khaki* (1900) also highlights the cumulative effort, describing with alliteration how “the first Canadian blood was shed in South Africa [] when our brave Canadians, French *and* English . . . faced the foe on the fatal field of Paardeberg” (10, emphasis added). Hart-McHarg relied on the same logic of Canadian collectivity that shaped the commemoration of the achievements at Vimy to cement the importance of Paardeberg by emphasizing the joint effort of the Canadians during the battle. In contrast to one unit’s engagement at the Battle of Sunnyside prior to Paardeberg, Hart-McHarg writes, “[t]rue, one company had received its baptism of fire, and done the greatest credit to the regiment, at Sunnyside; but it was only a small part of the regiment, acting as a detached unit, and the very men who composed it were as anxious as any of the others to see the regiment take part in a big battle” (106).

As Paardeberg overshadowed Sunnyside, so too did the joint attack at Vimy come to define Canada’s role in the Great War despite earlier Canadian contributions such as Ypres. During and immediately after the war, Cook explains, “Canadians extolled Second



Ypres as their nation's baptism of fire" (*Vimy* 186). In 1916, Sir Max Aitken wrote that "[t]he wave that fell on us round Ypres has *baptized* the Dominion into nationhood—the mere written word 'Canada,' glows now with a new meaning before all the civilized world" (qtd. in Cook, *Vimy* 195-96, emphasis added). Like the constructions of Vimy as the nation's baptism of fire despite previous battles described in those very terms, the expression "baptism of fire" was also repeated to describe the Canadians' experience at Paardeberg:

Our first baptism of fire had been a costly one, but the great question was, How had the regiment carried itself? We knew we had not gained as much ground as we would have liked on the previous day, but we also knew that under the most trying circumstances no man had flinched, and what had been gained had been held. We also knew that the very keenness and dash of the men, and the way they fearlessly exposed themselves, were responsible for a considerable portion of the casualties" (Hart-McHarg 115-16).

In Canada's baptism of fire at Paardeberg, Hart-McHarg suggests the casualties were a result of Canadian bravery.

### 3.4 High Ground on Horse Hill

Representations of Canadians' participation at Vimy Ridge and at Paardeberg emphasize "the military-aesthetic appeal of high ground" (Campbell 32). Rebecca Campbell relies on D. M. R. Bentley's history of the view from high ground in the topographical long poem to analyze high ground in the military context. Bentley argues that "[s]uch elevated perspectives were a means of assimilating new spaces into the imagined nation *and* into

its emerging literature” (Campbell 33). Campbell usefully translates Bentley’s connection between land, nation, and literature that is crystallized in the aestheticization of high ground in Canadian topographical poetry to the military context. In war poetry, Campbell explains, “the glance that takes the landscape ‘up and in’” is a “military gaze” that “mobilizes vision, rewrites terrain in military terms, weaponizing perspective as the poet aestheticizes it” (34). George L. Mosse also considers the aesthetic representations of elevation in the military context, explaining how mountains figured in imagery during the First World War because they are “symbols of man’s domination and individuality” and represent “individual and national regeneration through conquest and domination” (114, 116). There is a symbolic link between the physical ascent celebrated after the taking of high ground and national ascendance. Vimy Ridge was a location of strategic military value during the First World War because of its high ground, and so it follows that it was commemorated and aestheticized as a Canadian battlefield partly because of its lofty position. Vimy Ridge’s highest point is Hill 145, with the numeric indicator describing the number of metres the ridge rises above sea level (Cook, *Vimy* 24). Percy Nobbs, head of McGill’s School of Architecture, prepared a report about the kind of memorials Canada should erect after the First World War, and he believed “Vimy might be a unique spot . . . because of its geographical location as a prominent ridge” (qtd. in Cook, *Vimy* 180). In an address to the Toronto Empire Club of Canada in 1936, F. G. Scott referred to Vimy as “that great ridge” (qtd. in Cook, *Vimy* 262). Sergeant Robert Kentner described Vimy as “a huge grey mountainous mass of mud” (qtd. in Cook, *Vimy* 24), and the poet John Daniel Logan described the scene at Vimy as “Vimy’s bristling crest” (qtd. in Vance, “Battle Verse” 268). Cook describes Vimy as the “hulking ridge” (*Vimy* 23), “the

sinister ridge” (*Vimy* 72), and “fortress Vimy” (“The Gunners” 120), evoking the hyperbolic constructions of Vimy’s position. Ernest Lapointe, the federal minister of justice and a speaker at the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial in 1936, proclaimed that “in their hour of testing the souls of Canadians revealed themselves gloriously at the summit of their national ascendancy” (qtd. in Vance, “Battle Verse” 275). As Vance explains, Vimy’s high ground led to “[t]he notion that in reaching the summit of Vimy Ridge the men of the Canadian Corps were also taking the country to the summit of its national ascendancy” (“Battle Verse” 275). The elevated landscape at Vimy Ridge became a metaphor for Canada’s elevated position in the world.

Even prior to Vimy Ridge, the conquering of an elevated landscape dovetailed naturally with the notion of the elevation of Canada from colony to nation. Representations of Canadian success at the Battle of Paardeberg also emphasize high ground, for doing so was a means by which Canadian authors assimilated the foreign landscape of South Africa into the Canadian imaginary. Even in his comments to commemorate the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Paardeberg on 27 February 2020, retired Colonel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Alex Ruff, Member of Parliament, drew upon the aesthetics of high ground in his description of the battle:

During the early hours of the 27th of February, 1900, the battalion advanced by night toward the enemy lines, quietly digging trenches on high ground only 65 yards from the Boer lines. The Boers attempted to repel the Canadian advance and fierce fighting began. By 6 a.m. the Boers had surrendered, thus removing the enemy forces blocking the way to the Boer capital. (“Battle of Paardeberg” n.p.)

Depicting the Canadians as “quietly digging” from above and engaging in “fierce fighting” presents the soldiers as competent forces. Turning back to consider the trope of high ground in early accounts of the battle reveals the connection between the elevated landscape and affirmations of Canada’s success. The drawing “Dashing Advance of the Canadians at Paardeberg” (1900), number ten in G. W. Bacon’s *South African Battle Pictures* series, implicates the viewer in the charge from above, for the perspective positions the viewing subject behind the military advance looking down upon (and down on) the Boer troops below. Brown describes the militarily strategic view afforded by Paardeberg: “as the British began to advance along the plain parallel to the river was Paardeberg, a fair sized kopje that commanded an excellent view of both contending armies” (237). MacLeod introduces Paardeberg in *For the Flag, or, Lays and Incidents of the South African War* (1901) as “these heights which have now become historic, the heights on which so many of the brave attested their courage and their loyalty with the offering of their precious lives, the fate deciding heights of Paardeberg” (90). MacLeod’s use of repetition emphasizes the elevation of Paardeberg, a site which means “horse hill” in Afrikaans (Foot). She repeats this term in her poem “Chaplain O’Leary” (1901) when she describes the “dense hail of bullets on Paardeberg’s heights” (MacLeod 17). Edward William Thomson’s “A Canadian Reply (To One Who Would Refuse Liberty to the Boers)” published in *The Many-Mansioned House and Other Poems* (1909) sets the victory at Paardeberg in the context of the loss at Majuba Hill in the first Anglo-Boer War and then emphasizes its vengeance:

Ye braves who stormed a mountain crest  
To fight with five to one,

By God, praise thunders in the breast

To think such deed was done! (33-40)

The image of the men storming a hyperbolic “mountain crest” while significantly outnumbered demonstrates the use of high ground as a trope to exaggerate the triumph of the soldiers. Interestingly, Woodville’s painting (Figure 2) depicts the Canadians’ triumphalism amidst their wounded comrades on low ground, whereas the painting positions the Boers and their white flag of surrender descending from the heights. The battle’s most iconic image suggests that the Canadians succeeded at Paardeberg even without occupying high ground.

Yarker’s poem “A Nation’s Welcome” praises the high ground on which Canadians fought at Paardeberg:

Then from our coasts, like Centaurs springing forth,

Leaped out the Riders of “the faithful North”

To plant the Standard by their comrades’ side,

Upon the heights that Britain’s power defied. (21-24)

Yarker isolates the “heights” upon which the “centaur-like” Canadian Mounted Rifles fought in a passage that implicitly evokes British victory at Canada’s Queenston Heights during the War of 1812. In this stanza, it is the Canadians who planted the British flag at Paardeberg Drift in a triumphant act of territorial domination and imperial unity. By placing the Canadians “by their comrades’ side,” Yarker again suggests the Canadians’ equality to their British counterparts. The emphasis on high ground at Paardeberg exemplifies what Bentley explains is “the use of heights of land for the purposes of articulating a place-based personal and cultural identity” (*Canadian Architexts* 171). The

Canadians' perceived contributions to the occupation of Paardeberg reveal the degree to which the "heights of land" were connected to Canadian military identity. Bentley considers literature that was "cataloguing Canada's landscapes from a great height in order to emphasize the country's natural beauties, agricultural wealth, and commercial potential" (*Canadian Architexts* 186); the emphasis on Canada's triumph on high ground on foreign soil adds an additional layer to the nation's self-fashioning. Proclamations of Canadian success at Paardeberg that refer to the site's high ground reflect Canadian imperialism in South Africa. As the flag-planting in Yarker's poem reveals, Canadian victory at Paardeberg reinforced notions of Canada as a full nation whose military worth afforded it equality within the British Empire.

In addition to the association of elevated land with national ascent, heights of land also invite associations with the sacred. Duncan Campbell Scott's "The Height of Land" (1916) positions the poet "[w]rapped in his mantle on the height of land" (126) possibly "[i]n closer commune with divinity" (137). In *Over the Canadian Battlefields: Notes of a Little Journey in France in March, 1919* (1919), John W. Dafoe called Vimy "holy ground" (qtd. in Cook, *Vimy* 229). It is not unusual for the commemorator to combine the sacred and the secular; Mosse argues that the memory of the First World War was "refashioned into a sacred experience" in order for nations to experience "a new depth of religious feeling" (7). Vance points out that "[t]he special appeal of Vimy Ridge rested in its ability to bring together the religious and the nationalist" for the Easter Monday offensive "brought together two events of tremendous import: the celebration of the resurrection of Christ and the birth of a nation" ("Battle Verse" 265-66). John Daniel Logan's poem "Night—Harmonies on Vimy (For Remembrance of April 9, 1917)"

sanctifies the high ground of Vimy as well as associating martyrdom with the Canadian soldiers: “the Sacred Hill was stark—and stained / With sacramental wine from martyrs’ veins” (qtd. in Vance, “Battle Verse” 269). Of course, it should also be noted that in addition to the sacredness of Easter Monday corresponding to the Battle of Vimy Ridge, sites of high ground have traditionally lent themselves to metaphysical symbolism; one need only look to Dante who positions Earthly Paradise atop the mountain of Purgatory, or the Romantic poets’ preoccupation with high ground and the poet-figure’s proximity to God.

Prior to the connection between Vimy Ridge and the sacred, Canadians imbued Paardeberg with spiritual significance. In *Memories of Forty-Eight Years’ Service* (1925), Major-General Horace Smith-Dorrien, who commanded the 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade, noted that the lifting of heads and raising of the white flags at Paardeberg were “just like the resurrection” (qtd. in Pulsifer 50). Describing the surrender of the Boers at Paardeberg in eschatological terms attributes value and sacredness to the Canadians’ efforts there. Mellish describes the sacredness of the high ground at Paardeberg when she writes, “[t]o the north of Paardeberg,—field of immortal fame—kopjes [...] towered heavenward” (20). The high ground at Paardeberg towers “heavenward,” demonstrating a symbolic connection between high ground and the sacred. Patterson sanctifies Canada’s participation at Paardeberg by claiming that “Paardeberg will always be a holy name” (204). Attaching religious significance to the battle elevates its importance and ensures there will be a degree of reverence associated with it. The rhetorical links between high ground, nationalism, and the sacred at Paardeberg reflect the discursive construction of Canadian military participation in South Africa as concomitant with nationhood.

### 3.5 The Anti-Militarism of the Canadian Militiamen

In contrast to the ostensible gentlemanly decorum and order of the British military, as the testimonies from the Battle of Paardeberg reveal, many Canadians were keen to highlight Canada's fighting spirit or scrappy nature. Ernest J. Chambers wrote in 1902: "I know from dear experience that there is a very marked disposition to underrate the value of the military spirit in Canada, except perhaps at such times as the late Boer War" (7). Hubly suggests that Paardeberg fortified Canada's defensive position: "[h]enceforward, for a protection greater than Quebec, stronger than Kingston, and more formidable than Halifax, shall stand for Canada the memory of Paardeberg" (69). Marquis describes the Canadians' march to Paardeberg and their fatigue work *en route* to the battle, noting that it was "well done" (219). Marquis continues, "whatever the Canadians undertook in this campaign from building sidings to charging an army in the trenches, they did with a spirit that gained them among the regulars the name of the Royal Dare Devils" (219). The hyperbolic "eager hunters of men" (228) characterizes Marquis's description of the Canadians approaching the Boer position. Marquis compares the character of the Canadian soldiers at Paardeberg to Robert Baden-Powell's idealized plucky scout; he writes that "[e]ach man was depending on himself, without feeling the touch of the soldier to his left and right. ... Their comrades were too busy keeping cover and endeavoring to pick off the foe to observe what the next man was doing" (Marquis 240). Marquis describes the Canadians who took photographs of the firing lines, noting how "[o]ne of these camera fiends had his helmet, his tunic, and his instrument struck while taking a picture" and believed there "was little wonder that the regulars looked at their



dare-devil dash with amazement” (247). This account celebrates the rebellious and daring nature of the Canadians.

Similarly, Wilkinson’s “Paardeberg” (1901) depicts the Canadians’ battle fury as they “shower” the enemy with gunfire:

The Canadians shower on them from their magazines

An incessant and furious fire;

And the awful roar of the deadly battle-lines

Clamor wilder, wilder, higher. (65-68)

The description of the Canadians’ “incessant and furious” gunfire represents them as unrelenting opponents. Wilkinson’s use of asyndeton enhances the drama of the scene, quickening the pace of the comparatives “wilder” and “higher” that escalate the noise and frenzy of the battle. The cacophonous description of Canadian ferocity at the scene of battle sets up Wilkinson’s claim later in the poem that “[t]he charge was as daring and heroically press’d / As war’s vast annals ever gave” (85-86), alluding to Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854) as above, and exemplifying the courage and heroism of the Canadians.

In “The Battle of Paardeberg: By a Canadian Eye-Witness” (1900), the author describes the night scene at Paardeberg as “one to be remembered. It was terribly picturesque; it was awe-inspiring. The great sky and distant tree tops reflected the red glare of the burning ammunition waggons and carts that had been fired by our shells” (312). This account describes the enthusiasm of Canadians as “simply splendid” (310) and notes how the men were “filled with a dashing ardour that nothing could withstand” (310). The commentary on the “picturesque” scene and the gesture toward the sublime

(“awe-inspiring”) demonstrates an aesthetic sensibility that glorifies the battle. The author continues to describe the deadly cross-fire the men were facing from the Boers:

In a strong cross-fire nothing can live. Yet in spite of this our men began their desperate rush. Ah! the madness of it all. Heavens! what heroism! What mockery of grim death was in that charge! Like the great heroes of old they rushed upon the foe. Immediately the men began to drop. [...] Pierced through the body by two balls a Canadian falls, but so strong is the combativeness of his nature that with his last effort he points his rifle toward the trench, presses the trigger and—dies” (“The Battle” 311).

Once again, echoes of Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” resound in this passage because of the battle’s “madness” and death “in that charge.” The author’s hyperbole when describing a Canadian soldier and the strength of the “combativeness of his nature” emphasizes the “pluck” of the colonial troops. The caesura prior to the final word “dies” that announces the soldier’s death attempts to heighten the hyperbolic expression of the Canadian’s heroism in battle. The account continues:

Quite close to one another lay four of our Canadian boys, all dead. Involuntarily I reined in my horse and gazed silently at them. The countenances of some seemed as though still in life, as far as expression went. And such varied expressions! In some faces I could read a ghastly and defiant smile, as though, even in death as in life, the fierce hot thirst for human lives and the defiance of the grim destroyer were the dominant passions. (“The Battle” 313)

The “fierce hot thirst for human lives” and “defiance of the grim destroyer” highlight the fighting spirit of Canadians. The account describes the “varied expressions” of the

soldiers, which stresses the humanity of the individual soldier. As Vance explains, “[i]t is axiomatic that the very fact of military service implied the submergence of individual desire into the will of the group” for “[t]he military machine [. . .] demanded that its constituent parts, the soldiers, be stripped of their humanity” (*Death So Noble* 141). In contrast, the descriptions of the citizen-soldier’s warrior spirit and individuality indicate an anti-militarism celebrated in accounts of the Canadian soldiers at Paardeberg.

Hubly’s summary of Paardeberg includes a description of “the raw, undisciplined sons of Canada” who “led the way and forced the victory” (69). The adjectival emphasis on the “raw” and “undisciplined” nature of the Canadians at Paardeberg indicates the anti-militarism that characterized the construction of the Canadian soldier during the South African War. In “The South African War” entry in *The Cyclopedic Review of Current History* (1900), the author describes telegrams sent to Canada and Australia by Field Marshal Frederick (Lord) Roberts that praised “the remarkable soldierly qualities which he had observed in the colonial contingents during the whole week of fierce battle and swift march” (136). The entry continues, “[t]he Canadian newspapers, in their comments on the heavy loss in the Canadian battalion, [...] agree in saying that the blood thus shed will cement the union of Canada with the empire” (136). The publication affirms the Canadian losses at Paardeberg as worthwhile for imperial unity. John Stirling argues in *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902: Their Record, Based on the Despatches* (1907) that “[t]his very telling incident put beyond all question the splendid military value of the Canadian Contingent” (304). In his Appendix to *History of the Union Jack: How it Grew and What it Is* (1900), Barlow Cumberland justifies his advocacy for the addition of the maple leaf to the British ensign to become Canada’s new

flag. Cumberland cites Paardeberg as proof of the symbolic value of the maple leaf: “The wounded Canadian who, lying stricken on the veldt at Paardeberg, touched the maple leaf upon his helmet and breathed out the words, ‘If I die, it may help this to live,’ spoke that which burns within the heart of every Canadian lad and fires the inborn energy of his race” (306). In this fatal account, the Canadian soldier equates his potential death at Paardeberg with national life. Similarly, Mrs. C. Saunderson’s stanza to a widow and mother in “After Paardeberg” (1901) connects Canadian deaths at Paardeberg with the nation’s life: “...through the blood yours shed / This land now lifts its head / With laurels crowned” (16-18). Saunderson relies on an imported signifier of success and nationhood from ancient civilization—the laurels, a traditional symbol of victory—to claim that Canadian deaths at Paardeberg led to national life.

Of course, these descriptions of Canadian valour at the Battle of Paardeberg contrast recent efforts to downplay Canada’s martial memory. As the accounts from the Battle of Paardeberg demonstrate, many Canadians were eager to emphasize Canada’s fighting spirit, including the Canadian soldier’s stubbornness and refusal to be pushed around. MacKinnon explains that after the campaign, “the fighting spirit is still strong within us” (73). Hart-McHarg writes, “[w]e were all very much exhausted, and the reduction of our rations to three-quarters of a pound a day was beginning to make itself felt; but the sound of the firing and the chance of at last getting into a ‘scrap’ put new life into us” (103). The descriptions of combativeness, defiance, and the eagerness for a “scrap” reflect the fighting spirit of Canadians. Cadogan explains that when “the atmosphere in front of [him] turned a living red,” he “longed to kill,” and continues: “and almost as the thought came—my rifle spoke for the first time—and the bullet sped on its

way—accompanied by my heartfelt wish—I hope you will find a berth in the fatty part of some Boers [sic] anatomy” (108). Private James Herrick of London, Ontario wrote from Bloemfontein on 16 March 1900: “[t]hey say the Canadians are devils to fight. I tell them that is what we came for, to go to the front and hold up the Maple Leaf forever, and I think we did our part” (qtd. in Labat 128). Not only does Herrick profess the fighting nature of Canadians by means of his appeal to anonymous authority with “they say,” he links that combativeness to the symbol of Canada. In an article titled “The Maple Leaf in South Africa” (1900), a Canadian officer argues that the men who went to South Africa were “equals in pluck, equals in strength, equals in bravery, and equals in sagacity” to “Britishers of the mother country” (339). The anaphora emphasizes the equality of the Canadians, which renders the “pluck,” “strength,” “bravery,” and “sagacity” as givens. He continues to argue that these men “raised Canada to a more important position than she had previously held in the eyes of the world” (339). As the metonymy in the title of this article suggests, the Canadians who went to the war in South Africa took on a symbolic status. The ethos of the militia contrasts the gentlemanly order and rule of the British military. MacLeod hyperbolically describes “the prowess of the youthful warriors of Canada,” which “accorded the honor of hastening [General Cronjé’s] surrender” (93). The Canadians’ “experience has been a wondrous one” (MacLeod 95).<sup>39</sup> Representations of the Battle of Paardeberg attest to the construction of the Canadian soldier as a plucky

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<sup>39</sup> Sidney Allinson returns to Paardeberg in his 2001 novel *Kruger’s Gold*. He describes how his character, Harry Lanyard, fights at Paardeberg, and “was proud to have taken part when his fellow-countrymen fought so decisively. The struggle for Paardeberg lasted ten days, the longest, bloodiest set-piece battle of the war. [. . .] it was an attack by Canadians that finally won the day” (143-44). Allinson’s contemporary version of Paardeberg maintains the national mythology surrounding contemporaneous accounts of the battle when he reinforces that the Canadians were responsible for the victory.

colonial warrior and Canada as an aggressive, self-sufficient nation at the turn of the century.

### 3.6 Military Metaphors

Arthur Conan Doyle's impression of the Canadians also relies upon the metonymic connection between Canada and the maple leaf: "Here and there are other men again, taller and sturdier than our infantry line: grim, solid men, straight as poplars. There is a maple leaf upon their shoulders, and the British brigade is glad enough to have those maple leaves beside them, for the Canadians are the men of Paardeberg" (qtd. in MacLeod 115). Conan Doyle remarks on the Canadians' physical prowess in comparison to the British infantry, for they are "taller and sturdier," "grim," and "solid," descriptions that reflect the social Darwinism that was common during the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, in this construction, the place Paardeberg and the battle are synonymous. Naming the Canadians "the men of Paardeberg" suggests they are autochthonous there and reflects a colonizing impulse whereby military success resulted in the proclamation of land claims. By means of the metonymy in Conan Doyle's description that substitutes the Canadians for their symbolic maple leaf descriptor, Conan Doyle exemplifies the tropes that forged the notion that the nation's participation in the South African War was productive of Canadian nationhood.

The metonymic link between man and nation was a familiar trope in nineteenth-century literature. As J. Bristow explains in *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (1991), in *Boy's Own Paper*, "boys are identified not so much with but rather as the nation" (48). Private Thompson relays how, after the charge for Canadians and Cornwalls

to fix their bayonets and prepare to charge the Boers at Paardeberg, one soldier shouted, “come on Canada” (Cadogan 110).<sup>40</sup> This soldier’s synecdochic command illustrates the degree to which a small group of soldiers’ performance at one battle came to represent the nation; the soldier as synecdoche for Canada is a familiar trope. In a letter to Lieutenant-Colonel Ponton, Reverend F. C. Powell wrote how in the hospital ward, he could hear one of the Captains shouting in his sleep “[n]ow Canada, on Canadians!” (qtd. in Labat 127). Even Berton, in his history of the war, describes the Canadians’ fighting at Belfast as “one of the most spectacular actions of the war, a purely *Canadian* affair” (62, emphasis added). Vance outlines how the same metaphoric connection between soldier and nation occurred during the First World War:

The youth of the soldier paralleled the youth of Canada, while his devotion to his mother extended into devotion to his country and also symbolized the devotion of Canada to Mother Britain. The metaphors were so closely related that a certain amount of interchange in terms was inevitable; indeed, in this complex discourse the lines of distinction between the soldier and his country became blurred.

(*Death So Noble* 147)

In response to both wars, Canadians declared the soldier as nation in order to establish the nation as militant and the wars as the catalyst for full nationhood.

Beers’s speech “Rifle Shooting as a National Pastime for Canada” (1900), referred to above, illustrates the metaphoric connection between Canadian military activity and national identity. In the speech, Beers argues that rifle practice should

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<sup>40</sup> In *Marching as to War* (2001), Berton provides a different version of this rush of the enemy. He reports that John Todd, an American who served in the Philippines, shouted, “Come on, boys!” (50).

become a national pastime. He rationalizes the seemingly odd inclusion of the speech in a dental journal by claiming that “[m]any of [Canada’s] dentists are good shots” (117) because he wants to organize “non-military clubs in the Dominion—in brief, to make every boy and man a crack shot” (117). Beers’s philosophy reveals the “sports-war equation” (Alexander 662) that characterized British imperial militarism at the turn of the century. James A. Mangan explains the values of nobility and sacrifice that were attached to the image of the imperial public schoolboy, calling him the “warrior-patriot” who would “fight and die for England’s greatness overseas” (60). For Canadian imperialists, Berger reminds us, “[p]ersonal experience and vicarious knowledge shaped their conception of war as a rather exhilarating kind of sport in which few were killed and from which, so it was said, many desirable consequences followed” (*The Sense* 235). He explains, “warfare was seen as a rather strenuous sport and an expression of national self-assertiveness and fitness” (Berger, *The Sense* 257). Beers’s speech highlighted the value of guerilla warfare and the importance of a citizen’s militia, for he argued that loyal citizens should dutifully prepare for emergencies (118). Beers pointed to the guerilla strategies of the Boers to advocate for a citizen army in Canada, noting the “efficiency and mobility of comparatively undisciplined forces” and the “individual habit of strategy and self-reliance, which has revolutionized for every nation some of the theories and practice of modern warfare” (118). Beers’s speech (and many constructions of Canadian success at Paardeberg) reflects the prominence of Canada’s militia myth, “the belief in the superiority and dependability of the untrained citizen soldier over the disciplined, barrack-bred British regular” (Miller, *Painting the Map* 9). Furthermore, Beers’s construction of Canadian soldiers demonstrates the “frontier masculinity” that Amy Shaw



argues characterized Canadians fighting in South Africa; it “valourized a more rough-hewn independence and countenanced disorder, including violence, as a necessary means to an end” (23). In isolating the desirable traits of the ideal citizen-soldier, Beers highlights characteristics of the young Canadian nation. Beers pronounces a model of Canadian citizenship founded on Canada’s performance in the South African War.

Similarly, in “The Maple Leaf in South Africa” referred to earlier, the author describes how after Canadian participation in the Battle of Paardeberg, “the ‘boys’ who went to South Africa on a sort of picnic trip were tried and trusted veterans” (340). The author argues that they

taught the world that the citizen with militia training takes little drilling to make him the equal of any soldier of the line. They and the other colonials taught the world that colonial troops are more capable of acting coolly and judiciously in an emergency than those soldiers who have been trained into automatic machines. They taught the world that the development of individual intelligence does not mean a loss of bravery or courage. (“The Maple Leaf in South Africa” 340)

Like Beers, the author of “The Maple Leaf in South Africa” connects Canada’s role in South Africa, and Paardeberg specifically, with independence, intelligence, and courage. The utility of the militia legend for Canadians responding to the South African War reflected the way in which commemorations of Canada’s role in the War of 1812 also relied on the legend. Berger points out that “to emphasize the role of the regular British soldiers [who fought in the War of 1812] would have tended to subtract from the fame of

the loyalist settlers and deprive the war of its national meaning” (*The Sense* 105).<sup>41</sup>

Constructing the Canadians as citizen soldiers and as distinct from the British regulars was one example of attempts to enhance the meaning of the South African War for Canada.

While fervently promoting a citizen army for Canada, Beers links the manner of fighting displayed in South Africa with Canadian identity:

We have seen enough and know enough in this country to measure the special characteristics of the rough and ready colonist-born, in contrast to the more coddled native-born, and it is these very characteristics which, for the first time in European history, were splendidly displayed for our boys in Africa, whether with the spade, the pick-axe or the rifle. (118-19)

Beers’s suggestion that the manner of fighting the Canadians demonstrated in the South African War mirrored the identity of Canadians thereby links Canada’s behaviour in the South African War with the qualities associated with self-government. Beers continues by highlighting “the individuality and self-reliance of our people” (124) as well as the “manly independence of Canadians” (124). “The Maple Leaf in South Africa” describes Canadian values as they manifested during the South African War in a similar way: “Their lack of drill discipline and their greater intelligence and self-reliance made them different from the British troops, and this very difference made their losses much less

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<sup>41</sup> Berger provides this example of the War of 1812 in his explication of the United Empire Loyalist tradition and imperial unity in Canada. This version of nationalism “symbolized the preservation of continuity of British national life in the new world and it enjoined all Canadians to maintain that connection” (Berger, *The Sense* 107), and this focus on heritage is evident in the desire to aide Britain in the South African War.

numerous” (342). The emphasis on the industry of the citizen soldier in the South African War reflects Canada’s move to independence: “Britain has blundered into the fact that too much attention has been spent on old-fashioned and new-fashioned drill, and too little on the development of the individual resourcefulness of the soldier, and far too little attention on individual practice at the ranges” (Beers 119). Beers creates the image of a Canadian by promoting a version of Canadian soldiering. He writes, “Canadians are far from quarrelsome, but the instinct of fight is born in the blood, and bred in the bone” (Beers 121).<sup>42</sup>

In “The Great Game” (2010), Caroline Alexander distinguishes between American and British concepts of athleticism: the American frontier athleticism “was about being stronger, clobbering the competition, blood lust,” in contrast to a form of British athleticism that “was about playing games” (662). Beers’s concept of the ideal Canadian soldier falls somewhere in between; a Canadian soldier possesses “the instinct of fight,” but has the independence of the colonial. Marquis explains how “[t]he Royal Canadians had gone into the battle of Paardeberg with the feeling that war was a great game in which they were playing their part. They laughed and they joked as the enemy’s bullets sang around them” (252). Marquis reflects the British sense that war is a game in order to position the Canadians as heroes at Paardeberg. On the other hand, Beers credits the South African War for revealing the importance of “acting upon one’s own individual

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<sup>42</sup> Ironically, the much-lauded citizen-soldier composition of the Canadian troops for South Africa entailed the dissolution of the war’s memory. Because many of the men were not permanently attached to the Canadian Militia, there was not enough consistent communion and infrastructure to ensure the war’s memory. For example, the veterans of the Battle of Harts River “possessed no regimental link to the Canadian Militia,” which entailed that its commemoration “faded with the battle’s last survivors” (Miller, *Canada’s Little War* 74). The temporary nature of some of the Canadian troops for South Africa led to the ephemeral nature of Canada’s South African War commemoration and the fading of the war’s memory.

judgment in emergencies” (119), and claims that the “North-West Mounted Police can teach these lessons to the very best military teachers in Europe, as our contingent taught Tommy Atkins how to handle the spade” (119). Stories of Canadian colonials “schooling” Tommy Atkins on the veldt were essential to constructing Canada’s myth of origins in South Africa. Notions of the independence of the Canadian soldier differed from the nature of the British military; Kate Massiah, a journalist, and mother of Trooper Hubert Massiah, wrote to the King, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and Lord Strathcona about the men’s mistreatment due to the fact that the British officers “failed to understand” that Canadians “are accustomed to being treated as intelligent men, not as an automatic body” (qtd. in Wallace, *No Colours* 209). S. Brown justifies comparisons between Canada and the British regulars with his assertion of Canadians’ ability to think: “nine-tenths of the Canadians on that contingent had been making their own livings at home by reason of honest labor, skill or ingenuity, and no matter by what art, trade or calling, they had been taught to *think* for themselves, to depend on themselves at home for their prosperity” (138). Like Brown suggests, and as Beers’s speech demonstrates, Canada’s participation in South Africa and specifically at Paardeberg became a metaphor for the nation’s identity; the literature suggests that the very nature of the nation’s participation in the South African War mirrored the image of the ideal Canadian.

### 3.7 Commemorating Canadian Deaths at Paardeberg

*Yet portion of that unknown plain  
 Will Hodge for ever be;  
 His homely Northern breast and brain  
 Grow up a Southern tree,  
 And strange-eyed constellations reign*

*His stars eternally.*

–Thomas Hardy, “The Dead Drummer” (1899)  
[“Drummer Hodge”]

Contemporaneous Canadian accounts of the Battle of Paardeberg also carefully document the care of the dead at its conclusion. These accounts rely on the pastoral convention to depict the burial ground. Descriptions of the commemorative activities at Paardeberg also focus on the togetherness of the Canadian bodies during the burial process. Father O’Leary’s tenderness toward the dead at Paardeberg became legendary in Canadian reports of the battle. Father O’Leary’s determination to tend to the men in the firing-line exemplifies the pluck and defiance of the Canadian soldier demonstrated earlier, which is uncharacteristic of a military chaplain, but foreshadows Canon F. G. Scott’s active role as military chaplain in the First World War. Father O’Leary inserts himself in the charge:

On, on we rushed through a hail of bullets, the air alive again with deadly missiles.

On we rushed, madly, wildly, tearing through brambles, stumbling over prostrate comrades, eager in the delirium of bloodshed and destruction which had seized on us all to reach the enemy’s trenches. And above the din of battle, oh, that wild soul-stirring cheer, or rather that savage yell! Like tigers our brave boys bounded over the open. (O’Leary qtd. in Mellish 28)

Resonant of the Tennysonian “wild” charge, O’Leary’s ironic personification of the air that is “alive with deadly missiles” animates the Chaplain’s description of the battle’s risks and the Canadians’ animalistic battle-hunger. In MacLeod’s “Chaplain O’Leary,” she describes how on the “march of a hundred miles” (5) to Paardeberg, he “faltered not, fell not away from the ranks, / But trod with the youngest of men” (7-8). MacLeod

highlights O’Leary’s reputation as one of the rank and file, noting that “[i]n the dense hail of bullets” at Paardeberg he “sought for no shield; / But smilingly walked in the dread firing line / Some help or some comfort to yield” (17-20). Marquis also expresses Father O’Leary’s boldness at Paardeberg, describing him as:

that noble self-sacrificing priest Father O’Leary, who has time and time again in this war proved himself worthy of the Victoria Cross. Than he there was no braver soldier in South Africa; wherever a wounded man needed succor, he was there; where a dying lad needed to be shrived there he was to be found. Out of the firing-line he could not keep. (241)

Marquis’s use of inverted poetic syntax emphasizes Father O’Leary’s bravery and willingness to enter the line of fire. The inversion serves to highlight what many Canadian accounts reported as Father O’Leary’s willingness to tend to the men from within the firing line on the field. Private Herrick of London, Ontario, wrote home in a letter describing Father O’Leary’s popularity: “[w]e have a chaplain with us named O’Leary. He is a Roman Catholic priest, and he is a grand old man, and every man on the field likes him. He was right in the field all day of the fight. He was better than a doctor to some of the men” (qtd. in Labat 128).

In stark contrast to his harsh, militaristic descriptions of battle, Hart-McHarg comments on Father O’Leary’s efforts to lay the dead to rest at Paardeberg:

he tended and soothed the wounded all through that bleak night on the battle-field, and carried comfort and solace to the dying. His work was not finished until next morning, when Canada’s honoured dead having been gathered together and placed in their sandy grave in a little grove of trees some distance from the banks

of the fateful river, he, in hushed accents which sent a thrill through everyone within sound of his voice, tenderly committed them “to the keeping of God’s angels.” (113-14)

Hart-McHarg praises O’Leary’s work throughout the night, and several accounts of the Battle of Paardeberg echo his overnight efforts. Tweddell’s journal entry of 19 February 1900 records how Father O’Leary “held a short burial service over the grave” (132). Tweddell “nearly forgot to mention the bravery of Rev. P. O’Leary during Sunday’s fight. He was to be seen right up in the firing line walking along calmly from man to man through the galling fire & it is marvellous how he escaped” (134). Establishing the chaplain of the Royal Canadian Regiment as a noble warrior, not just a humble priest, enhances the depiction of the Canadian troops’ ferocity.

J. W. Bengough’s “Father O’Leary’s Return” printed in Borthwick’s *Poems and Songs* (1901), titled just “Father O’Leary” in Bengough’s volume *In Many Keys* (1902), characterizes Father O’Leary as a front-line soldier: “’Twas yours not to fight, tho’ in many a battle / Your khaki clad form wid the fighters was seen” (23-24). Bengough exposes the gendered subjectivity of the war hero by fusing Father O’Leary’s traditionally feminine qualities with the typical masculinity associated with the soldier. As the regimental chaplain, Father O’Leary stands apart from the stereotypically masculine soldier: “’Twas yours to kneel down by the poor fellows dyin’— / A father and mother in one, so you were—” (25-26). Canadian reports of Father O’Leary’s importance in South Africa highlight his ability to transcend religious differences and care for every man. Bengough attributes Father O’Leary’s popularity to his religious tolerance:

But your heart was too big in its pity an' kindness

To know in such moments the limits iv [sic] creed;

You were equally ready, in charity's blindness,

The Protestant prayer o'er an Orangeman to read. (29-32)

Praise of Father O'Leary's tenderness to both creeds hints at the potential of religious tolerance in Canada: "May your name unite Catholic and Protestant neighbors / In a mutual respect that will never more cease" (39-40). Bengough's claim that Father O'Leary could "unite Catholic and Protestant neighbors" (39) suggests that the South African War was perceived as leading to unity in Canada. The reports of the funereal proceedings over which Father O'Leary presided attest to the importance the Canadians placed on commemorating the men's participation in South Africa.

In addition to the record of Father O'Leary's service, Canadian accounts of the battle reveal care and concern about the final resting place of the lost Canadian bodies: "As a result of our first battle, we left twenty-three Canadians in the hollow sandy graves of Africa. Will they sleep as well as under the snows of Canada?" (Hubly 71). The emptiness of the "hollow sandy graves of Africa" emphasizes the loneliness of the dead and the foreignness of the burials. Hubly contrasts Canada's "snows" and South Africa's "sand" to intensify the binary he establishes between home and away. Hubly's and McHarg's "sandy graves" chime with Norman Patterson's concern about the Canadian bodies buried in the "sandy veldt" (205) quoted earlier, and the "burning sand" and "Egyptian sands" in Nix's and Roberts's Nile Expedition poems. Descriptions of the sandy, foreign burial grounds exoticize the site of British settlement, thereby distinguishing Canada within the Empire. Questioning the suitability of the overseas



burial grounds also emphasizes the problem of overseas commemoration of Canadian military sacrifices. In Hubly's account, the pathos comes from the graves' distance from Canada. The repetition of "away" in his description of the death of a stretcher-bearer reinforces this sense of separation: "[w]e buried him away out there where so many heroes await reveille—away from friends and the beloved hills of Canada" (Hubly 71). Hubly's concern about the Canadians left "in the hollow sandy graves of Africa" is mirrored in the penultimate stanza of Hardy's poem as quoted in the epigraph to this section. Hodge has become a part of the South African landscape, for his "breast and brain / Grow up a Southern tree" (13-14). The notion of the dead body resting in a foreign location in Hubly's and Hardy's writing echoes forward in Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" (1915). In the poem, the speaker assures the reader that in the event of his death, part of England will become a part of the foreign landscape, for "there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England. There shall be / In that rich earth a richer dust concealed" (Brooke 2-4). Arthur Weir's final poem "Dead by the Modder" (1901) also emphasizes the southern burial of the bodies:

Dead by the Modder they lie,  
 Under a southern sky;  
 Happy it is to die  
 For country and Queen.  
 The south their bones shall hold,  
 But here, in the north, behold  
 The shrine of those strong and bold  
 Shall rise ere the grass is green. (1-8)

In this stanza, Weir juxtaposes north and south to venerate war loss. The use of the simple future tense in the concluding line of the stanza highlights that although Canadian soldiers' bodies will remain in South Africa, it is in Canada where their legacy will quickly be seen.

In contrast to Hubly's and Weir's emphasis on the separation of the Canadian body from the Canadian landscape as noted earlier, many Canadian accounts rely on the pastoral convention to commemorate the Canadian fallen quite soon after the battle, despite the war-torn landscape. Mellish describes the "nineteen Canadian heroes [who] were laid to rest under the balmy trees of the now famous Modder [River]" (28). Similarly to Hart-McHarg's description of the burial at Paardeberg quoted earlier, Tweddell also recounts how the men were called to bury the dead: "[w]e chose a nice spot under a grove of trees & dug a large trench & put all the Canadians together" (132). In a letter from Captain Rogers dated 19 February 1900, Rogers describes the death of Zachary R. E. Lewis. Rogers assures his reader Lewis "had his remains buried. [...] He lies with his comrades near the bank of the Modder River, at the edge of a beautiful grove—one of the few we have seen in this country" (qtd. in Labat 125). Similarly, Brown writes, "[n]ear a grove of trees at the edge of the river, Father O'Leary, at noon the next day, performed the burial service over the Canadians who had given up their lives the day before" (251). Rogers's, Tweddell's, and Brown's accounts all echo Hart-McHarg's report above that describes the grove of trees by which the Canadians lay buried. Groves of trees serve as idylls that "displace the thought of death into the contemplation of nature" (Mosse 43). References to the groves of trees in Paardeberg accounts symbolize beauty and regeneration in contrast to the harsh reality of death. The

Canadians sought beauty in a place many soldiers associated with intense sand, dust, dryness, and extremes of heat or cold. The Paardeberg accounts reveal a preoccupation with locating a necessarily pastoral or regenerative memorial tribute to the fallen in the immediate geographic vicinity of the battle. These “balmy trees” became animate symbols of the life-giving sacrifices of the Canadian soldiers at Paardeberg.

As Mosse points out, “[n]ature symbolized . . . an immortality that could be shared by the soldier and that legitimized wartime sacrifice” (109). During the Enlightenment, Christian belief about death became associated with the “living of a harmonious life within the confines of nature” instead of about repentance, a change which “transformed the Christian cemetery into a peaceful wooded landscape of groves and meadows” (Mosse 39). Mosse cites the American Park Cemetery Movement, the Park of Remembrance in Rome, and Hans Grässer’s forest cemetery design in the nineteenth century as examples of cemetery architecture that began to reflect an Enlightenment belief in death as tranquility or sleep as opposed to the terror previously associated with it (41). Grässer’s designs were known as “*Heldenhaine*, or heroes’ groves”—sites “where each of the trees stood for one of the fallen” (Mosse 43). As Mosse argues, “[n]ature itself could be a symbolic substitute for actual graves” (43). Vance explains that the use of trees in First World War memorials “represented the promise of everlasting life” (*Death So Noble* 47). John Bacher describes the “goal of planting trees ceremoniously and with respect as the basis of a communal ritual” that characterized post-First World War commemoration, such as the planting of trees at Toronto’s Coronation Park (213). Like the link between high ground and the sacred, trees also accrue hallowed symbolism. Canon F. G. Scott blessed the tree planting at

Coronation Park, noting how the trees were symbolic of the ideals of the Canadian Corps since both “reached up toward heaven” (qtd. in Bacher 213). The repeated references to the importance of the “little grove of trees” that marked the Canadian burials in the accounts quoted above illustrates the symbolic weight attached to the trees that stood as memorial markers of the Canadian deaths at Paardeberg. As Campbell writes, “the pastoral becomes a physical correlative for the act of collective memory, or for the afterlife of heroes” (54-55); the use of the pastoral in Paardeberg accounts reflects the immediate acts of collective memory on behalf of Canadian soldiers and writers as they attempted to enshrine not just the soldiers but this battle into Canadian history.

Jeremy Garrett cites Philippe Ariès’s consideration of the nineteenth century as “the beautiful death” as Victorians following the Enlightenment in moving away from thoughts of “divine judgement” after death (4). Ariès explains how the mourners began to focus less on the horrors of the death of a person and more on the suffering that results from loss (Garrett 4). Garrett follows Ariès in pointing to the Crimean War to demonstrate the beginnings of a shift in attitudes toward burial practices during war, noting that it was during the Crimean War that soldiers revealed efforts to preserve and commemorate battle deaths; by this point in the nineteenth century, soldiers grappled with the emotional response to loss in addition to the practical need to bury soldiers’ bodies (37). In the Canadian context, Garrett argues that the exhumation and collection of Tecumseh’s body in 1876 after a group sought to locate Tecumseh’s gravesite reveals a greater interest in the proper burials of soldiers’ bodies in the second half of the nineteenth century (73). Garrett outlines British burial efforts during the South African War, but does not attend to the details of Canadian efforts, especially the accounts quoted

above that describe the immediate commemoration of the Canadian fallen at Paardeberg. However, his suggestion that burial and memorial experiences from the South African War inspired post-war efforts to commemorate previous Canadian or British military efforts demonstrates the importance of the South African War in shaping the commemorative practices that marked First World War losses.

MacLeod quotes the anonymous poem “After the Battle—Paardeberg” in *For the Flag* (1901), which also commemorates the solemnity that marked this occasion for Canada by relying on the pastoral:

“Among the thorn trees in the glade  
Our heroes gently sleep;  
And though nor maid nor mother dear  
By that lone grave may weep.

Beneath the spreading hawthorn wild  
As peacefully they’ll rest  
As if the flowers of Canada  
Bloomed sweetly o’er each breast.” (5-12)

The poem alludes to the opening line of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Village Blacksmith” (1840), “[u]nder a spreading chestnut-tree” (1), to convey the sense of peace for the Canadian bodies. Campbell reads the description of lilies in Archibald Lampman’s “At the Long Sault, 1660,” arguing that the flower “presents commemoration as natural sympathy rather than human creation, an elegiac convention that recurs often in Canada’s military literature” (8). The “spreading hawthorn” above the Canadian bodies at

Paardeberg naturalizes the deaths as intrinsic to the moment of national becoming, for the poet compares the bush to the “flowers of Canada.” The image of the “flowers of Canada” blooming “sweetly o’er each breast” reflects a standard trope in pastoral elegies whereby the deceased body is covered over with flowers. Mosse also recounts how in English and French war traditions, the planting of colourful flowers “disguise[s] the tragic and heroic death of the fallen” (84). Nature is used ““to take the sting out of death” (Mosse 88) in “After the Battle—Paardeberg.” After the First World War especially, “[t]he fallen in England . . . were associated with the pastoral. The flowers on English graves were intended to recreate an English country churchyard, suggesting home and hearth” (Mosse 110-11). The second stanza’s concluding lines align with the tradition of implying “home and hearth,” for it is “as if” the nation’s flowers bloom over the Canadian bodies. In “After the Battle—Paardeberg,” the poet attempts to domesticate the burial grounds of the Canadian bodies by referring to the “flowers of Canada,” which contrasts with the emphasis on foreignness in Hardy’s poem in which the personified “strange-eyed constellations” look over Drummer Hodge’s dead body. The parallelism in “nor maid nor mother” (7) emphasizes the absence of female mourners at the gravesite, but the natural glade and wild hawthorn provide a consolatory function that serve as a palliative for this absence. The pastoral images in “After the Battle—Paardeberg” make the foreign battlefield home and translate the Canadian soldiers’ deaths as symbols of national sacrifice.

Similarly, W. M. MacKeracher implies that Canada achieved recognition as a nation within the Empire within the context of imperial mourning in the concluding stanza of “Canada’s Eighteen” (1908):

And now, as Britain weaves  
 The garland of her grief,  
 We place among the leaves  
 A blood-red maple leaf. (29-32)

The addition of the “blood-red maple leaf” to Britain’s wreath of mourning symbolizes Canada distinguishing itself within the Empire by means of natural imagery. Similarly, Bengough connects Canada to Britain with symbolic imagery in “The Return of the Contingents” from *In Many Keys* (1902):

Fete them, and feast them,  
 And hero-wreaths weave them  
 Of oak leaves and maple leaves  
 Lovingly blended;  
 For by valor of theirs  
 Was Majuba jibe ended; (15-20)

Bengough suggests that Canada’s role in avenging the British loss at Majuba led to unity between Canada and Britain by means of the “[l]ovingly blended” oak and maple wreaths.

Hart-McHarg describes the care that was taken to ensure the commemoration of the Canadian dead at the site of Paardeberg: “Before we left the vicinity of Paardeberg, volunteer parties went back to the scene of the fighting and carefully improved the last resting places of our comrades, fixing up the graves as well as possible, and placing large stones round them” (Hart-McHarg 135). Captain C. K. Fraser describes the burial of Private Wasdell after Paardeberg: “He was buried [...] in a very pretty spot on the river

bank. The grave has been nicely fixed up and fenced in by some of his comrades, and a cross placed at the head” (qtd. in Labat 126). Writing on 4 March 1900 on a Sunday following the Battle of Paardeberg, Tweddell describes further commemoration of the Canadians by means of his description of the decoration of their graves:

[v]olunteers were called for to go & decorate the graves of our late comrades. Some 50 men volunteered including Non-Coms & Officers. We started out with 2 Scoth [Scotch] carts & marched down. The carts were filled with stones & empty Shrapnel shells. We fixed the graves nicely with stones & shell all around a large cross of stone across the top & Canada in small white stone [stones] & two of us picked some wild flowers & put them in the centre of the graves. Dr. Wilson took a snap shot of them. They look very nice indeed both being under a clump of trees (141)

Hart-McHarg’s and Tweddell’s descriptions of the “fixing up” of the graves during the commemoration of the Canadian deaths reflects efforts at Paardeberg to focus upon “the tidiness and tranquility of death in war” (Mosse 130) rather than the gruesome losses of life. The account demonstrates the commemorative acts that held national symbolism after Paardeberg. Dr. Wilson’s “snap shot” is indicative of the curation of memorial efforts during the early commemoration of Canadian losses. Furthermore, Tweddell’s account of inscribing national identity internationally exemplifies “Canada’s desire for distinctiveness within the imperial family” (Miller, *Canada’s Little War* 85). Miller describes the plain wooden or iron crosses that mark British graves in South Africa, but Tweddell’s description reveals the effort with which the Canadians inscribed the nation’s name on these immediate monuments.



To return to “After the Battle—Paardeberg,” the poem’s speaker describes the inscriptions on the graves at Paardeberg as well:

Rough stones from off the dismal veldt  
 Shield well their lowly bed;  
 We piled them high and set a cross  
 As guardian at the head.

And ’scribed thereon our comrades’ names  
 That all who mark that mound  
 May learn that every patriot heart  
 Doth sleep in hallowed ground. (13-20)

By means of high diction such as “lowly,” “patriot heart,” and “hallowed ground,” the poet clouds the reality of the foreign grave, and the euphemistic “[d]oth sleep” reduces the impact of the soldiers’ deaths. The poem reinforces the sacredness of the site of Paardeberg by the suggestion that it is “hallowed ground.” In describing the collection of stones and the placement of the cross that also appear in Johnson’s and Tweddell’s accounts, the speaker recounts the careful Canadian memorialization process. The Canadians’ emphasis on the importance of salvaging and placing the stones contrasts with the “cold” depiction of stone grave coverings in “To Frank Robinson” (1901) by R. W. Eglinton of the British 24<sup>th</sup> Middlesex Rifle Volunteers:

Upon that once warm heart the cold stones rest,  
 Grey, rugged boulders, jealous of their prey,  
 Amongst whose crevices the lizards nest

Like the quick thoughts that animate the clay. (9-12)

Whereas the pile of stones in “After the Battle—Paardeberg” transforms the earth into “hallowed ground,” in Eglinton’s treatment, the rugged stones are a reptilian home. The practice of piling stones over the grave had the pragmatic function of preventing wild animals from unearthing the soldiers’ bodies.<sup>43</sup> However, Garrett outlines Viscount Alfred Milner’s 1903 proposal for South African War memorials, which includes a cairn of stones and a stone slab for marking outlying or lone graves (56). In “After the Battle—Paardeberg,” the act of burial decoration is a kind of “shrine[] of national worship” (Mosse 80) to the Canadian bodies and as an opportunity for the inscription of names. The poet also reveals a democratizing impulse in the inscription because it signifies the symbolism of “every patriot heart” (19). MacKeracher’s “Canada’s Eighteen” (1908) memorializes the men who died at Paardeberg, insisting that the names of the eighteen Canadians will always be remembered:

And yet no hero’s fame  
 That rings across the seas,  
 Shall e’er eclipse the name  
 And memory of these. (21-24)

MacKeracher suggests that because of Paardeberg Canada will no longer need to look to Britain for its war heroes, for “no hero’s fame” from “across the seas” will surpass the memory of the Canadians who died at Paardeberg.

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<sup>43</sup> Thank you to Jonathan F. Vance for this note.

Mellish quotes the text on the cross of Lieutenant Charles C. Wood's grave that the soldiers in the first contingent of the Royal Canadian Regiment inscribed. After Paardeberg, the soldiers erected a wooden slab with the inscription "CANADIANS: N. C. O. and men R. C. R. 1, Died on the battlefield, Feb. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1900. 'Dead, but not forgotten'" (16). Another correspondent describes a visit to the Paardeberg battlefield:

One grave is conspicuous in a glade amongst the thorn trees. It is that of six of the brave Canadians who fell when one of the Boer trenches was rushed. The grave is covered with large stones, and a cross formed of planks stands at the head, with the inscription: "In memory of Corporals Withey and Withers, Privates G. Orman, J. M. Johnson, J. B. Scott, W. A. Riggs, Royal Canadian Regiment, killed in action, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1900." (qtd. in Labat 155)

In addition to the specific naming of the Royal Canadian Regiment—which is yet another example of the efforts to inscribe the nation's name on the international memorials—these inscriptions evince the accounting for each individual soldier and transcend the anonymity of the mass grave. In "Burial at Paardeberg" (1901), Wilkinson's use of the imperative instructs the soldier-mourners at Paardeberg to "[p]lace a white stone o'er each head; / Carve their noble names upon them" (26-27). Unlike the natural elegiac function of the "grove of trees," the acts of inscription reveal the element of "human creation" (Campbell 8) by means of the efforts to nationalize the Battle of Paardeberg and convert the deaths into a useful narrative of nationhood.

Johnson's "Gun-Shy Billy" is again pertinent here, for as seen earlier, the young protagonist, Billy, is a bugler in the South African War. Johnson describes the immediate commemoration of Paardeberg: "Weeks afterwards the newspapers rang with the glory of

it all. The fame and the bravery of the Canadian regiments at the terrible battle of Paardeburg [sic] was known to all the world” (208). With echoes of “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” Johnson describes how Billy sees a fellow Canadian soldier “shot in a dozen places” who then asks Billy to bring his love home to his wife and son. The narrator describes Billy’s reflections on the Battle of Paardeberg when he returns to Canada and sees the wife of the soldier whose death he witnessed at the battle:

He saw only a simple grave in the open veldt in far-away Africa—a grave that he, himself, had heaped with stones formed in the one word “Canada.” At the recollection of it, poor Billy buried his aching head in his hands. The glory had paled and vanished. There was nothing left of this terrible war but the misery, the mourning, the heartbreak of it all! (Johnson 211)

Johnson’s story depicts the same care for the “simple grave in the open veldt” that Tweddell describes in his diary; in both cases, the mourner marks the grave as Canadian with a natural stone adornment. The patterning of the natural landscape into the word “Canada” can be read as a colonizing act. The stone monuments also speak to consolatory acts that lend a sense of permanence to the bodies that will not return from overseas. In Johnson’s narrative, Billy’s reflection on the gravesite and his commemorative act leads to his mourning. Johnson’s focus on foreignness and absence is evident in her description of the “simple grave in the open veldt in far-away Africa.” The grave in South Africa comes to symbolize an anti-war stance by means of Johnson’s use of asyndeton and spondaic stress in the cumulative effect of Billy’s lamentation at the end of this passage; Billy is left with “the misery, the mourning, the heartbreak of it all.” Johnson does not repeat the image of “the public school hero’s selfless, reckless devotion

to a vague yet ideal cause” (van Wyk Smith 57) that much South African War writing epitomizes. Billy is not a representation “of the late-Victorian public school warrior” (van Wyk Smith 58) but a sensitive, mournful bugler. Unlike the consolatory function of commemoration in the poems and accounts described above, the symbol of the Canadian gravesite in Johnson’s narrative is resistant to consolation.

In contrast to the emptiness and openness described by Hubly and Johnson, as described earlier, several descriptions of the burials at Paardeberg emphasize the togetherness of the Canadian bodies. MacLeod quotes a Canadian’s description of Paardeberg: “It is impossible to describe the moving about in the blackness, with the bullets fairly raining about, the only human sounds being the cries and moans of the wounded men, or a short, sharp order to ‘advance,’ or ‘volley fire,’ or ‘charge’” (92). The account of the Canadian continues: “as dawn began to break we saw that the victory was to be ours and that it would be a glorious one” (qtd. in MacLeod 92). He continues, “we gathered together to bury our dead comrades. We dug a long trench and laid them down side by side while Father O’Leary said a short service over all creeds. Tears filled many of our eyes, tears of grief for our lost brothers-in-arms, and of thankfulness because we had escaped a like fate” (qtd. in MacLeod 92-93). Brown also describes how “[i]n a long-trench seventeen bodies were tenderly laid side by side, and the first Canadian graves were made on the sandy veldt” (251). Similarly, Father O’Leary described the burial after Paardeberg: “Monday morning we gathered our dead together, and buried them, side by side, eighteen in all, in one broad grave, whilst I performed the sad but consoling duty of committing them to the care of God’s angels, when we would be far away from this fateful land” (qtd. in Labat 130). Despite the difference in the number of dead between

the accounts, they specify the careful placement of the Canadian bodies “side by side” and the respect granted thereby. Hart-McHarg describes how Canada’s “honoured dead” were “gathered together” (113), and Tweddell writes how they “put all the Canadians together” (132). The accounts carefully record the togetherness of the Canadian bodies in the South African grave, demonstrating the camaraderie very typical of First World War accounts.

In W. Campbell’s “[These we give to the Empire],” the speaker’s use of the imperative instructs readers how to remember the fallen:

Lift high their funeral urns;—

And speak their names with pride:—

Scott, Maundrel, Jackson, Summers, Todd,

Findlay, Marrion, Lewis, Jackson, Burns,

Goodfellow, Lester, Barrie, McQueen,

Brunswick, Taylor, McCrary.

They have gone back to God.—

These gave their loyal breath

These died the heroes’ death

To keep our mighty Empire vast and wide. (3-12)

Campbell’s use of asyndeton to list the names of the Canadian dead at Paardeberg emphasizes the togetherness of the Canadians. The lumbering catalogue of names illustrates the “cult of the service roll, an obsession with listing the names of those soldiers who had joined the colours” (Vance, *Death So Noble* 116). As Vance explains, “the identity and individuality of the soldier were paramount concerns. The accounts that

appeared in newspapers and patriotic volumes relied heavily on letters written by soldiers, and usually included detailed lists of the members of the local regiment who had offered their services to the colours” (*Death So Noble* 116). Naming the dead has a consolatory function, but it also ensures that the “identities of the fallen remained prominent in the public consciousness” (Vance, *Death So Noble* 119). R. Campbell claims that it was after Vimy when “the mass graves of earlier conflicts . . . give way to tombstones, and the recitation of dead men’s names” (42), however, as these anecdotes carefully recount, it was during the South African War—and particularly at Paardeberg—when Canadians also seem to painstakingly and personally commemorate their war dead. The careful accounting for the bodies that lie together in the mass grave at Paardeberg indicates a shift away from the philosophy of a mass grave in which comrades dispose of all the soldiers’ bodies, but both demonstrate the desire for unity among the lost soldiers. The similarity of the Canadians’ Paardeberg burial accounts illustrates the consolidation of the immediate construction of a collective memory of Canada’s role in the war.

Immediately after the war, the IODE initiated “the search for the graves of those brave Canadians who sleep on the veldts of Africa. These graves they marked with fine headstones of Canadian grey granite, and later founded a fund which will keep the graves green for all time” (McDougald). Although it could be read metaphorically, Mrs. A. W. McDougald’s description of the graves being kept “green for all time” illustrates a concern for battlefield beautification that is usually directed toward First World War cemeteries. As Vance notes, the actions of the Imperial War Graves Commission responsible for First World War cemeteries turned “soldiers’ graveyards into gardens of the dead” (*Death So Noble* 65). Furthermore, the IODE’s careful efforts to nationalize the

graves with “Canadian grey granite” anticipate the planting at Vimy of 650 maple trees that had been sent from Canada (Cook 262). In both cases, the commemorative gesture nationalizes the overseas sites with Canadian materials and indicates the similar structure of Vimy and Paardeberg mythology.<sup>44</sup> The Canadian granite also reflects prehistoric monumentalizing efforts of “megalithic transport,” whereby mourners would incorporate stone from a distance to mark the significance of that site, instead of or in addition to using materials in the immediate landscape (Scarre 55). Sir Arthur Lawley, the first Lieutenant-Governor of the Transvaal upon British governance, indicated that the colonies desired to maintain their own South African War graves instead of transferring the responsibility to Britain (Garrett 62). Garrett cites the British poet Michael Davitt to argue that “the British dead were very badly buried” (55), but Canadian accounts suggest a preoccupation with proper burials of the Canadians at Paardeberg.

The careful Canadian commemoration contrasts with Attridge’s description of British writing about Drummer Hodge, such as Thomas Hardy’s “The Dead Drummer” [“Drummer Hodge”] (1899): “They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest / Uncoffined—just as found” (1-2). According to Attridge, this line is “a diatribe against a war which discards the unknown dead” (135). Attridge’s description of the British perspective on their war dead in South Africa greatly contrasts the accounts of the Canadians’ careful and commemorative burial efforts. “After the Battle—Paardeberg” describes the care over each individual body that is buried communally:

We gathered from the gory field

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<sup>44</sup> Of course, the tree-planting at Vimy is reflective of the heroes’ groves discussed above.



Those who had earned their crown;

And tenderly we wrapped them round,

Each in his shroud of brown. (1-4)

Whereas Attridge argues “Hodge’s death and alienation in an unfamiliar landscape is part of a larger incomprehension which points to the futility of that death” (135), the Canadian Paardeberg narratives reflect attempts to highlight the utility of the deaths in emphasizing Canadian military worth and success in the South African War. The Canadian accounts reveal efforts to name and nationalize Canadian gravesites in South Africa, and the significant echoes in the narration of Canadian commemoration at Paardeberg evince the concerted efforts to distinguish Canada as a nation during this overseas war prior to very similar constructions of Canada’s role at Vimy.

If, as Cook argues, the Vimy myth gained strength, not in the immediate post-war years, but especially in the centennial era, it follows that Canadians would no longer celebrate Paardeberg to the same extent after the First World War as they had prior to it. Commemorative efforts reveal as much or more about the commemorators than the ones being commemorated; Canadians would not have felt as connected to a South African War battle in the wake of the nation’s efforts during the First World War; however, members of the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) and other military history enthusiasts have continued to celebrate Canada’s role at the Battle of Paardeberg. Even in 1970, the Royal Canadian Regiment in London, Ontario paid tribute to Canada’s role at the battle: “On February 28<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated Paardeberg Day along with our officers and senior NCO’s of 1 RCR at the Dundas Street armoury. This event turned out to be the highlight of our social activities for the year” (“Sergeant’s Mess” 72). In 1999, the RCR’s 4<sup>th</sup>

Battalion hosted a Paardeberg Ball and “had more numbers than ever before” (“4<sup>th</sup> Battalion” 29). The RCR celebrated the centenary of the Battle of Paardeberg, “Paardeberg 2000,” with a gala, battalion-specific balls, a Regimental Family Centennial Reunion, and by exercising the “Freedom of the Cities” in several Canadian cities. The Regiment’s continual commemoration of the battle by means of anniversary celebrations on 27 February demonstrates the dichotomy between historic memory and Canadian social memory; the nation seems to have easily forgotten Paardeberg while the Regiment continues to celebrate Canada’s part in the battle as an annual regimental anniversary. Paul Ricoeur explains that an excess of memory inevitably entails forgetfulness: “the collective memory of groups, peoples, and nations is a prey to pathological phenomena comparable to those substitutive discharges equivalent to forgetfulness” (21). Although maintaining the coherent national memory of the achievement of Canadian nationhood at Vimy has entailed the forgetting of Canada’s former military and literary history, Chapter Four will reveal how contemporary authors are returning to the South African War.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Realism and (Anti-)Revisionism in Contemporary Canadian Historical Fiction on the South African War

Donna Coates's entry "War" in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (2002) states that "the Boer War did not seem to capture the imagination of the nation's writers" (1188). Coates's entry does not include the many Canadian poems, memoirs, and prose responses written during and immediately after the war. Following Coates's claim, Canadian writers have represented the South African War in historical fiction, suggesting that this event in Canada's history continues "to capture the imagination of the nation's writers." In her subsequent article "*Fin de Siècle* Lunacy in Fred Stenson's *The Great Karoo*" (2017), Coates states, "to my knowledge, Stenson is the first to fictionalize Canadian participation in the South African War" (223). In fact, recent texts that fictionalize the South African War and demonstrate a resurgence of interest in Canadian participation in it include Eric Zweig's *Hockey Night in the Dominion of Canada* (1992), Margaret Sweatman's *When Alice Lay Down with Peter* (2001), Sidney Allinson's *Kruger's Gold: A Novel of the Anglo-Boer War* (2001), David Richards's *The Plough's Share* (2004), *Keeley: Book Two: Keeley's Big Story* (2005) from Deborah Ellis's *Our Canadian Girl* series, William Hay's *The Originals* (2007), Fred Stenson's *The Great Karoo* (2008), Trilby Kent's *Stones for My Father* (2011), and Paul Almond's *The Chaplain* (2013). Coates's omission is understandable given that, in Canadian literary history, many authors have examined the relationship between Canadian nationalism and

its connection to Canada's role in the First World War in Canadian fiction, but the collection of South African War novels deserves further critical attention.<sup>45</sup> This chapter inevitably explores the relationship between Canadian nationalism and militarism; the novels that it examines depict an inextricable link between Canada's military past and a sense of national identity.

Herb Wyile argues in *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History* (2002) that in comparison with fiction published nearly forty years ago, recent Canadian historical fiction "seems less radical and more ambivalent in its challenging of the underpinnings of empiricist historiography and the form of the traditional historical novel" (xiii). This movement back towards the traditional historical novel form mirrors the return to traditional historical content such as a British imperial war like the South African War. The return to examine the literature of an imperial war connects with Jonathan F. Vance's acknowledgement that "only recently have historians turned back to Britishness, seeing it as something more than a sign of youthful immaturity," and only recently have writers unapologetically "started to show a renewed interest in the British connection" (Vance, *Maple Leaf Empire* 3). I connect this "renewed interest in the British connection" that historians have demonstrated with a similar return

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<sup>45</sup> See Jim Zucchero, "The Canadian National War Memorial: Metaphor for the Birth of the Nation" in *Mnemographia Canadensis: Essays on Memory, Community, and Environment in Canada, with Particular Reference to London, Ontario* (1999); Dagmar Novak, *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel* (2000); Donna Pennee, "Imagined Innocence, Endlessly Mourned: Postcolonial Nationalism and Cultural Expression in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*" (2006), David Williams, *Media, Memory, and the First World War* (2009); chapters in Amy J. Shaw's and Sarah Glassford's *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War* (2012); Robert Zacharias, "'Some Great Crisis': Vimy as Ordinary Violence" in *Shifting the Ground of Literary Studies in Canada* (2012); Neta Gordon, *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War One* (2014); Andrew Lubowitz, "The Unknown Soldier in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: War Commemoration in Contemporary Cultural Production" (diss., 2017); Andrea McKenzie (ed.), *L. M. Montgomery and War* (2017).

by Canadian fiction writers in recent novels to Canada's past British connections. That is, a renewed interest in historical realism seems to coincide with a resurgence of literature on the South African War. This chapter examines the ways in which Allinson's *Kruger's Gold: A Novel of the Anglo-Boer War* and Richards's *The Plough's Share* exemplify Wyle's argument that recent Canadian fiction writers have adopted less radical novelistic forms than fiction published in Canada thirty years ago.

The chapter then focuses primarily on Stenson's *The Great Karoo* to argue that it conforms to the traditional novelistic form of historical fiction, but that Stenson adapts this traditional form in unconventional ways. Stenson's novel, although predominantly written as historical realism, revises the predominant memory of the war and attempts to challenge the war's racial politics. This chapter will consider the stakes of contemporary historical fiction that privileges the traditional realist mode and will examine how a less obviously experimental form might legitimize a marginal, or previously neglected history like the one Stenson writes. The chapter will introduce the term "retrospective realism" in order to explain Stenson's seemingly paradoxical use of an archetype of postmodern Canadian fiction in order to reinforce the traditional historical realism of the majority of *The Great Karoo*. Finally, the chapter will consider revisionist historical fiction in two Young Adult historical novels—Deborah Ellis's *Keeley's Big Story* and Trilby Kent's *Stones for My Father*—to argue that the authors attempt to distinguish Canadians as morally superior to their British comrades.

## 4.1 Contemporary Literary Context

In *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (2009), James Belich underscores the importance of looking back to the British connection and denounces the seeming need to apologize for studying Canada's relationship with Britain. He states that Canadian historians who stress the British connection "have been denounced as 'imperial apologists'" as though "the one-time Dominions share a shameful secret—a protracted adolescence, decades long, spent firmly tied to mother's apron-strings—which is best forgotten" (473). Despite the costs of Canada's connection to Britain, Belich points out that "there was arguably nothing cringing or demeaning about Dominion Britonism" (437) and asserts that "forgetting important phenomena simply because they embarrass some in the present is not an option for historians" (473). In addition, Belich draws attention to a negative affective element in historiography that delimits scholarship about Canada's past. Similarly, literary criticism has witnessed an avoidance of subjects that relate to Canada's past British connections due to what is considered Canada's problematic colonial history. Stories that focus on the "settler-invader" or Anglo-Canadians are no longer seen as privileged accounts that represent the nation. D. M. R. Bentley suggests that "acts of historical revision and amnesia are inevitable in a country trying desperately to deny its colonial past, and present" (*Mimic Fires* 11). However, recent fiction on the South African War by Canadian authors indicates a renewed interest in Canada's connections with Britain; these novelists have focused on a *fin-de-siècle* war that demonstrates Canada's strong British connections while simultaneously securing Canada's own global identity. Some of the novels this chapter examines reveal a post-9/11 conservatism that indicates, not a

celebration of multiculturalism, but rather, a celebration of past ties to previous Western allies.

In order to explore these trends in Canadian historical fiction and historiography, it is necessary to consider the return to examining Canada's British connections. *The Plough's Share* and *Kruger's Gold* suggest that the historical moment delimits the fictional mode. Rather than employ contemporary narrative techniques or write from current politically correct perspectives, Richards and Allinson prioritize the historical over the fictional in their novels and do not experiment with the interplay between history and fiction. In these novels, there are few signposts of historiographic metafiction and little of the experimentation characteristic of many other contemporary Canadian novels that Linda Hutcheon isolates in her text *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988) such as challenges to genre boundaries, self-reflexivity, fragmentation, or a "metafictional [. . .] attention to the processes of writing, reading, and interpreting" (Hutcheon 13). Richards does not challenge realism but presents a straightforward narrative of romance, war, and settlement. Whereas many contemporary Canadian novels suggest that "the aesthetic and the social, the present and the past, are not separable discourses" (Hutcheon 14), Richards and Allinson interrogate these overlapping discursive models only minimally. Part of this conservative trend results from these novelists' desire to popularize the South African War in fiction. As Hutcheon writes, "Canadian novelists must return to their history (as do Wiebe, Swan, Bowering, Kogawa, and so many others) in order to discover (before they can contest) their historical myths" (6). Hutcheon discusses how under-recognized or minoritized groups have had to first write their neglected histories in fiction before they can play with this history. Because the dominant history of the South African War

has not been widely explored by Canadian novelists, this same writing-before-revising kind of fiction is exemplified in Richards's and Allinson's novels. Although these fictional efforts cannot be compared to those of minoritized groups who are writing against histories of oppression, these novels reveal a similar attempt to establish a little-known historical narrative without experimentation. Hutcheon makes clear that it is only when national myths and identities have been defined that they can be deconstructed, and the traditionalism of Richards's and Allinson's fiction suggests an attempt to identify Canada's role in the South African War as an important part of the national mythology (6).

Further, these novels reflect a trend Neta Gordon observes about contemporary Canadian First World War books: the war "is reimagined within a complicated framework of nostalgia for a time and set of events that might reify a set of constructive values (about, for example, community or duty or justice)" (12). Gordon's description of the nostalgia for past social values relates to Renato Rosaldo's concept of "imperialist nostalgia" and the degree to which contemporary media represent British imperial exploits with a longing for a lost colonial past (107). In the case of the contemporary South African War novels, Canadian authors seem more interested not in British imperialism but in reifying Canada's distinct martial success within imperialist projects. This interest is an additional example to support Wylie's argument that recent historical fiction reflects a relative conservatism in comparison to historical fiction from the 1970s and 1980s. Wylie argues that "such experimentation with genre, narrative form, point of view, and so on seems to have given way to a more mimetic and less disruptively self-conscious historical fiction" partly because of the demands of the fiction market ("Latte



Drinking” 187). Further, Wyile turns to historiography to consider “the response in historiography to poststructuralist and postmodernist antifoundationalism” (“Latte Drinking” 193). In addition to the late capitalist context in which these novels are being published, one further explanation for the relative conservatism of recent fiction follows Vance’s line of thought in relation to historiography insofar as the authors writing historical fiction on the South African War have unapologetically turned back to examine Canada’s relationship with the British empire. Wyile points out that “[m]any historians committed to a more traditional political and military history are anxious about Canadians’ declining historical knowledge and declining adherence to a unifying historical narrative” (Wyile, *Speaking in the Past* 1). Reminiscent of the “Who Killed/I Killed Canadian History” debate, recent novels on the South African War exemplify this anxiety in the way that they attempt to “authentically” reconstruct Canada’s past.

Contemporary attempts to fictionalize Canada’s role in the South African War stem from the fact that despite contemporaneous literary responses and even those in the contemporary moment, the war does not seem to have resonated in the popular collective imagination. Ken McGoogan writes in his review of *The Great Karoo*: “[i]f there exists another novel that treats Canadian involvement in the Boer War, then I, for one, have missed it” (D15). Trilby Kent explains her motivation for writing *Stones for My Father*, stating that the South African War is “certainly not a subject covered today in most Canadian classrooms” (“*Stones for My Father Wins*”). John Boileau points out that the South African War is “no longer a part of living memory” but, he notes, “at the time, the Boer War was the single most important event for Canadians—both those who supported

the war, and those who opposed it” (117).<sup>46</sup> Boileau has a personal stake in how Canadians remember the South African War because of his previous positions in The Royal Canadian Dragoons and Lord Strathcona’s Horse, for it was his responsibility “to ensure that the traditions and esprit de corps established by the unit in South Africa were remembered and fostered” (120). He highlights the way in which these units maintain the memories of the war in the contemporary moment, noting that The Royal Canadian Dragoons commemorate the Battle of Leliefontein annually on its November anniversary with such events as a dismounted parade and inspection by the colonel of the regiment, a mounted rollpast in tanks, a memorial church service, games, and a formal dinner (119). These ceremonies, he argues, are about inculcating in the unit “pride in the heroic deeds of their forebears and contribut[e] to the esprit de corps and the morale of the unit today” (120). Boileau also draws attention to other contemporary commemorative acts to remember Canada’s role in the South African War:

Like the Dragoons, the Strathcona's foster a deep pride in the accomplishments of their predecessors on the high South African plains. Tales of Sam Steele’s remarkable leadership, “Tappy” Richardson’s Victoria Cross, and the unit’s reputation as rough-and-ready “Soldiers of the Queen” are told and retold with a mixture of pride and awe. (120)

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Buma examines how hockey is portrayed as ontologically Canadian, and he looks at several hockey novels that position the development of the game alongside Canadian historical events to “give the impression of an indubitable march of almost predetermined events that have somehow organically constituted hockey as integral to Canadian identity” (49). Buma cites Zweig’s *Hockey Night in the Dominion of Canada* (1998) which sets French-English tensions on the ice during the South African War, when tensions escalated between French and English Canada off the ice. Zweig’s *Bildung* narrative of young Canadian hockey players developing along with professional hockey in Canada highlights the way that for Zweig, the South African War was the starting point for nationhood.

Boileau's list of the contemporary regiments' practices, like those of the RCR discussed in Chapter Three, reflect niche commemorative acts that are largely unobserved by the national body.

## 4.2 Anti-Revisionism in Contemporary South African War

### Literature

Allinson's *Kruger's Gold* exemplifies the connection between narrative conservatism, historiographic method, and the historical content. The novel centres on the search for "Kruger's gold"—the supposed gold that Paul Kruger, the President of the South African Republic from 1883-1900, left at various intervals along his flight line to Mozambique in 1900 (88). The novel includes the perspective of both British—in this case Canadian—and Boer soldiers, and switches between perspectives to demonstrate the views of each side. The scene that describes the main character, Harry Lanyard, a Canadian Officer leaving Canada for South Africa depicts the kind of Canadian nationalism evident during the South African War. Harry "stood on deck among fellow volunteers aboard the Canadian Pacific ferry as they sailed from Victoria harbour a week or two before Christmas, 1899. His parents were there, pale-faced but proud, as the whole city turned out to wish the volunteers God-speed for a quick victory against the Old Country's foes in far off South Africa" (121). Allinson suggests there was a collective and totalizing interest in the South African War because "the whole city" watched the men sail from the harbour. He continues:

The Empire's cause had all seemed so noble and certain back then. Most of his companions of that day were returned home safe to British Columbia long

since, hailed as conquering heroes [sic] when victory was prematurely thought to be gained in 1900. That early unquestioning support for Britain against Boers had radically changed in Canada now.

But not out here, Harry thought. In the distance, he caught sight of the Witkloof escarpment, where the hell-for-leather Royal Canadian Dragoons had won three VCs in a single hour, saving the guns at Leliefontein. He wondered if anyone back home these days even knew or cared about such heroism. (121)

Allinson points to the sense of pride the Canadian soldiers felt in their victories as indicating a developing nationalism. Despite the fact that at this point in the war the Empire's cause had diminished in the perceptions of Canadians at home, according to Allinson, the Canadian soldiers regarded their achievements on national terms in South Africa.

Allinson's text raises questions about the ethics of writing a mimetic history when, as Wylie notes, most historical novelists recognize the "decline of the mimetic ideal" in writing about the past (13). In the "Postscript" to *Kruger's Gold*, Allinson describes his theoretical perspective on historical fiction: "In telling this story, I have avoided 'presentism,' that trendy urge to impose latter-day politically correct views on people who lived a century ago. Rather, I portray the social attitudes, behaviour, and prejudices as they actually were back then, without any retrospective sermonizing" (283). Allinson's historiography contrasts with most postmodern fiction in Canada, which, as Hutcheon explains, no longer attempts to portray "'how things actually happened,' with the historian in the role of recorder" (14-15), citing historical thinkers such as Hayden White and Michel Foucault who have "studied the implications of seeing history as a

construction, as having been *made* by the historian through a process of selecting, ordering, and narrating” (Hutcheon 15). In addition, Bernd Engler writes that “[t]he positivist-empirical model of knowledge on which realistic art formerly based its claim to both the authority and authenticity of its representations is now challenged by a sceptical relativism which radically unmask[s] the ideological basis of our belief in definite, undeniable, and transcendently guaranteed truths” (14-15). However, Allinson emphasizes how he perceives he is a mediator of history, and he reflects a belief in objective history when he states that his characters “are portrayed in as authentic a manner as possible” and the historical figures “speak their own style of words, and act as they did in real life” (283). Here Allinson speaks to a desire to recuperate the past, and his positivist position emphasizes how he believes in the potential for fiction to serve as history. His Postscript reveals the motivations of an historian, as well as a novelist. In addition to the process of discovery that Hutcheon highlights, these novels also indicate the power of storytelling in the Canadian literary tradition, for Allinson’s comments especially attest to a novelist’s ability to animate this part of Canada’s past that is still not prominent in the nation’s consciousness. According to Engler, historiographers have not abided by poststructuralist theory like those in literary and cultural studies, but rather, believe that they deal with “verifiable historical events” not “imaginary realities” (16). Engler continues that although representing the past objectively nonetheless falls back “on acts of mere conjecture and imaginative (re-)construction, many historiographers still maintain that historical knowledge is based on specific modes of cognition and that—if properly executed—the writing of history may rightfully claim an ontological status quite different from that of literary fictions” (16). Allinson’s past position as an historian

inflects his novel; the book and his Postscript suggest he believes in history's ontological status over fiction.

Despite Allinson's intentions to avoid "presentism," he also includes a subtle critique of settler colonialism by means of Harry's musings. Allinson's character Harry often wondered about the docility of natives in this country. Not thirty years ago, fierce black warriors were the scourge of southern Africa. They resisted white invaders every step of the way, and ably fought British and Boers in a half dozen wars. Then in less than a generation, ruthless suppression by whites' superior arms abruptly changed them into meek serfs in their own land. (134)

As indicated above, Allinson switches between Boer and British perspectives in his novel, so he also includes the racist views of the Boers as naturalized as those of the British. When Advokaat Boergaard, a Boer lawyer living in London, England who returns to South African to fight, learns the news that the two Boer republics will become British protectorates, he responds with rage: "Let savages vote as equals to us? [. . .] How could they agree to such shame, when we commandos are still ready to fight to the last man? After all the dead children, and lost farms, and devastation of everything the Volk hold dear!" (253). For Boergaard, the war was unsuccessful because it did not uphold the hierarchy of Boers and Black South Africans. Boergaard continues, "It's up to veterans like us to make sure that the right people get elected. Ones holding 'Wit Baasskap' [white power] ideals. Only total white supremacy can keep the kaffirs in their place, and prevent too many uitlanders arriving to thin pure Afrikaner blood" (277). Boergaard's comments serve to convince the reader that the British cause was validated against such ideologies. Allinson's implicit conservatism elevates the British Empire;

however racist the British Empire seemed, he suggests that the Boers were worse. The discourses of racial supremacy Allinson reproduces draw upon troubling blood-based notions of racial identity, notions that Allinson naturalizes because of his resistance to “presentism” and because he does not incorporate the self-reflexivity characteristic of historiographic metafiction to interrogate these beliefs. These passages underscore the lingering racial tensions that the war in South Africa did not alleviate, and led to further race-based hatred, violence, and oppression in the country.

Richards’s *The Plough’s Share* exemplifies a similar conservative historiography. The novel reflects the narrative modes of the historical time period rather than the time of Richards’s writing. Richards’s novel reads like a nineteenth-century realist romance because of his lengthy descriptions, detail, and use of such similes as “Jack shrieked like an hysterical woman” (447). The romance plot also connects to the Victorian literary tradition with its propriety and sentimentality: “Emma and Jack waved one last farewell then fled hand in hand through the unending downpour to their carriage. They were pursued by several brave souls flinging soggy flower petals and Mr. Swinglehurst who was tooting the ‘Tally Ho’ on a small brass hunting horn” (298). Despite the downpour and “soggy flower petals,” this couple left their wedding “hand in hand.” *The Plough’s Share* tells the story of Jack Thornton who takes the place of a reserve soldier, Charlie Cordey, and travels to South Africa as an honourable escape from his home town in England where he was a farm labourer, and from the woman he loved, Emma Wilson. Jack returns to Britain but soon thereafter immigrates to Canada after he becomes attached to a Canadian horse in the army and decides to take a plot of land with the Barr Colonists in Western Canada. The novel traces Jack’s path from England, to South

Africa, back to England, and then to Canada, demonstrating the triangulations of imperial connection at the end of the century. This structure highlights the ways in which Richards connects the nation's development with British lineage, and the novel emphasizes Canada's British heritage.

Thornton connects his experience in South Africa with his longing for Canada. After his return to Britain following the war, he reads a letter by Reverend George E. Lloyd on the prospect of land ownership in Canada:

Western Canada. The words leapt at Jack. Sergeant Kerslake, Bobbi, Captain Arnold, a starry night on the march to Paardeberg where he dreamed of Rocky Mountains and Red Indians. These images and thoughts swamped him. They sent a tingle down his spine. Canada. (287)

Thornton's experiences with the Canadians during their legendary battle at Paardeberg—a British victory fought between 18 and 27 February 1900 for which Canadians were given credit—leave him corporeally connected to the country. Richards romanticizes Canada by means of Jack's longing for membership in the nation. Emma and Jack “clung to Mr. Barr and the British Colony for the Saskatchewan Valley vision and felt themselves carried by it toward a very bright future” (Richards 304). Furthermore, Jack's vision troublingly draws on representations of Indigenous peoples as mere “images” or icons in the colonial imaginary, static symbols of Canadianness like the “Rocky Mountains.”

With its shifts between multiple colonial spaces, Richards's novel highlights Canada's post-war advancement by means of his depiction of the nation as a site of immigration that stemmed from Canada's contribution to the South African War.



Thornton's interest in immigrating to Canada results from his interactions with the Royal Canadian Regiment in South Africa and the Canadian horse he rode while fighting in the War. Further, Richards connects the settlement of the West by the Barr colonists with the South African War, a nation-building narrative that is reflective of a "return to the narrative of national history" typical of the traditional historical novel (Hulan 33).

Canada is narrated as an "all-British colony" that "'will have good, solid English values.' [...] 'The organization is impeccable. Reputations will be made there. The owner of hundreds of acres cannot be ignored—once they are successful in Canada'" (Richards 291). Richards advances a nation-building narrative that he sets alongside a typical *Bildung* in which Thornton moves from immaturity to post-war maturity: he must build his own future, so he enlists in the South African War to redeem his family and then refuses to be a remittance man since they are not allowed in the colony.

This kind of narrative reflects the way Richards's novel reiterates rather than revises the traditional celebratory national mythology of the war that emerged out of immediate Canadian literary responses to the war. In this case, Thornton's maturity results from his role in building the nation.<sup>47</sup> His manhood becomes clearest when, upon leaving for Canada, Emma gives him a pipe: "He'd envied the men in Africa their satisfaction at a pipe and mug of tea but somehow felt foolish—like a child aping grown men—when he'd tried it himself. But no longer. He was a man. The realization startled him. Hard manual labour, government service, war veteran, and now married farmer and

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<sup>47</sup> It is no coincidence that Richards, like Zweig, fictionalizes the South African War in the style of a *Bildungsroman*. By placing their characters' development during the South African War, these authors suggest that the Canadian nation developed into maturity because of its role in the South African War, and thereby the men's development occurs alongside that of the nation.

landowner. . . . He was going to succeed or fail by his own merit” (309). Thornton’s maturity based on his experiences in the South African War and his settling the land in Canada is analogous to the narrative of national development. Richards describes Thornton’s connection to the Canadian land:

Ten thousand years of untouched roots and humus. Grass, upon buffalo dung, upon grass, ten thousand times over. It split and surrendered to Jack Thornton. His last shred of doubt evaporated. He sucked the magic wind into his lungs. This wasn’t what he had expected. He was not the conqueror of this soil. He was joining it. (398)

Richards describes the process of Thornton’s indigenization—“the act or process of rendering indigenous” (*OED*)—for he naturalizes Thornton’s settlement when he suggests that Thornton becomes part of the land. This process of indigenization stems from Thornton’s desire to stake a claim in the nation, a claim he believed was legitimate because of his connection with Canadians in the South African War. Richards’s depiction of the land “split[ting] and surrender[ing]” to Thornton naturalizes the settlement process by means of the land yielding to Thornton’s presence. Richards further emphasizes the nation-building mythology in his narrative, for one of Thornton’s friend’s states, ““The Northwest Territories Jack! It’s new and green and hardly been touched. *You* will be the first. *Your* foundations will be built upon by thousands who follow you”” (296, emphasis in original). The invocation of *terra nullius* overwrites Indigenous presence on the land. This erasure enables Richards’s attempt to connect Canadian participation in the South African War with the beginning of Canadian nationhood. The realism of Richards’s novel—his conservative historiographical choices—connects with his conservative

content in terms of his reiteration of the theme of nation-building as a result of the South African War. Like Allinson's novel, *The Plough's Share* points to the degree to which contemporary authors are writing reminders of Canada's colonial ties to Britain. Postcolonial theory has emphasized literature's decolonizing potential (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 29). The novels by Richards and Allinson do not participate in a decolonizing project, but, rather, exemplify a literary re-colonizing of Canada by means of their glorified fictional depictions of Canada's role in the imperial war.

### 4.3 Retrospective Realism in *The Great Karoo*

Like Richards's novel, Stenson's book highlights the tangled triangulations of empire because of the novel's spatial moves between Canada, England, and South Africa. The chapter turns now to explore how *The Great Karoo* differs in its historiography from the other contemporary novels, while it still privileges the traditional realist mode. Although the novel also portrays historical figures in a realistic manner that might be considered true to history in Allinson's terms, his text differs from Allinson's in its historiographic method. *The Great Karoo*—the third novel in Stenson's historical fiction trilogy including *The Trade* (2000) and *Lightning* (2003)—uses realism as a window into the past, but primarily as a way to reveal marginalized histories. Wylie argues that “the last few decades have seen a proliferation of revisionist historical fiction,” some of which focuses on marginalized histories (*Speculative Fictions* 6). Stenson's revisionist historical fiction is two-fold: on one hand, his novel seems to attempt to distinguish Canadian from British efforts in South Africa and to demonstrate the significance of Canada's activity in the war, as are the goals in *Kruger's Gold* and *The Plough's Share*. On the other hand,

Stenson provides a critique of the war because of the focused perspective of the French-Canadian and Indigenous soldiers. Stenson focuses on the neglected history of minority Canadian soldiers (such as Ovide Smith, a French-Canadian soldier) and on the roles of Jefferson Davis, a Canadian soldier whose mother was a member of the Kanai (Blood) nation, and Frank Adams, a Métis soldier.<sup>48</sup> Stenson's focus demonstrates the degree to which, in the little-known history of Canada's involvement in South Africa, Indigenous soldiers are not remembered to have played a part. These two narratives exist in some tension in the text, for the celebratory romantic view of Canada going to war for Britain does not map neatly onto Stenson's fictional account of Canada's treatment of Indigenous soldiers.

The section underway first outlines the way in which Stenson's realism is at work for a revisionist history. To enhance the realism of the novel's main section, Stenson includes historical personages. Naomi Jacobs writes in *The Character of Truth: Historical Figures in Contemporary Fiction* that "[t]he a priori reality of recognizable names and historical people—'real names' and 'real people'—can reinforce the created reality of the fictional people" (19). Jacobs looks at contemporary novels that include historical figures in unreal or parodic situations, whereas Stenson includes historical figures as they might have experienced the war, such as Lieutenant-Colonel Sam Steele, the commander of Strathcona's Horse, and Lieutenant John McCrae, famous First World War poet of "In Flanders Fields" (1915) who joined the Second Canadian Contingent to

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<sup>48</sup> Jefferson Davis was a cowboy from Fort Macleod who joined the Canadian Mounted Rifles, whose Military Agreement described him as "[t]all, very dark, black eyes" ("Image" n.p.). However, to avoid confusion, it should be noted that he bears the same name as the leader of the Confederate States of America.

South Africa. Stenson writes: “The lieutenant was a doctor who wrote poetry. He had taken the sting out of melancholy nights on the *Pomeranian* [the troop ship] with his singing. In Cape Town, he had led a pilgrimage to Rudyard Kipling’s hotel” (81).

Stenson depicts McCrae not only as a crooner but also as a hero, for McCrae saves the men from poison (83). In one of Adams’s letters home, Adams writes that three Mounted Riflemen went with McCrae—“a gunnery officer who writes poetry and sings”—to see Rudyard Kipling, who “asked them questions for something he might write” (107). This kind of fictional mingling of literary greats who all participated in the South African War enhances the novel’s sense of historical realism. In addition, Stenson does not signpost his use of W. A. Griesbach’s memoir *I Remember* (1946) within the diegesis of *The Great Karoo*. There are at least half a dozen examples of Stenson borrowing images or scenes from Griesbach’s memoir to fictionalize in his novel. For example, Griesbach describes how one of the Canadians “composed a poem to the tune, ‘Just Tell Them That You Saw Me’” (259) and then quotes the lyrics in his memoir. Stenson includes the same song lyrics in his novel from the mouth of one of his fictional soldiers without making reference to Griesbach’s memoir. The undisclosed use of historical document within the fictional text demonstrates that at times, Stenson integrates fact and fiction without self-consciousness. The use of historical figures and the seamless integration of the historical archive in Stenson’s novel indicates the privileging of verisimilitude in his representation of the war.

The novel’s historical realism, however, has led to criticism:

Stenson’s twin desires to include historical figures and not leave out any significant events mean that the fiction is often driven by the research, rather than

the other way around. Characters sometimes seem to go places merely because something interesting is about to happen there. And for much of the book, the main characters are almost painfully laconic. Dialogue is at a minimum; in places the novel reads a little like non-fiction. (Wilson n. p.)

Rather than value Stenson's historical fiction for its historicism, John Wilson thus argues that Stenson's research takes away from the fictional quality of the book. Yet Wilson does not support his argument or answer why Stenson is at fault for producing an historical fiction that is, in fact, historical. In *Canadian Historical Writing: Reading the Remains* (2014), Renée Hulan speaks to the assumption that contemporary fiction will be self-referential when she quotes Jerome de Groot's argument in *The Historical Novel* (2010) that "[i]f an historical novel is not self-aware, interested in undermining its own authority and legitimacy, then it might be failing in its duty to history, as it might open itself up to obfuscation and untruths" for, Hulan clarifies, "the form of the novel must be self-consciousness: it must show that it is fiction or else it might be mistaken for something else" (Hulan 7). Unfortunately for Stenson, Hulan seems to refer to a hierarchy between fiction that is obviously fictional and that which is historical.

Stenson develops his historiographic method when he mobilizes the realist mode of representation in order to legitimize the neglected history he narrates in *The Great Karoo*. Although his historiography is not overly experimental, this re-mobilization of realism enables him to present "as real" a powerful critique of the war and its relation to settler colonialism in Canada. He thus achieves a postmodern critique by relying on an omniscient narrator that conveys the perspectives of several characters with various perspectives on the war. Stenson's novel, "[t]hough aesthetically more accessible,"

nevertheless stages “some of the historiographical interventions of the earlier [postmodern] fiction [in Canada] and in the process suggest[s] that there is more than one way to skin a past” (Wylie “Latte Drinking” 190). The realist mode enables Stenson to examine the complex racial hierarchies that affected some Canadians during the war and to show the complicated racialization at work during that war. For example, Stenson depicts an “imagined community” (Anderson) that supports the troops from the West even in the East coast, describing how “[t]he train pulled into Halifax, bucking an ice-cold wind. It was blowing knives as they disembarked and looked upon the frozen crowd huddled in coats, and the brass band risking their lips on their instruments. It struck them that these far-from-home strangers owed them nothing, and yet here they were” (Stenson 39). The coherence of this communal support for the war at the beginning of the novel further emphasizes the exclusion of the Indigenous and French-Canadian soldiers. One effect of Stenson’s strategic use of realism is the way it legitimizes the marginalized history he includes in his novel. Stenson depicts Adams as a character with a shifting relationship to his Métis ancestry by describing the different ways that Adams attempts to identify with his heritage.<sup>49</sup> In doing so, Stenson dramatizes the politics of passing<sup>50</sup> on two occasions in his novel, which subtly subverts the British military’s policies of racial exclusion.

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<sup>49</sup> Stenson makes it clear that Adams’s mother is of Métis heritage, although he never uses the term in reference to Adams or in the novel, relying on the term “halfbreed”—which is now considered pejorative—because of his fidelity to historical representation. He writes: “It was possible to be white and from Manitoba, but a good many who left there for the District of Alberta or for Montana were Halfbreeds from Red River. This was roughly Adams’s mother’s family history” (19).

<sup>50</sup> In the context of Stenson’s novel, the chapter uses “passing” to refer to Adams’s ability to “pass” as white, and also to refer to the more conventional way in which the reverse occurs in an Indigenous context whereby a white person attempts to pass as Indigenous, a typical trope in the North American context known as “playing Indian” (Green 30).

Stenson's reproduction of colonialist discourses at the recruitment station exemplifies how Adams navigates the complexities of his mixed-race identity. For example, Lieutenant-Colonel Herchmer, former commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police and Commanding Officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Canadian Mounted Rifles, asks Davis in the inspection line, "Are you not aware, Mr. Davis, that this is a white man's war?" (Stenson 17). Herchmer demands that a telegram be sent to Ottawa asking "[i]f there can be Halfbreeds" sent to South Africa (Stenson 17). The answer to the telegram arrives and reads, "Yes, to Halfbreeds. Stop. If intelligent. Stop" (Stenson 19).<sup>51</sup> When Adams attempts to enlist, he is in disbelief at the potential that he might be turned away. He hears Herchmer say "white man's war," and worries that, although he "had skin that freckled and burned, and his hair was a wet sand colour," and had a father from Ontario, "the very definition of a white man in Canada," his mother was "a Halfbreed, the kind of person who was thought of as French or Halfbreed, depending on who was doing the looking and what kind of mood they were in" (Stenson 17).

Upon his recruitment, Adams tries to pass for a white man: he does not admit to being of mixed ancestry like Davis ahead of him in the recruitment line, and becomes extremely nervous. His "concentration was so murdered that the clerk had to ask him several questions twice" and Adams worries that he will be "unmask[ed]" (18). He "felt more like the embarrassed few who left quickly after putting their clothes back on,

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<sup>51</sup> Brian A. Reid's detailed historical text *Our Little Army in the Field: The Canadians in South Africa 1899-1902* (1996) provides the historical account of the Commander of the second battalion, Commissioner Lawrence Herchmer's question to Ottawa about whether "intelligent half-breeds" were able to be admitted into the battalion (34). Reid's footnote elaborates that Ottawa "included the caveat that the men must be able to pass as white" (179). As Timothy C. Winegard notes, "[t]he official policy of indigenous exclusion, promulgated conjointly by the imperial and Dominion governments during the Second Anglo-Boer War, remained the precedent at the outbreak of the First World War" (*Indigenous Peoples* 45).



having been found physically or mentally wanting” (18). Despite the troubling amount of stress Adams experiences over his racial qualification for the war, his successful performance of whiteness and his reflections on passing indicate his agency as a mixed-race soldier. This first example of passing, in which Adams redefines the parameters of blood-based belonging in the British-Canadian military, also demonstrates the degree to which Stenson undermines the policies of racial exclusion during the South African War.

Adams eventually uses his heritage strategically when he wants permission to become a Scout. Stenson further reveals Adams’s strategic practice of passing and connects scouting with Indigeneity when Adams desperately adds to his plea to become a scout that he and Ovide, a French-Canadian soldier serving in South Africa, ““are part Indian”” (204). Later Stenson’s narrator adds that Adams “decided before he got to their bedding spot that he would not say anything about the conversation to Ovide, certainly not the part about Ovide’s being a Halfbreed, which of course he wasn’t” (205). Adams’s doubled mobilization of passing suggests that Stenson emphasizes Adams’s agency in this “white man’s war,” thereby disarticulating whiteness from the image of Canada’s ideal soldier. Stenson’s mobilization of passing both on the homefront and in South Africa serves to challenge the military’s authority over racial qualification for Canadian participation in the war. Furthermore, in order to improve his chances of becoming a scout, Adams relies on the backwoodsman mystique popular in notions of Canadian identity, for it was believed “the Native soldier was a true product of the wilderness” (Vance, *Death So Noble* 248). Stenson links scouting in South Africa to the behaviours of Indigenous peoples from Turtle Island, describing how Davis “set his fingers on his forehead, making the shape of its horns. This made Frank laugh because it was how an

old man from the Blood would portray an unusual animal. Being a scout for the day had turned Jeff more Indian” (132).<sup>52</sup> Stenson elevates the place of the Indigenous soldiers in the war by means of his connection between scouting and Indigeneity. However, Stenson’s portrayal of Davis as “more Indian” because of his scouting relies on the stereotypical association of Indigenous peoples as “closer to nature” and as hunters that white officers perceived would make them better scouts; it was not Davis’s superb soldiering as a scout that renders him “more Indian” but his hunt of an antelope for dinner.

Stenson attempts to expand the historical record to include those who were not even intended to be a part of the historical event. Stenson highlights how Davis defies the subjugation he encounters: “Jefferson Davis had wanted to be a scout and was one. The fact that he was a regimental sergeant-major was remarkable. As a Halfbreed in a white man’s war, [British General] Butler would have assumed him stuck at private. It suggested Jefferson was something special, as Red Crow [(1830-1900), the former Blood Chief] had always said” (276). As Coates observes, Stenson’s novel compares with Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road* (2005) in its depiction of the unique success of Indigenous scouts at war. Pete Belton, another of the soldiers who enlists for South Africa, yelled at Davis because he believed that Davis’s horse bit Pete’s horse’s tail, and shouts “[t]hey should never let a fucking cayuse like that with white man’s horses. That’s no kind of army horse” (36). He continues, “Goddamn Indian horse bites mine.

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<sup>52</sup> Winegard documents the ways in which Indigenous men have been employed as scouts for British-Canadian military purposes such as during the Red River (1869-70) and North-West (1885) Resistances (*For King* 9).

Goddamn Indian says I didn't see what I saw!'” (37). Stenson's analogy between the war horses and the men emphasizes the complex racial issues that an imperial war effort brings to the fore. Stenson writes, “[l]ooking at his car's arrangement, Frank understood the hierarchy. Where Morden and Redpath were, that was for blooded horses. The back end was for animals that lacked breeding” (35). This hierarchy serves as an allegory for the hierarchy of Anglo-Canadian and minority soldiers; Stenson draws attention to Canada's own racial politics. As Coates observes, when “even the decent and good Fred Morden, who erroneously blames Davis for the death of his horse” (*Fin de siècle* 227) calls Davis “a stupid Halfbreed bastard,” Davis reacts “as though he'd been expecting the words” (*Fin de siècle* 62). Coates argues his expectation “confirms that he has grown accustomed to the frequency of such invectives” (*Fin de siècle* 227). Stenson sets the reader up to disavow the racism of the insults wielded by Fred Morden, Pete Belton, and the other soldiers because of these soldiers' ignorance and the focalized narrative perspective of Adams. However, Davis's and Adams's expectation of the insults can render readers complicit in the expectation also, and the realist mode can reinscribe settler colonial racism as axiomatic.

Stenson further emphasizes the distance between the Indigenous and the white Canadian soldiers because the Indigenous soldiers fight with people who had only recently fought against them in the North-West Resistance of 1885: “Charlie Ross [was] a Mountie around Macleod and Lethbridge. He was someone Frank's father knew and his mother would not let in the house, because Ross had fought against the Halfbreeds in 1885” (133). Stenson highlights the complicated colonial relationships between Indigenous and white Canadians that are being enacted in the colonial “contact zone”

(Pratt 4) in South Africa when Frank joins Gatling Howard's Canadian Scouts and realizes the irony that Gat Howard had shot his mother's relatives with a machine gun during the North-West Resistance (359). Stenson draws attention to the ironies of the British fighting against Boer colonization of the Bantus and Zulus when the British colonized Canada's Indigenous peoples. Lionel Brooke, a British remittance man working as an Alberta rancher who enlists for South Africa, states: "Fact is, there are money grubbers in Kimberly and Johannesburg, and all they want out of this war is more diamonds and gold" (Stenson 13). He continues, "I'm not against the Boers for British reasons, but I am against the Boers. [ . . . ] My problem with the Boers is how they took the land from the Bantus and Zulus. Killed them and made them slaves. I say *that's* worth a war, on the assumption Britain will treat the blacks any better" (Stenson 13). Brooke is anti-imperialist, but supports the war in South Africa. When men in the bar shout "Three cheers for Lionel Brooke! Empire assassin!" He responds, "Not *Empire!*" (Stenson 13). Although Brooke's correction is drowned out over the cheering, Brooke's comment nonetheless registers in the novel as a means of discrediting the imperial reasons for the war. Travis Mason points out that Stenson's critique of the war figures by means of Adams's character (114); Adams registers Stenson's thread of anti-imperialism when he tells Fred Morden, another soldier from Alberta who enlists with Adams and Davis, that he does not "even know why a person fights for Empire" (Stenson 94). When Morden explains what provokes a person to fight for Empire, Adams realizes that he knew all of those reasons, but did not care for them.

Stenson links Indigenous peoples and Boers in his novel when Adams draws an analogy between a group of trapped Boers and their animals and Indigenous people in

Canada: “Frank had seen Indians exhausted this way, hollowed out by hunger and disease, left in the dust as land boosters passed them. Whether or not this lost country was a place the Boers had stolen in the first place, Frank found them tragic” (438). Adams’s comparison reveals the complications of a colonizing people being colonized by the British. Moreover, it demonstrates the degree to which Stenson collapses the differences between colonies with vastly different histories. Adams thinks about Davis: “If Hank was right and the British did not care as much about colonial lives as British ones, it implied that Jeff must be in danger all the time. What could be more colonial than an Indian in a troop of British scouts?” (Stenson 163). Stenson provides a counter-narrative to racial discrimination, but also indicates the complexities of racially based moral hierarchies. In this vein, Stenson connects the Indigenous and French-Canadian soldiers with the Black South Africans: “Frank and Ovide went about their chores in silence, with the same assumed invisibility as the black men beside them” (223). Stenson continues, “Ovide and Frank were the whites that the rest of the whites treated like blacks, and the black campies welcomed them to their fire and shared the hot food their wives and relatives sometimes brought” (223). Coates draws attention to the fact that Adams and Ovide interact with the Black characters “without prejudice: they get to know them by name [and] find them hospitable and generous in their sharing of meager supplies of food and drink” (“*Fin de siècle*” 229). Stenson emphasizes Smith’s and Adams’s perceived position on the outside of the Canadian nation by aligning them with the Black South Africans.

After an explosion, Adams deserts to the Kleff farm where he eventually encounters Denny Straytor, a Boer who he must guard until the other British at the farm

return from gathering supplies. He and Denny have a conversation about their positions in the war:

“What do Boers think of Canadians?” Frank asked.

“We barely know you exist . . . Your uniforms are so much like British ones. Only the hats make you different. A lot of Boers didn’t know about the Canadians, or the Australians and New Zealanders, until Pretoria fell. Even then, we had no idea why you would come so far to fight us.”

“How about you?” Frank asked.

“What? You mean, do I understand why you fight us? No, I don’t. Turn it around. Would the Boers cross the ocean to fight Canada?”

“Some say we’re here to protect the blacks.”

“Oh, don’t make me laugh,” said Straytor, laughing. “Your side sends blacks out with dispatches if it’s too dangerous to send your own. They dig your trenches same as they dig ours.” (Stenson 297)

Straytor demonstrates that although the British purport to be in South Africa partly because of the ongoing slavery and treatment of Black South Africans, they are also guilty of misusing Black people as labourers in the war. Davis notes that the whites made Black South Africans work for them, stating they were “treated poorly, as bad or worse than white people treated Indians” (Stenson 140). The novel reveals how Black South Africans’ “invaluable contribution to the war effort shattered the oft-repeated claim that colonials were volunteering to fight in a ‘white man’s war’” (Coates, “*Fin de siècle*” 229). The characters’ reflections on the commonalities between colonized people in both countries undermines any possibility of glorifying the British empire.

However, the novel's ambivalence in its critique of the South African War is apparent when Stenson draws attention to the elements of historiography in order to legitimize several Canadian heroes. When the Canadian Scouts find De Wet's cave, Charlie Ross states, "this here find of Boer treasure is what will be beside Charlie Ross's name in the history books. *Charlie Ross and his Canadian Scouts discovered the biggest Boer arsenal ever found in the war.* That's what they'll write, and every damn one of us will have that bit of fame to point to" (451). In this example, Stenson reinscribes the narrative of national fame and progress as contingent on war. Although Stenson chooses "to give weight to the ineffectiveness of British command" (Coates, "*Fin de siècle*" 228), he does not deconstruct the notion of military glory. The novel highlights Canada's participation in the war as distinct from British participation, emphasizing the way in which Canada has been left out of traditional war histories. In the novel's conclusion, Frank Adams thinks:

I've read anything I could about the Boer War, including Arthur Conan Doyle's fat book . [ . . . ] English writers like Conan Doyle could write a whole book about the South African War and not mention there were Canadians in it. Though to be fair, I should say that Conan Doyle did mention the day Charlie Ross and his Canadian Scouts found De Wet's cave full of booty (just like Charlie predicted some history writer would). (477)<sup>53</sup>

Stenson does not undercut the narrative of national war glory, but ensures that Ross's and the Canadian Scout's contributions are apparent in order to include the Canadian—and Indigenous—soldiers in the historical record. In the text, Canadian officers "prove

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<sup>53</sup> Conan Doyle does, in fact, mention Canada's contributions in several sections of his book.

superior in numerous ways to their British counterparts” (Coates, “*Fin de siècle*” 230). Earlier in the novel, Stenson describes the Battle of Paardeberg, and highlights Canada’s role in it. Colonel Herchmer remained quiet during the re-telling of the scene at Paardeberg, but finally roared, ““The Royal Canadian Regiment took part in the battle of Paardeburg. [. . .] They were in the final fight that produced the surrender”” (Stenson 58). For Herchmer, it was not enough that Britain won the battle; he needed to add to the initial story and pronounce *Canada’s* success at Paardeberg.

In what might seem like a postmodern move but is arguably a further realist impulse, Stenson concludes *The Great Karoo* with three temporal shifts, ending with Adams’s first-person narrative perspective in 1942, a short commentary on his war memoir *Frank Adams’s Boer War Memoir*. Rather than include the memoir itself, Stenson only includes Adams’s comments on writing the memoir. Adams’s interrogation of the historiographic mode when he describes writing his memoir validates the historical record. Whereas Hutcheon points out that strategies of historiographic metafiction are employed to challenge “the causal, closed linear nature of narrative history” (14), Stenson’s novel does not seem to challenge this narrative but legitimizes it. The novel reflects Gordon’s argument about First World War novels published after *The Wars* in what she terms a “‘post’-historiographic metafictional period” when “authors began to signal a distinctive interest in dialogue with the past, a dialogue that, paradoxically, seeks out a sense of stability rather than ambivalence and flux” (91). Prior to Adams’s remarks on his memoir, the novel seemed to reveal a “relative disinterest in sorting through the problem of how to confront a historical record” (Gordon 86). Stenson’s conclusion discussing *Frank Adams’s Boer War Memoir* is his brief opportunity for fictional play,



and he even interrogates subjective omissions in historiography. Adams figures as the historian or archivist, an archetype of contemporary Canadian First World War fiction (Gordon 10). Whereas Gordon points out that combatant literature on the First World War “does not explicitly negotiate the issue of temporal distance” (10), in contrast, the figure of the historian or archivist in contemporary First World War fiction makes this negotiation explicit. Stenson’s rapid shift in temporality at the end of the novel, in addition to Adams’s position as the historian figure, highlights the way the novel draws upon contemporary methodologies of writing about the First World War in Canada. However, Adams’s thoughts do not question empiricist historiography, as is typically the case when authors draw upon the historian/archivist archetype. In fact, Adams’s comments on his memoir serve as an attempt to validate the historical record and reinforce rather than undermine “the mimetic connection between art and life” (Hutcheon 61). That is, Stenson’s conclusion acts as a realist device—a “retrospective realism”—whereby Adams’s fictional musings at the end of the novel suggest the historical accuracy of everything previous to the novel’s conclusion.

For example, Adams notes that in his memoir he does not mention Eddy and Pete Belton—characters who take up a part of Stenson’s novel—because he does not want “to tell how they poisoned the baboon, tried to shoot Jeff Davis, and stole [his] dun mare. Nobody thinks highly of Eddy and Pete, but I don’t think it’s my job to give people reasons to look down on them even more” (Stenson 478). Here, Adams draws attention to the limits and omissions of historical memoir or autobiography. Stenson underscores the degree to which memory can complicate rather than simplify history, and emphasizes a desire to censor memory. Stenson also highlights the authorial biases at play in a first-

person account when Adams points out that he has left out of the memoir his desertion and his love of a Boer woman. Further, Adams thinks, “What I’ve left out of the memoir is that, after Ovide died and Dunny was stolen, I deserted. Nor is there a whisper of my having loved a Boer girl. I did not want my children to think of me as a coward. I did not want my wife to know I loved someone before her, in case she thought I loved her less” (Stenson 478). Adams’s self-reflexive comments about the past in his commentary on the memoir make the reader question the extent to which fictional texts rely on history. However, the novel’s structure, whereby Adams’s first-person narration follows the omniscient narration of the majority of the novel, also heightens the sense of the fiction’s historicity. Adams’s comments about what he does *not* include in his memoir provide a sense of realism to the novel’s previous sections that include those very events, thereby instilling the initial diegesis with a sense of authenticity. As a result of this retrospective realism, the earlier events effectively become the “real” history of Adams’s South African War experience—and the Canadian war experience—that he then filters and revises in his memoir. Stenson’s adherence to realism’s claims of veracity are a result of the novel’s innovation at its conclusion.

Stenson emphasizes Adams’s sense of feeling outside of the war that connects to Adams destroying his memoir: “When I get up from this table, I will make a fire in the wood stove. Then I will feed this memoir to that fire, every page. . . . We travelled inside [the war], Ovide, Jeff, and me, but we never understood it and we were never part of it” (480). Stenson’s careful balance of his exciting war narrative with the brotherly bond his characters form in South Africa based on their mutual minority status heightens the affective weight of Davis’s eventual death. For Adams, his Métis identity prevented him

from feeling included in this “white man’s war,” which suggests one reason why Stenson returned to the South African War in his novel to re-examine the effects of the racial hierarchies that some soldiers who fought for Canada experienced during the war. As McGoogan argues, “[t]he book is subtly subversive not for its postcolonial attitude toward British imperialism, but because it plays down leading figures such as the legendary Sam Steele, for example, while celebrating a fictional little guy” (D15). Although Stenson’s historiography is conservative at times, he nonetheless follows a postmodern tenet of incorporating characters in his fictional account that do not figure into the collective consciousness of this event’s historical record. Stenson’s conventional devices of realism highlight the gaps in the traditional historical record; this realism attempts to move beyond a conservative history because it legitimizes the novel’s inclusion. This perspective demonstrates how part of the contemporary national landscape bleeds into the text, whereby an event as far-reaching as the South African War is coloured by the contemporary celebration of difference and otherness in Canada. The fact that Stenson concludes the novel by jumping forward in time to 1942 allows him to disagree with the war and provide a critique outside of the war’s immediacy from Adams’s perspective: “I tell [my family] it was a stupid war from start to finish and benefited no one but the rich. The proof is that the black people of South Africa never did get the vote, just like Indians here in Canada don’t have the vote to this day” (478). Stenson connects the racial discrimination at the time of the South African War to the ongoing disparities between different Indigenous groups in South Africa and Canada at the time of the memoir’s writing. By setting Adams’s war memoir decades after the war, Stenson enables a critique of the longevity of settler colonialism in Canada that

maintained policies that excluded Indigenous peoples by connecting the democratic exclusions of Black South Africans with the very belated franchise rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada. In this novel, the South African War serves not only as a site for the exploration of issues of race, gender, or class, but also as a distant mirror for the reflection of the continuance of settler colonialism in Canada.

In “‘A Trading Shop So Crooked a Man Could Jump Through the Cracks’: Counting the Cost of Fred Stenson’s *Trade* in the Hudson’s Bay Company Archive” (2010), Kathleen Venema argues that Stenson’s novel *The Trade* “proposes an alternate version of a knowable past” instead of problematizing historical knowability (4). Venema takes issue with how Stenson “reinstates the powerful fur-trade hierarchy it ostensibly interrogates, and that it reinscribes a pervasive and pernicious distrust of mixed-blood characters generally” (6). *The Great Karoo* also does not seem to problematize empiricist historical knowledge. Although the novel’s realism is essential for Stenson’s attempt to unearth the neglected history of Indigenous soldiers in the South African War, at times, Stenson’s fidelity to history reinscribes problematic depictions of mixed-race characters. In the novel, Stenson characterizes Adams and Davis as reliant on alcohol, problematically reproducing stereotypes of alcoholism amongst Indigenous communities (Mancall 13). Adams explains that he had “seldom been as angry in [his] life” because of the way Jeff Davis was depicted in the post-war years: “By the time of his death, Jeff had a reputation around Ft. Macleod as a drunkard. ‘Just a Halfbreed’ was what he was called in a book about the range era by a man named Kelly. Kelly also called him ‘shiftless, unmoral, and whiskey sodden.’ There was a whole page devoted to running Jeff down as

a war hero who came home and did nothing ‘with all his advantages’” (Stenson 479).<sup>54</sup> Stenson’s reference is to L. V. Kelly’s *The Range Men: The Story of the Ranchers and Indians of Alberta* (1913) in which Kelly argues for Indigenous assimilation: “If a Halfbreed were removed from the prairies and hills, from association with the Indians, from the shiftless ways of the tribes, he would be a much more creditable addition to the human race” (49). Kelly narrates the encounter between Stenson’s fictional Davis (Kelly’s unnamed “Halfbreed boy who grew up in the Macleod district”) and a Boer (49):

“Surrender!” ordered the half-Indian, but the Boer threw up his rifle and fired, leaping then off the bridge into the deep mud, while the exultant pursuers thundered down from behind.

“Surrender!” ordered the halfbreed again, but the stubborn enemy only replied with his rifle. Sudden anger flamed within the Macleod halfbreed; he threw his rifle down and plunged blindly toward the Boer, the lust to kill coming and overwhelming him. Absolutely regardless of the cornered enemy’s bullets which cut his uniform in ribbons, he walked coolly closer, his service revolver ready. Finally the Boer’s gun clicked, his ammunition was gone, and then he threw the useless rifle down and cried: “I surrender.”

But the Indian blood was up, the stubborn, senseless opposition, the whistling bullets, the smell of smoke, the heat of pursuit had resulted in a blood-frenzy, and the halfbreed gritted as he shot steady and true:

“I gave you your chance and you wouldn’t take it.”

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<sup>54</sup> In Kelly’s text, Davis is unnamed and referred to as a “half-Indian.”

This man went to his home country after the war, away from the East, away from his early companions, back to the range where the red men wandered and the tepees of his mother called silently. He went, and he became—‘just a halfbreed,’ shiftless, unmoral, whiskey-sodden.” (50)

The passage quoted reveals a problematic depiction of Indigenous bloodlust. Kelly’s text also reveals how Stenson derives his characterization of the soldier Jefferson Davis from Kelly’s unnamed “halfbreed.” The passage demonstrates the intimate interplay between history and fiction in Stenson’s novel.

After Adams reads Kelly’s book, he explains, “I wrote a storming-mad letter to Kelly, but I never sent it. I did not because I knew that, if Jeff were alive, he wouldn’t have bothered. He would have laughed about it and had another drink” (Stenson 479). Stenson’s invocation of the stereotype about alcohol and Indigeneity is no less problematic despite its agential and humorous depiction. The men drink at war in part because it is a coping mechanism with which to confront the war’s colonial realities and are of course offered standard army rum rations, but Stenson depicts the Indigenous characters as relying heavily on alcohol at various times in the novel. Prior to boarding the ship at Halifax, the soldiers enjoy a night of drinking, with Ovide, Davis, and Adams drinking separately from the other men. Although the men’s intoxication in the context of their social exclusion could be argued to demonstrate their alienation within the “white man’s war,” this interpretation would demand a critical readership that reads against the grain of the text’s historical realism. The trope of Indigenous drunkenness concludes the paragraph, for Adams blacks out from alcohol, not remembering much of the night, “including how he found his way back to the armouries” (Stenson 44). As Davis begins

to take more risks and behave independently at war, his abuse of alcohol also becomes more significant: the narrator describes him “as drunk as Frank had ever seen him” (Stenson 428). When Davis’s superior, Charlie Ross, explains to Adams that Davis was behaving too recklessly, he asks Adams to explain it to Davis “when he’s sober enough to understand the English language” (Stenson 429). By speaking to Adams instead of Davis, Ross veils his racist insult about Davis’s ability to understand English—relying on an element of the stereotype of Indigenous drunkenness’s logic that alcohol made Indigenous peoples incompetent (Mancall 13). Adams tries to communicate to Davis about the importance of protecting the three younger soldiers under his command “in his own drunkenness” (Stenson 432). When Davis is demoted from Charlie Ross’s “sidekick,” Adams “expected Jeff to drink, for this was what he had done during dark moods in the past” (Stenson 433). Wyile highlights the danger of accessible historical fictions that “are more susceptible to realist recuperation; the seductive illusion of history passing before our eyes, as a packaged past” which “threatens to obscure the ways in which that illusion is being self-consciously subverted as a construct” (“Latte Drinking” 189). For Stenson to maintain pejorative terminology such as “halfbreed” and the depiction of Indigenous soldiers as drunks has the potential to reproduce the historical injustices he is ostensibly trying to undercut. In addition to legitimizing the nationalist project of mythologizing war as noted above, Stenson’s problematic depiction of his Métis characters’ dependency on alcohol inhibits the full potential of a project that seems to expose settler colonialism in Canada, suggesting the limits of an inclusive historical fiction that is represented in the realist mode.

There is also a connection between Stenson's realism and his conviction of the very real similarities between this war and the war on terrorism. Stenson connects the interest in gold and diamonds in the Boer Republics, which motivated the South African War, with the interest in oil in Iraq that motivated the Iraq War. Recent Canadian intervention in Afghanistan makes Canadian participation in the South African War increasingly relevant today. Like the war in Afghanistan, the South African War saw relatively small numbers of Canadians participate, but nevertheless, this participation was not insignificant. Lewis DeSoto connects the Afghanistan War with the South African War, and claims that the Boer War was as unpopular in its time as Canadian intervention in Afghanistan: "It was by no means a popular war, in Britain or in Canada. The resonances between past and present are heightened if we look at old photographs of the bearded Boer farmers and note the similarities to the fighters in Afghanistan today. Gold and diamonds were the prizes then; black gold is certainly in the mix today" ("Canada's Boer War"). DeSoto does not parse the nuances of the South African War; the war was highly popular in Britain and most parts of Canada at its beginning. A direct comparison between the two wars' popularity is impossible, for given the trope of the peaceable kingdom, a contemporary war is much less palatable than a *fin-de-siècle* war was with its contemporaries. In Stenson's article "The Good War" in *Alberta Views*, he explains that "[t]here are also aspects of the Boer War in Canada's conflict against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Just as Canada got involved in Afghanistan to show support for the US after 9/11, Canada got involved in the Boer War to show support for Britain after it was trashed several times in one week by the Boers" (60). He continues, "For the record, the Boer War led to World War I, a much bigger, bloodier and longer conflict" (60).



Although Stenson's argument for the direct causation between the South African War and the First World War is suspect, Stenson does suggest that there is more at stake in his return to the South African War. Stenson's linking of the contemporary conflict with Canada's part in the South African War speaks to his commitment to realism in *The Great Karoo*. Stenson writes:

In both wars, we started with very little emotional involvement, but became more and more emotionally aroused as our soldiers came home dead and missing limbs. To say anything against the war became an insult to the dead and an insult to the men still fighting—even though, at the start of those wars, a lot of Canadians could not have won a quiz show by pointing to the enemy nation on a map. (“The Good War” 60)

Stenson's comparison is skewed; in fact, the South African War began with a lot of “emotional involvement,” not “very little,” and rather, interest waned over time. Nevertheless, for Stenson, the stakes of this comparison and the achievements of Indigenous soldiers in the South African War are very real.

#### 4.4 Theft, Looting, and Farm Burning in South Africa

Stenson includes the problematic history of theft, looting, and farm burnings in *The Great Karoo*. Prior to turning to the novel's depiction of the unsavoury war practices, the section will first examine several of the first-hand accounts of the war that disclose the unprincipled behaviour by Canadians in South Africa. For example, in Charlie Tweddell's journal from the front published in Miller's *Charlie's First War: South*

*Africa, 1899-1900* (2014), the entry for Thursday, 11 January 1900 remarks on Colonel Otter's reprobation of the men's theft:

Col Otter gave us a little speech, Reminding us what we were & who we represented & said that he had heard a remark made by some party whom he would not name that gave him a thrill of horror. The remark was that the Canadians were the most light-fingered crowd in the Camp. He spoke very nicely to us as man to man & referred to the pilfering on board ship & the cases he had punished & said that such a thing should be below us & that he did not want to punish or even hear of this offence again. He said he was sure that we would feel bad over this & he was right for several of us who have known how some were behaving often said to each other We will be getting a nice name some of these days. It is really too bad that for the sake of a few low sneak thieves the whole regiment should get a bad name. (100)<sup>55</sup>

Tweddell's journal for 16 February 1900 describes how the Canadian "boys ransacked all the houses & took all sorts of things. Some got Jewelry, some got Albums full of pretty photos, some went in for clothes such as Pants, shirts, handkerchiefs, Shawls etc. etc. some got Parasols & Japanese fans, straw hats (Ladies), Ostrich feathers Ribbons & all sorts of truck. One chap got a lovely Guitar" (127). Tweddell admits he "got 3 bottles of herbs for flavoring meats or soups a lot of Ladies [sic] belts & some Photos and Statuts [statues]," and adds, "[a]s we are outward bound I might say every little weight tells so I left or gave away nearly all I had commandeered" (127). The men's theft contravened

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<sup>55</sup> The lengthy text quoted here and below maintains Tweddell's capitalization from the original source.

their superiors' expectations, for their Colonel "[g]ave [them] a song & dance about looting & said that Lord Roberts did'nt [didn't] want any looting done whatever" (Tweddell 128). On 14 March 1900, Tweddell records that "[o]ne of D co Pte Beaulin [Boylea] got himself into trouble for stealing a chicken. He was field court martialled & let off very easy only getting 56 days field imprisonment—instead of the full penalty—Death" (150). Trooper James Taylor from "A" Division of the South African Constabulary wrote home that they "'shall have a good reputation as thieves as after a while some of the men being splendid foragers going out and coming back with a dressed pig on the saddle or a goat or half a dozen fowl'" (qtd. in Wallace, *No Colours* 119). In a letter printed on 2 January 1901 in the *Ottawa Citizen*, E. W. B. Morrison characterizes the Canadians as ethically superior. He describes the "ominous bluish haze" over the town and the "crackle of rifle fire" during the burning and looting of the village of Dullstroom during an attack on the Boers in which Canadian troops participated. He distinguishes the Canadians: "[o]ur Canadian boys helped to get their furniture out, much as they would do at a fire in a village at home. If they saw anything they fancied they would take it . . . but they had not the callous nerve to take the people's stuff in front of their faces" (qtd. in Dyer and Viljoen 169). Morrison's irony nonetheless presents a moral relativism that enables the justification of the Canadians' theft. Morrison went into a cottage that the Canadian Mounted Rifles and Royal Canadian Dragoons were looting, "but [were] really helping the woman out with her stuff more than sacking the place" (qtd. in Dyer and Viljoen 170). Although Morrison qualifies their looting with his admission that "it was a sad sight to see the little homes burning and the rose bushes

withering up in the pretty gardens,” they still “rode away” from “the pathetic groups of homeless women and children crying among the ruins” (qtd. in Dyer and Viljoen 170).

Furthermore, Carman Miller explains that the “men’s apprehensions and discontent [at Belmont] expressed itself in fighting and disorder. More men were court martialled for drunkenness, looting, insubordination, sleeping on duty and other irregularities in their two months at Belmont than in all the rest of the campaign. Looting was common, especially for food” (*Canada’s Little War* 39). In Major-General E. T. H. Hutton’s opinion, the Canadians were the “most notorious thieves in the British Army” and “even stole his horse” on one occasion (Miller, *Canada’s Little War*, 67). In “*G*” *Company, or, Every-day Life of the R.C. R: Being a Descriptive Account of Typical Events in the Life of the First Canadian Contingent in South Africa* (1901), Russell C. Hubly describes how his company killed a sheep for food: “It is true that now and then, when the captain was not looking, we killed a sheep. But then you must admit that fresh, fat mutton, cooked before the blood had time to clot, and eaten without salt, is not the best food. In fact, it but increased the hunger” (Hubly 74). Indeed, Hubly’s sarcasm emphasizes the poor quality of the mutton’s preparation for comedic effect, but it also serves to undermine the troops’ misdemeanor: the men were hungrier after eating the stolen sheep than before, so the reader should excuse their crime. In *I’m Alone* (1930), Jack Randell’s sarcasm points out the irony of the different standards for the English and Canadian troops: “The English weren’t allowed to loot. Their officers watched against it and heavy punishment followed detection. But the Canadians could loot and did. I noticed that the English officers didn’t mind buying ducks and chickens and pigs and horses from us Canadians. I suppose they thought we had farms somewhere in Africa and

raised them!” (81). Primary accounts of the War detail the theft and looting in which Canadians admittedly participated.

In *The Boer War in the Novel in English* (1968), Donald Jay Weinstock explains the waning popularity of South African War fiction in the immediacy of the war, stating that “[t]he majority of the novelists apparently thought either that this last stage of the war was too dreary to interest the public, or too sordid. Except to Afrikaner authors and to some of the authors of boys’ stories guerrilla fighting was generally regarded as criminal and against all codes of decent warfare” (25). Although the change in war tactics toward the second half of the War may have troubled Canadians, Jim Wallace highlights the less than scrupulous participation of Canadians in the later phase of the War. He states that “[t]he success of the Canadian Scouts on the veldt confirmed that the Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders had become masters of guerilla warfare” (v).

Canadians also participated in the controversial farm burnings and lootings of Boer property, behaviour which contravenes contemporary standards of a just war. The British began their farm burning policy to force women, children, and servants out of their homes and onto the veldt, which obligated Boer men still away on commando to protect them. Although British Liberal leader Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman would call Kitchener’s policies “methods of barbarism” in June 1901 based on pro-Boer social activist Emily Hobhouse’s concentration camp reports, Boer guerrilla tactics toward the second half of the war left many believing it was the Boers’ behaviour that necessitated the British policies (Bernstein 111). In a letter to his wife dated 16 February 1901 that was published in the *Lethbridge News* on 25 April 1901, Charlie Ross admitted that they “get so many sheep that we have to kill hundreds every day and burn every wagon,

buggy, saddle, etc. we don't require for our own use. We are leaving an awful trail of smoke and ruin wherever we go'" (qtd. in Wallace, *Knowing No Fear* 42). Eventually, the farm burning project was too expansive, which led the British to begin imprisoning Boer women and children, Black servants, and elderly men in "concentration camps" (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 58). The British ran approximately sixty-eight camps, which resulted in nearly 28,000 deaths of Boer women, children, and old men (Miller, *Canada's Little War* 58). Approximately 16,000 Black people died in the camps, which indicates the severe impact of the War on Black South Africans who were often used as free labour but were omitted from most official narratives of the War. The British scorched earth policy, which saw the burning of Boer farms, crops, and buildings, was intended to starve Boer families. Miller makes clear that part of Canada's second contingent, engaged in patrol duty at Blankfontein, Aasvogel, Nooitgedacht, Wonderfontein, and Belfast, "participated in the British Army's increasingly distasteful scorched earth policy, herding women and children into concentration camps and burning their crops and farms" and notes that "some of the Canadian farm boys found the activity especially unpleasant" (*Canada's Little War* 70).

In *The Great Karoo*, Charlie Ross tells the Scouts to "[b]urn the farms," and Gat Howard explains that "Kitchener wants all the rebel farms torched, and the women and children collected and put in camps" (Stenson 449). Howard and the Scouts decide to search and scout the farms ahead while those in the rear participate in the farm burnings. Howard states, "I'd damn sooner be a scout, even on a day like this, and actually fight this war, than herd women and sheep and burn farms" (Stenson 450). During one of the farm burnings in which the Canadian Scouts participate, a weeping Boer woman grabbed

Adams's arm, begging him not to burn the home. "Out of all of them, she had chosen him, and he felt at once guilty and miserable," Stenson describes (455). He includes an image of "[a] bedraggled mother lift[ing] her child to the high step of a wagon. A black servant astraddle the wagon wall swung him over. The boy's head twisted, his giant eyes never leaving the flames that devoured his world" (Stenson 455). Frank then pats the old woman's hand on his arm, and her "look turned from supplication to hatred" (Stenson 455). Later in the day, Adams and Davis see a Boer woman driving a cart loaded with possessions and children, and Davis lets it go "even though they had been warned these fugitive women were forming laagers as they went east, well armed and every bit as dangerous as their menfolk" (Stenson 456). Adams was grateful that Davis let them go, and for not forcing him to have to ask. He was worried that the Boer woman he loved, Alma Kleff, "would smell however much char and death was on him" (Stenson 466). Stenson's depiction of the Boers' perspective as they watch their homes burn humanizes the enemy. As Coates argues, "[t]he text further suggests that Canadian colonials—here mostly Alberta cowboys and their officers—were largely spared from (and in some instances outright refused) any commitment to the barbarity exercised by both Boers and Brits" ("*Fin de siècle*" 229). Adams's displeasure with the corrupt policy and his unwillingness to stop the Boer cart demonstrates Stenson's attempt to depict Adams as ethically exceptional.

#### 4.5 "[A] Bloody Oath": Rumours of Boer Execution

In addition to the scorched earth policy and the concentration camps, Canadians were rumoured to be embroiled in another less palatable war measure. As Wallace writes,

“[e]ven before the war ended, there were many allegations against Ross and other members of the Canadian Scouts for a variety of offences, many related to illegal dealing in cattle. There were also persistent rumours of prisoners being robbed and murdered” (132). Wallace refers to the rumoured, unsanctioned policy of executing Boer prisoners after the Boer killing of Major Arthur L. “Gat” Howard, who organized the Canadian Scouts. When the Scouts heard that the Boers had killed Gat Howard, Randell explains “[i]t was Indian-fighting stuff to get at them” (66). Gat Howard’s orderly describes how “[t]hose Boers crowded up around him and stood over his body and pumped shot after shot into him like a bunch of savages. They were laughing as they watched him twitch when the bullets hit him” (Randell 68). Randell aligns the Boers with Indigenous people, suggesting it was “Indian-fighting stuff” to fight them and naming the Boers “savages” for shooting Gat Howard. Randell problematically draws upon tired tropes that characterized Indigenous people as “savage” warriors. As Bridgette Brown explains, “the battle between the English and the Afrikaners is frequently depicted as a clash of civilizations, where the Boers are portrayed as uncivilized and in need of advancement” (77). Randell’s characterization of the Boer soldiers is intended to reveal how the Canadian scout can tame the “uncivilized” Boer in the project of Empire.

Randell explains the notorious oath that was made over Howard’s body. Captain Ross says, “I want you to take an oath with me that this outfit never takes another Boer prisoner” (68). Randell relays the promise Charlie Ross made to execute Boers instead of keeping them prisoners: “The first scout that brings in a Boer prisoner after this—I’ll shoot him myself!” (69). In *The Great Karoo*, Stenson includes the oath to which Randell refers, explaining that the Boers likely killed Gat Howard instead of taking him



prisoner “because Gat had a black man for a guide. That was their rule: shoot whites that use blacks to fight” (Stenson 385). Charlie Ross claims that other colonial units who had lost their leader in the manner the Scouts lost Gat Howard had “sworn a bloody oath” that “they would never take another Boer rebel prisoner” (Stenson 385). Ross asks, “[h]ow about—in Major Gat Howard’s honour—the Canadian Scouts take that oath right now? That, after today, we will take no more Boer rebels prisoner” (Stenson 386). Stenson depicts Captain Ross’s maniacal features during the oath-swearing, noting his “black eyes [were] sparkling” (386) and how he had “a scar on his forehead livid in the fire’s light” (386). Stenson’s version of the oath-swearing enables him to further distinguish Frank Adams from the other Scouts because he refuses to swear the oath, and likewise to accept Ross’s offer to become a Scout, until after his Boer lover, Alma Kleff, has rejected him. The oath reappears in Stenson’s novel when stories come to camp about the infamous Breaker Morant, the Australian who was court martialled for executing Boer prisoners; in Stenson’s novel, at Morant’s court martial hearing he gives the oath taken by Charlie Ross’s Scouts as precedent for his behaviour (433). Although the Canadians’ participation in an oath to execute Boers contravenes contemporary standards of a just war, the pride with which Stenson depicts Ross’s oath-taking is intended to suggest the loyalty and ferocity of the Canadians, and their willingness to act according to their own notions of justice outside of military law because of the Boer soldier’s own illegitimate warfare.

## 4.6 Revisionism and Exceptionalism in *Keeley's Big Story* and *Stones for My Father*

In “The Intellectual Construction of Canada’s ‘Peaceable Kingdom’ Ideal” (2018), Scott W. See reviews the intellectual history of the “peaceable kingdom ideal” that Northrop Frye articulated in his conclusion to *The Literary History of Canada* (1965). As Robert Teigrob explains, “[a]ccording to time-honoured self-perceptions, Canadians are an ‘unmilitary people’ who inhabit a ‘peaceable kingdom’” (3). He continues, “Canadian society may be more militaristic than is generally recognized” (Teigrob 5). As See and Teigrob demonstrate, studying literature that exemplifies the paradigm of non-violence to which Canadians have adhered is not novel. However, the ways in which Canadian writers have attempted to construct Canadian participation in the South African War as peaceful despite its combative nature deserves further attention. Tim Cook argues in *Vimy: The Battle and the Legend* (2017) that “[t]he symbols forged from struggle and paid for in blood often have a greater resonance than those derived from peace, compromise, or judicial decisions—likely because of the drama involved, and the high stakes” (367). As the previous chapters demonstrate, much of the war’s contemporaneous writing attempts to position Canadians as brave fighters and quick-witted warriors. Paradoxically, some accounts also position the Canadians as morally superior to their English counterparts. Ironically, some Canadians even championed Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier as the candidate to buttress peace as a mediator between Boer and British sides, overlooking Canada’s role as aggressor alongside Britain (Miller, *Canada’s Little War* 91).

Recent writing about the war reflects a curious revisionism whereby Canadian authors distinguish Canadians from the British based on the former's ostensible moral superiority. The section underway examines *Keeley: Book Two: Keeley's Big Story* (2005) from Deborah Ellis's *Our Canadian Girl* series and Trilby Kent's *Stones for My Father* (2011), winner of the 2012 TD Canadian Children's Literature Award. This section will discuss the paradoxical logic of Canadian identity in the context of the South African War that positioned Canadians as distinct within the British military because of raucous, anti-military independence on one hand and moral superiority on the other. The section first turns to contemporaneous examples of writers constructing Canadians as distinct in South Africa before moving to contemporary iterations of the revisionist fiction in *Keeley's Big Story* and *Stones for My Father*.

#### 4.7 "Singing our own Canadian war song": Distinguishing Canadian Participation in South Africa

Although the Canadians fought as part of the British Empire, the nation emphasized the distinctiveness of the Canadians. As Miller points out, "[w]ithin the limitations of size and colonial status, every effort was made to enhance [the men of the First Contingent's] importance, extend their autonomy, and retain their Canadian character" (*Painting the Map* 49). For example, "[t]he Militia Department was equally determined to retain the Canadian character of the contingent and to avoid having it broken up and integrated into the British army" (Miller, *Painting the Map* 51). These decisions "enhanced the contingent's prestige, autonomy, and self-sufficiency" (Miller, *Painting the Map* 51). Even the title of the First Contingent, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Special Service) Battalion, Royal Canadian

Regiment of Infantry, was intended to show that “the men of the First Contingent were not British army recruits but men with a temporary appointment in the Canadian permanent militia” (Miller, *Painting the Map* 51). In *Canada’s Little War: Fighting for the British Empire in Southern Africa 1899-1902* (2003) Miller describes how the Royal Canadians’

brown canvas khaki uniforms, white helmets (later sensibly dyed coffee), heavy black boots, Sam Browne belts and Canadian-invented Oliver equipment—as well as their small distinctions of dress and kit and insignia—underlined their desire to differentiate themselves within the imperial family. No distinction provided greater pride than the maple leaf ‘Canada’ badge affixed to their helmets.<sup>56</sup>

(*Canada’s Little War* 27)

The badge “proved a great source of pride to many recruits” (Miller, *Painting the Map* 54). In his description of the Canadians fighting at Paardeberg, T. G. Marquis glorifies “the splendid marksmen with the maple leaf on their helmets” (287). The descriptions of Canada’s unique uniform illustrate the degree to which Canada attempted to demonstrate autonomy by means of these efforts at visually distinguishing themselves in South Africa. G. M. Fairchild, Jr. highlights Canada’s distinctiveness within the Empire in his song “To the Canadian Contingent” (1901), which explains how the Canadians are “going to help old England on Africa’s sunny strand. / Singing our own Canadian war song” (3-4).

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<sup>56</sup> The Canadians in the First Contingent had affixed a three-inch badge featuring an imperial crown superimposed on a maple leaf with the word “CANADA” below the crown (Miller, *Painting the Map* 54).

In the *Toronto Star* from 28 December 1900, Colonel William D. Otter, the Commanding Officer of the Royal Canadian Regiment, described the Canadians' enthusiasm despite their lack of military training or experience:

...owing to that peculiar spirit that exists in Canadians, namely that of enthusiasm in whatever they may be called upon to do and the determination to carry it out, to say nothing of the deep and fervent feeling for the country that has given them birth, that feeling under which we are all so proud to serve, it became a very easy matter for the officers of that battalion to soon convert it into one of the most efficient battalions that tramped the veldt of South Africa. (qtd. in Labat 78)

Colonel Otter's hyperbolic portrayal of Canadians as more enthusiastic, determined, and passionate because of their "peculiar spirit" leads him to the conclusion that they were also "one of the most efficient" battalions. Miller discusses how the Canadian men demonstrated local mannerisms, and Colonel Otter believed adding "the barbaric 'tiger' to the end of cheers" and other excessive cheering "betrayed his men's colonial character, and he ordered them to cease this foolishness" (*Painting the Map* 73). In *From Quebec to Pretoria with the Royal Canadian Regiment* (1902), William Hart-McHarg describes a quirky effort at maintaining a distinct Canadian identity when he elaborates on the significance of the "tiger" as an expression of Canadian independence:

"Tigers," we were given to understand, were low-down things, only indulged in by people from wild and woolly regions, and Lord Roberts would think we were wild and woolly instead of a barrack-square regiment if we let ourselves loose in such a manner. This incident illustrates somewhat the apparent fear there was that in some way we should show a little independence or individuality. We were

always made to copy any little “wrinkles” of the British regiments, and our drill was changed half a dozen times to make it conform to something some of the other regiments did which took the adjutant’s eye. At Windsor Castle, after being reviewed by the Queen, we had dinner in the riding-school. The officers lunched with the household. When we drank the Queen’s health we gave three cheers *and* a “tiger,” the London papers describing it next morning as a supplementary Canadian cheer of special vigour and heartiness. After that the “tiger” was trotted out on all occasions. (196)

Upon the “tiger” being associated with Canadianness, the men proudly repeat it. As Hart-McHarg explains, the Canadians in South Africa reveal an anti-militarism because of their efforts to distinguish themselves from the British military. Charlie Tweddell’s diary of Sunday, 5 August 1900 distinguishes the Canadians from the British after he witnessed the way the Tommies threw banana peels and dirt at people near the ship: “I’m ashamed to call myself an Englishman for the way these Tommies deal & treat people is disgusting” (193). Tweddell relays his disgust at the English soldiers’ behaviour in order to distinguish the Canadians as ethically superior to the English.

#### 4.8 “Dissolv[ing] into myth”: Revising the Past

Bridgette Brown analyzes the exhibit in Ottawa’s Bytowne Museum curated to commemorate the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the South African War, noting that “contemporary recollection still celebrates soldier heroes and nursing contingents to position the event as precedent setting in terms of achieving national distinction, while overlooking Canada’s more hostile participation in devastating farm burnings and

assimilation efforts” (298). Similarly, Ellis’s *Keeley’s Big Story* and Kent’s *Stones for My Father* position Canadians outside of the war’s controversies, thereby depicting Canadians as ethically exceptional, and as morally superior to the British regulars. In *Keeley’s Big Story*, Keeley is a nine-year-old girl living in the Crowsnest Pass in Frank, Alberta and the book is set during the South African War. Ellis interrogates the logic of imperialism in the book, for seeing the Empire Day banners, which read “Sons of Canada, Sons of England, Sons of Scotland,” Keeley asks her friend Patricia, ““what are we? [...] Are we Canadian or are we British?”” (35). In the book, one of the townspeople makes a speech to encourage donations during the South African War: ““Those of us who cannot fight on the front line of the British Campaign in Africa can show our support for the Empire by giving money to the Fund for Disabled Soldiers, the Soldiers of the Queen Relief Fund, or the Absent-Minded Beggars Fund”” (Ellis 36). While Keeley observes the soldiers, Ellis strips away the glory of war in her portrait of disabled veterans. She describes how Keeley thought “[i]t was fun to cheer and make noise with the rest of the crowd as a row of men in military uniform got up on the platform. One had a bandage over his left eye. Another was on crutches and had only one leg. Many had shiny medals on their chests. Keeley noticed that these men didn’t cheer” (Ellis 37). Keeley asks a soldier, “[w]here’s your leg?”” and his ironic response “[i]n Africa”” conveys Ellis’s criticism of the effects of the South African War on the male body (38). Chapter Two examined the significance of the traumatic war wound in Robert W. Service’s “The March of the Dead” (1901). To quote Paul Youngquist again, the soldier’s traumatic limb loss is not an “honorific national deformity” (176) that represents the nation’s military strength. Rather, Keely’s question emphasizes the soldier’s loss and the War’s destructive

effects, and the soldier's sardonic response undercuts the notion of martial sacrifice. During a discussion with the editor of the local paper, Keeley asks why Canadians are in South Africa, and he answers, "[b]ecause England told us to be there" (Ellis 44). Ellis undermines the belief in imperialism that inspired many Canadians to fight in South Africa.

Later in the book, Keeley falls in the forest and hurts her ankle, and a young Indigenous girl, Makskii, finds her while looking for herbs (Ellis 84). Makskii leaves and later returns with her father, Walter Two Moons, who picks Keeley up and brings her to his community. Keeley meets her teacher's brother, Fred, who was hiding with Walter Two Moons and his community members because he deserted from the army. Her teacher, Miss Griffin, explains: "My brother was a soldier in that war, but he didn't want to fight. He left his unit without permission, which is a serious crime in the army. He made his way back to Canada on a trading ship" (Ellis 94). In Ellis's book, the main Canadian soldier represents the image of the ideal Canadian soldier as pacifist, for Fred "didn't want to fight." Fred describes his experience at war:

"The fighting was bad enough, but I stood my ground. I did my duty to the King, and to the Queen before him, although exactly why they required me to kill those people, I'll never understand. But then they turned me into a jailer. Boers and black Africans were rounded up and put into separate concentration camps. While my brothers-in-arms burned down farms, I watched Boer women and children die of pneumonia, starvation, and dysentery. But those camps were palaces compared to the camps for black Africans." (95-96)



Ellis makes a commentary on the different standards of the concentration camps for the Boers and those for the Black South Africans. In this passage, Ellis positions Fred as one who observed but did not participate in the farm burnings when she writes that his “brothers-in-arms burned down farms.” Ellis depicts Fred, the Canadian soldier, as morally superior to the British regulars. Fred explains that there was no honour or courage in this military role, so he deserted.

After describing the reasons for his desertion, Fred states, “Now I live with civilized people” (Ellis 96). Here Fred refers to the Indigenous community with whom he resided after leaving the South African War; Fred and Miss Griffin learned their language and integrated in their community. Ellis’s suggestion that the Indigenous community is civilized in contrast to Fred’s “brothers-in-arms” inverts the racist discourses at the time of the War which held that the British were civilized and Indigenous people were not. Keeley struggles with her decision about whether or not to report finding Fred, the deserter: “She had a duty to obey the law and to support the Empire. But what if she didn’t agree with what the Empire was doing? Could a child disagree with a King?” (Ellis 99). Ellis’s rhetorical question from the narrative perspective of a child protagonist infantilizes imperialist logic in order to undermine it. Whereas a pedagogy of imperialism inculcated such values in school-aged children during the end of the nineteenth century, Ellis’s children’s book attempts to revise imperialist logic by questioning the Empire’s actions in South Africa. Fred’s decision to live in an Indigenous community in the woods and Ellis’s anti-imperialist discourse reflect the historical revisionism common during the contemporary moment of Ellis’s writing that witnessed attempts to correct the racist discourses of the nineteenth century, or the historical moment of the South African War.

The book attempts to reflect contemporary Canadian values of tolerance and inclusion because past Canadian values of imperialism and militarism contradict current versions of Canadian ethics.

In *Stones for My Father*, Kent also depicts the main Canadian character, Corporal Byrne, as critical of Canada's role in the war by means of his interrogation of Canadian imperialism: "The smile faded as he returned to work. 'But you're right, we're giving the Tommies a hand out here. King and Country, and all that. Seems a little crazy, now that I think about it. I've never even been to England, you know—and here I am, fighting for the English king'" (44). Kent also portrays Corporal Byrne as external to the scorched earth practice. Corlie describes the policy:

We'd heard the stories of women and children who had been dragged from their houses even as they begged the British for mercy. If they were lucky, they would be given a few minutes to remove any valuables before the entire farm was set alight. *Scorched earth*, the British called it: destroying everything of their enemies—livestock, crops, food stores—so that there was no way they could sustain commandos in the bush. (Kent 24)

Whereas Kent carefully depicts Corlie's fear of her own mother, she depicts the Canadian soldier, Corporal Byrne, as an unquestionably benevolent figure. Watching "the soldier with the black mustache" she "hadn't been frightened" (29). In the novel, Corlie runs back to see if her family's home was unharmed while the rest of the troops move together to find a *laager*, and she watches the men throw all of their possessions onto the fire. Corlie explains, "I continued to watch as a second plume of smoke rose higher and higher into the air until it joined with the first one, smearing the sky with the remains of our

modest home. I felt myself fill with rage—a fury that made my temples pound and my eyes burn—and still I watched” (Kent 33). Kent positions Corporal Byrne outside of the controversial farm-burning policy because he only supervises the fire but does not submit anything to it. As Corlie observes, “[f]rom where I was, it was just possible to make out the shape of the badge on his jacket—it looked like a leaf—and as I tried to muster the courage to scream, I focused on that badge, wondering what it meant” (Kent 34). The failure of the maple leaf’s semiotics does not seem to stop Kent from depicting the symbol as peaceful, for Corlie focuses on the symbol while trying to remain calm. Corporal Byrne does not yell out or draw attention to Corlie’s presence, but quietly looks at her, “and moved his head as if to say, *Go. Go while you can*” (34, emphasis in original). Not only does Corporal Byrne refrain from participating in the farm burning, he also spares Corlie’s life.

Corlie connects the maple leaf iconography to Corporal Byrne’s peacekeeping (or bystander) actions later in the story when Corlie and Gert go to the river to look for food. They see Corporal Byrne and describe how “[h]e wore a wide-brimmed hat that looked a bit like the kind our men favored, different from the English soldiers’ domed helmets” (Kent 42). Corlie responds to Corporal Byrne’s statement that he has a farm: “‘*Engeland,*’ [sic] I said, to show him that I knew. I said the word as if it made a rotten taste in my mouth, just in case he had any doubt as to what I thought of his country” (Kent 44). Corporal Byrne laughed: “‘No, not England,’ he said. ‘Alberta. Canada.’ He pointed to the badge that I had noticed before. ‘See this? It’s a maple leaf. A leaf—’ He pointed into the treetops, I nodded. ‘Canadian Mounted Rifles’” (Kent 44). Corporal

Byrne continues his kindness to the Boer children, giving them one of the haunches of a springbok he killed.

In *Stones for My Father*, a third instance of Kent connecting the maple leaf with Corporal Byrne and Canadian kindness figures by means of the narrative of adoption, which is the most heavy-handed example of Kent's attempt to distinguish Canadians as morally exceptional. After Corlie's brother Gert dies in the concentration camp, her mother is angry, distraught, and tells Corlie she wished her daughter "had never been born" (Kent 127). When Corlie's mother disowns her, Corlie learns that her mother's hatred of her stemmed from the fact that Corlie was a reminder of her mother's relationship with an Englishman who impregnated her and then left her before she married Corlie's non-biological father. After Corlie is forced to survive the night outside of her family's tent in the concentration camp, she sees a British soldier and weakly asks for "Corporal Malachi Byrne." Malachi translates from Hebrew as "my messenger" (*Oxford Reference*), fitting because, in what seems to be a "jumping of the shark," the British soldiers summon Corporal Byrne who visits Corlie for two weeks while she recovers from a wound and then eventually adopts her. She recognizes "the sweep of black hair, the neat moustache, and the leaf-shaped badge" (Kent 149) as Corporal Byrne when he first finds her recovering with the British. He plans to bring her back to Lacombe or Medicine Hat, Alberta, and he

drew [her] pictures of Canada—majestic mountains circled by handsome birds; sparkling lakes and rivers overflowing with fish; forests lurking with bears and strange, antlered horses called moose; buffalo that looked nothing like ours, with lumpish heads and handlebar horns; cabins built out of tree trunks—and I

wondered if he regretted leaving his homeland for the battlefields of Africa. Once, I asked him if Canada was as beautiful as the Transvaal in the spring. Corporal Byrne had laughed, and said that it was a darn sight colder at that time of year. (Kent 153-54).

In order to grapple with the obvious tension that arises when Corlie's former enemy will become her adoptive father, Corlie reflects that "[her] country had been watered by the blood of men from all corners of the globe—English and Dutch, Canadian and Irish, African and Indian," and asks if forgiveness is possible (Kent 165). Kent's answer to the question of Corlie's forgiveness entails historical amnesia when Corlie suggests that it is the nation's future that matters, and history will "dissolve into myth" (165). Corlie's assessment of the war, imperialism in South Africa, and the potential of forgiveness entails a teleological narrative of progress that enables Kent's narrative of national progress and the ethically exceptional Canadian soldier. Corporal Byrne's adoption of Corlie and entrance into fatherhood can be read allegorically as Canada's achievement of full maturation as a result of the South African War. *Stones for My Father* and *Keeley's Big Story* compel critics to consider what is left out of the national narrative when a belief in the just cause is no longer justified. Kent and Ellis demonstrate the Canadian impulse to rewrite rather than remember the nation's history of war. In returning to the South African War, Allinson, Richards, Stenson, Ellis, and Kent suggest that Canada's war remembrance requires revision.

## Conclusion

Given the predominance of interest in the First World War, the thesis began out of curiosity to turn back to the South African War to discover if and how Canadians responded to the earlier conflict. Surprisingly, literary responses to the war abounded: if Canadians were this interested in the war, what are the literature's characteristics and what accounts for the near absence of attention to the responses in the Canadian canon or popular imagination? There are countless poems, several short stories, and at least a dozen novels that mention Canada's role in the South African War, but most Canadians are not familiar with the war's history or the country's literary responses to it. Alden Nowlan's poem "What Colour is Manitoba?" (1977) gestures toward the lost communal history of the South African War. Laura Moss and Cynthia Sugars introduce the poem in their anthology as one that "juxtapose[s] factual records beside the 'truer charts' of personal experience" (352). Nowlan describes his personal knowledge of the War as "secrets I share / with the very old" (95-96). He continues:

...I know why  
 we fought in the Boer War  
 and how in the lumber camps  
 we cracked the lice between  
 our thumbnails and it made  
 a homely sound, was a restful  
 occupation for an evening:  
 cracking lice, we were  
 like women knitting. (96-103)

While Nowlan suggests that men cracking lice mimics the sound of women's knitting needles, he also establishes a masculine community of men at war and in the lumber camps that he compares to women's communal activity (103). Nowlan also implies a generational gap between the speaker's son, "in Grade III or IV" (1), and "the very old" (96), the latter being with whom the speaker shares historical understanding. In contrast to his son, the speaker "know[s] why / we fought in the Boer War" (96-97). The South African War is one example of the shared historical narratives Nowlan describes as "secrets," indicating the degree to which Canada's role in the War has been excluded from the national narrative.

Rather than suggesting that the literature was meaningless or that the war did not move Canadians, the research reveals that the South African War inspired Canadian writers; in fact, writers invoked the same tropes and attributed a similar meaning to the war that Canadian writers would later include in their responses to the First World War. The predominance of Canada's First World War literature and the narrative of Canadian nationhood arising monolithically at Vimy did not result from the absence of national myths hitherto the later war. Chapter One established the context for the dissertation's focus on the South African War by turning to two earlier post-Confederation overseas expeditions in which Canadians participated, including Garibaldi's expedition against Rome, to which a regiment of French-Canadian Papal Zouaves went in support of Pope Pius IX (1868-1870); the Nile Expedition (1884-1885), which saw Canadians attempt to rescue General Gordon from the siege at Khartoum. The literature of the expeditions revealed much about Canada's thirst for a military history that aligned with French and British military successes throughout history. The authors of this literature attested to the

importance and novelty of the early expeditions in fascinating ways, but the literary works did not produce a consistent nationalist narrative, nor were the early post-Confederation overseas expeditions prominent in the Canadian consciousness beyond the immediate years of Canada's participation. However, in addition to demonstrating the degree to which Canadian writers linked the new nation with ancient empires, the literary responses examined in Chapter One reveal that both expeditions saw Canadian writers attest to the importance of Canadian participation with the development of a national identity.

It is all too easy to assume that Canadian South African War poetry deals myopically with themes of Empire, but Chapter Two revealed the variety of topics and tropes that enabled Canadians to express their active engagement with the War. Writers engaged in “call and answer” poetics with the metropole, but they also explored Canada's investment in the South African War, its distinctiveness in the Empire, and its evolving identity. To consider the volume and variety of South African War poetry that now has little currency reveals the predominance of the First World War in Canadian cultural memory. The ease with which the First World War overshadows Canada's South African War memory demonstrates the terrifying malleability of national memory. Although the repetition of some of the tropes and themes of South African War poetry in Canadian poems that responded to the First World War reveals the potential for the latter war's memory to be undone, reading Canada's South African War poetry demonstrates the palimpsestic nature of the nation's war writing—acts of erasure and rewriting—that confirm the permanence of Canada's origins myth at Vimy.



In Chapter Three, Canada's responses to the Battle of Paardeberg demonstrate with greater specificity the degree to which Canadian identity is linked to international military participation. Writing Canadian identity as ontologically militaristic occurred prior to Vimy Ridge; immediate battlefield inscriptions attempted to identify Canada's distinguished role at the battle and to establish Canadian commemorative practices. Naming and nationalizing graves as Canadian contrasted with the English war grave practices. Isolating Canadian responses to the Battle of Paardeberg reveals the same themes and tropes that would appear in the First World War. Although the Vimy myth could not accommodate an earlier narrative of Canada's "baptism of fire," unearthing Canada's commemoration of the Battle of Paardeberg demonstrates the myth's prior iteration in Canadian literary responses.

Chapter Four explored why contemporary Canadian novelists turned back to the South African War when novels on the First World War had predominated in the category of Canadian war novels from the late 1970s. Of course, what Robert Wiersema refers to as "premise fatigue"—the "sinking sensation" that results from reading "another book about the Great War from a serviceman's perspective" ("Four Cures")—may have resulted in a fictional turn back to the South African War. Sydney Allinson's *Kruger's Gold: A Novel of the Anglo-Boer War* (2001) and David Richards's *The Plough's Share* (2004) reflect less experimental literary techniques than much contemporary fiction and demonstrate an interest in Canada's British connection. These mutual concerns reflect a close connection between trends in historical scholarship and historical fiction. The novels demonstrate a link between the conservative historical content and narrative conservatism in terms of their historiographic method. Even Fred Stenson's *The Great*

*Karoo* (2008)—which indicates an interest in challenging Canada’s national narrative and exposing racial injustice during the war—relies on traditional historical realism to accomplish its goals. The chapter introduced the term “retrospective realism” to explain Stenson’s careful authentication of the fictive account that came before the novel’s postmodernist conclusion. Stenson’s experimentation does not undermine historical fiction but validates it; by means of his reliance on traditional historical realism, Stenson legitimizes the role of Indigenous soldiers in the South African War. The chapter observed that Stenson’s project of historical inclusion does have limits, for reproducing colonialist discourses from the contemporaneous historical period can reinscribe their accompanying offences in the contemporary moment.

In addition to relaying the experiences of Indigenous soldiers, Stenson also provides a critique of war by drawing attention to the less appealing realities of Canada’s participation in the South African War such as “the elements most hated by soldiers: marching, boredom, digging in the ground” (Stenson 435). Stenson’s expansive novel enables him to dwell on the cost of war, noting that it “was a kind of arithmetic that worked only by subtraction. Even in the moments of glory and achievement, there was always less than there had been before. Horses that had been alive were dead or ruined. Men who had been perfect in their young bodies were gone or reduced in some lasting way” (428).<sup>57</sup> Stenson’s astute observations about the costs of the South African War are relevant beyond the context of that war in their expression of war’s impact on both

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<sup>57</sup> Stenson’s comment about negation and having less than before echoes Griesbach’s reflections on the South African War in his memoir: “If I learned anything in the South African War it consisted practically of negative facts, such as how not to do things” (281).

human and nonhuman lives. In its conclusion, Chapter Four turned to the Young Adult novels *Keeley's Big Story* and *Stones for My Father* to explore the curious revisionism of the narratives that see Canadian soldiers in the South African War as morally superior to their British counterparts.

Canadian literary scholarship would benefit from further study that is necessary to continue to unearth the many poems in newspapers and archives. An edited collection of South African War poetry (taking Borthwick's anthology as a starting point) would be welcome to any student or scholar of Canadian literature. Additional searches for plays and songs reveal that there are more cultural works to unpack. Exploring the experiences of nurses and other medical professionals, Canadian teachers who travelled to South Africa, and soldiers in war letters and memoirs—especially from the interwar years (between the First and Second World Wars)—would yield a greater understanding of the variety of responses to the war and how it evolved over time. Furthermore, such accounts invite the consideration of the South African War memoir as autofiction.

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