Returning to Vimy Ridge: Canada's Narrative of Battle and Remembrance

by

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Abstract

The approach of the centennial of World War I (1914-1918) has marked an increase in domestic and international interest in war narratives. In Canada, this can be most clearly seen in the institutional focus on remembering Canada's first major military victory in that war, the Battle of Vimy Ridge. This study begins with the question of why the grand narrative of Vimy Ridge continues to persist in the national consciousness, especially as it relates to identity construction and commemorative practice. And why do Canadian artists, educators, historians and war veterans continue to return to Vimy? Through my examination of three texts that represent three different genres in Canadian literature, Pierre Berton's popular history book, *Vimy*, Jane Urquhart's novel *The Stone Carvers*, and Vern Thiessen's play, *Vimy*, I endeavour to make conclusions about the role of contemporary artists in challenging and disrupting traditional representations of the Vimy narrative. In particular, this study explores how these authors (especially Urquhart and Thiessen) are engaged in an imaginative retelling or revision of the meta-narrative or "myth" of Vimy. I employ Jonathan Vance's use of the term "myth" to capture the imaginative and epic elements of the Vimy story. At the same time, I examine specific ways in which Thiessen and Urquhart interrogate traditional representations of soldiers and the home front through their depictions of gender, ethnicity, religion and art. These two writers are exploring alternative narratives, or in the words of Herb Wyile, "speculative fictions" that unfold in the inventive blend of history and fiction. My field work at the site of Vimy Memorial Park near Arras, France, and at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ontario, also has as its focus the commemorative role of Vimy in national narratives about WWI. At these two sites, I found evidence of the institutional mandate to remember juxtaposed with the material evidence of
social and cultural suffering and healing. My conclusions argue that the Vimy narrative continues to play an important role in the Canadian social ethos, but contemporary approaches to the narrative provide critical interventions to the representation of war in Canada.
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Dedication

In memory of my dear friend, Barbara Pell (1945-2009), whose passion for Canadian literature inspired me to follow my dream.

To my loving partner and enthusiastic companion in life's journey,

Paul Wyatt Lermitte,

and to my darling family:

Ryan, Tracy, Patrick, Jeremy
Introduction

As the centennial of WWI approaches, domestic and international interest in remembering the Great War has increased. A few examples of this are increased public attendance at Remembrance Day services, exhibitions of war art such as Canvas of War in 2000, and the development of numerous films and television documentaries that feature WWI events. At the institutional level, as well as the private, WWI narratives have become commonplace. In Canada, the Battle of Vimy Ridge has been a central, foundational WWI story that continues to undergird national identity construction and commemorative practice. My research begins with the question of why this narrative persists. Why do Canadian artists, educators, historians and war veterans continue to return to the site of Vimy, both figuratively and physically? I am also intrigued by the apparent contradiction between cultural analysis that argues that the Canadian public is ignorant or apathetic about the iconic story of Vimy Ridge, and the institutional and educational insistence on the relevance of the narrative to contemporary culture. If interest in the Vimy narrative is rising, as my research suggests, then it may be traced to greater acceptance of contemporary revisions of historical narratives, and to the emergence of novels, plays and poetry that re-imagine historical events in order to elicit new viewpoints or to encourage further understanding of those who were ignored or silenced by the historical record.

The focus of my thesis, therefore, is to examine in an interdisciplinary manner, the contemporary return of military historians, artists, film makers, writers, war veterans and politicians to the place that is most often described as the site of Canada’s emergence as an independent nation. I begin with an examination of how the Vimy myth was constructed in historical narratives written immediately after the war by military personnel who were witnesses
to the event. I have provided historical background to the battle itself, as well as a survey of the work that is currently being done in Canada to support and reiterate the story of Vimy as an iconic event that, according to many scholars, continues to be culturally and socially important to all Canadians. The recently restored Vimy Memorial near Arras, France, is central to this discussion because it is used as a cultural symbol for remembrance, commemoration and national identity.

Two key terms found in my work need to be defined. The first is "traditional," a word that is problematic because it is burdened by social and cultural assumptions. I will use the term to describe those narratives that are primarily masculinist in tone, subject and content, and that were written by men about the military and historical landscapes featured in post-war narratives. They are also politically "conservative" (another problematic term), nationalistic and sometimes, propagandistic. Nevertheless, they also represent the particular social and cultural ethos of Canada in the early 1900s.

The second term is "myth". I am employing this term in the manner of Jonathan Vance, who uses the word so productively in Death So Noble, to describe a real event that has developed idealized or epic proportions. He writes that "the word seems to capture the combination of invention, truth, and half-truth that characterizes Canada's memory of war" (8). Although Vance's use of the term may suggest a certain scepticism about the validity of war narratives, I would like to borrow it to emphasize the "invention, truth, and half-truth" that is an important aspect of the postmodern turn in historical fiction. I consider the work of contemporary writers and artists to be an imaginative response to earlier historical narratives that elide the viewpoints and stories of various "others" (including gender, minorities and immigrants). They are
responding to the constructed nature of the historical narratives and are interested in imagining the possible truths that lie *behind* the "facts" of the story. They are also exploring alternative narratives, or in the words of Herb Wyile, "speculative fictions" that plausibly unfold in the inventive blend of history and fiction. For this reason, I have chosen to discuss three important contemporary texts that contribute to a current understanding of the ethos of Vimy: Pierre Berton's *Vimy*, Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* and Vern Thiessen's play *Vimy*. I am specifically interested in the ways that these three writers have challenged, critiqued and subverted the form and content of traditional war narratives.

In my thesis I also describe my field work, which included a trip to the Vimy Memorial in October, 2008 and two trips to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa in 2008 and 2009. In these two locations, I examined the contribution these sites make to the Vimy narrative in Canada, and their roles in the construction of Canadian identity and nationalism. I also considered their contributions to the role of art in this country, especially as they relate to memorialisation practices, sites of mourning, and depictions of war. My discussion has become my own testimony to the work of the Vimy narrative in my understanding of war and Canadian identity. My photographs and description of what I have experienced have become yet another Vimy narrative, and a contribution to Canada's cultural ethos.

The pervasiveness of the Vimy narrative in Canadian representations of national identity, institutional mandates of remembrance and commemoration, and the role of artistic representation in the public sphere is worthy of examination and discussion because it has been, and remains, a foundational myth in our national history.
Chapter 1:
National Myth Construction and the Return to Vimy Ridge

Canadians could grumble that Ypres, the Somme and Passchendaele were bungled by the British. But Vimy! That was Canada's, and nobody could take that victory away. In the years between the two World Wars, every schoolchild, every veteran's son, every immigrant was made aware of it.

— Pierre Berton, *Vimy*

It has been argued aggressively by noted historians and average Canadians alike that Vimy Ridge was the symbolic birth of Canada as a nation. However, in a poll conducted by *The Globe and Mail* in 2002, only 36 per cent of Canadians could name Vimy Ridge as the most significant Canadian victory of the Great War.

— Vern Thiessen, *Vimy*

As Berton and Thiessen demonstrate, the public memory of Vimy Ridge has significantly fluctuated in last fifty years. This fluctuation may be related to a number of complex social and cultural realities, but one obvious conclusion is that the passing of time inevitably changes society's view of what is important. What has happened in Canada since the end of WWII to bring about the change captured by these two observations in the public's awareness or knowledge of this significant event in Canadian history? Has the Canadian public decided that understanding key facts related to WWI is no longer important? Perhaps research on artistic
representations of Vimy Ridge is irrelevant in Canada in 2010. Why not focus instead, as Canadian war artist Althea Thauberger does, on Afghanistan, the most significant theatre of war for Canadian troops in this century? Why is it necessary to return to a particular battle that many Canadians barely recall? One reason might be that the Battle of Vimy Ridge is a historic event that developed iconic status immediately following the victory—a status that has continued to be remembered, analyzed and employed as a symbol of Canadian identity and national development for almost a century. The following passage from Canvas of War offers a fairly typical summary of the significance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, both internationally and on the home front:

The success [of the battle], hailed in Europe and at home as a brilliant military achievement, also marked an important phase in the evolution of the country. Historian Pierre Berton and many others have said that modern Canada, as a proud, independent, confident nation-state, was born on Vimy Ridge because there, for the first time in the war, all four of Canada's field divisions, including men from coast to coast, fought side by side to win the day. "I have always felt that Canadian nationality was born on the top of Vimy Ridge," remembered E.W. Russenholt, who was promoted to the rank of lieutenant in the 44th Battalion just before the battle. "There was a feeling that we had mastered this job and that we were the finest troops on earth. This is where Canadian nationality first came together when all of us were fused or welded, if you like, into a unity. (Oliver and Brandon, 29).

These observations are similar to many other assessments that appeared in newspapers, soldiers’ memoirs and Armistice Day services across Canada during the war and in the early post-war years. Their common feature is that they describe the way in which Vimy Ridge
became an iconic site that symbolized Canada’s increasingly visible presence during WWI, not only as an English colony but as a nation in its own right. Combined with the phrase, “Canada comes of age” and the metaphor of Canada as a young nation emerging into independence, historians support and reinforce the widely-held belief that Canada’s role in WWI, especially the victory at Vimy Ridge, is synonymous with the development of the nation. The National Vimy Memorial, which was constructed between 1925 and 1936 at the site of the battle, near Arras, France, is closely related to the symbolism associated with the battle site. After the memorial was restored and then rededicated in April 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper returned in his rededication speech to the ‘coming of age’ metaphor and emphasized that "everyone immediately understood the enormity of the victory" (Vimy Ridge 90). Harper’s allusion to the importance of the victory in relation to the development of the nation represents an ongoing rhetorical return to Vimy as a signifier of Canadian identity.

I am interested in why this signifier continues to be used and repeated by generations of Canadians in all walks of life. Specifically, I am interested in examining who returns to Vimy and why. Artistic representations of war, including art, theatre, sculpture, poetry and literature, have increased in Canada since the 1990s, a trend that suggests a cultural preoccupation with war. I think this representation is also related to the way that both private and public life in Canada has been shaped in the twentieth century by an understanding and acceptance that the two world wars forever changed Canada and its people, as well as their relationship to England (as the colonial mother), Europe, Asia and the rest of the world. As such, the Vimy story has become a form of Canadian myth that is worthy of attention. Although there is evidence, which Canadian playwright Vern Thiessen refers to in my second opening epigraph, that many Canadians no longer name the Battle of Vimy Ridge as a foundational national story, the recent
work of artists, novelists, historians and institutions suggests that there is a contemporary return to the myth of Vimy as a key narrative in the framework of WWI and as a relevant signifier of Canadian identity. In this context, I will examine the work of three Canadian writers who have engaged with the Vimy story in the last thirty years: Pierre Berton, Jane Urquhart and Vern Thiessen. Although the myth of Vimy Ridge began as an important metaphor to describe the development of the Canadian nation, Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* (2007), Thiessen's play, *Vimy* (2008), and, to a lesser degree, Berton's *Vimy* (1986), subvert more traditional (patriotic, anglocentric, masculinist) views through their focus on alternative depictions of Canadians in terms of gender, religion and ethnicity, and through their creative exploration of the imaginative gaps highlighted by artistic representations. Although other contemporary works, such as Joseph Boyden’s award winning novel *Three Day Road* (2005) in which First Nations snipers are the troubled "heroes," and Jack Hodgin's *Broken Ground* (1999) in which a former teacher and military officer is haunted by his role in the execution of a former student and fellow soldier, also challenge traditional views of WWI, I have chosen the works of Berton, Urquhart, and Thiessen because of their specific focus on the Vimy narrative.¹

**Vimy as Myth: Canadian Discursive Formations**

Basically since the battle began on April 9, 1917, journalists, Canadian military historians, government officials, political institutions, veterans' groups and community organizations, as well as writers, artists and film-makers, have returned, and continue to return to Vimy Ridge and the national myth of victory in one of the harshest arenas in modern times. I use the word "myth" here to suggest not an invented story about an imagined event, but rather a real event that developed idealized or epic proportions in the early post-war years.² Jonathan Vance, in *Death So Noble,* uses the word "myth" very productively to set forth his social and cultural analysis of
the public response of Canadians to WWI. According to Vance, he chose the term “because the word seems to capture the combination of invention, truth, and half-truth that characterizes Canada’s memory of the war” (8). These words, “invention, truth, and half-truth” speak to me of the work of artists who respond to or write about war narratives. Artists, in contrast to historians, are interested in imaginatively engaging with the gaps that the historical record leaves open and, as such, provide a place for speculation about potential truths and possible stories. I am intrigued by how and why Canadian artists, writers and playwrights return to the story and site of Vimy Ridge in their work.

Vern Thiessen's play *Vimy* suggests one possible motivation for the artist's return to Vimy. When the character Clare asks her lover Laurie to tell her about "this here place we are currently lying on," he begins by offering her factual information about it (30). But she stops him mid-sentence and chides: "I want to hear the story of this place, not how tall it is."

**Laurie:** The story of it.

**Clare:** What’s in its heart. What does it remember. (Act 1, 30)

Remembering is central to social and cultural reasons for artists to return to the site of Vimy: they desire to understand the heart of its story. If we consider the heart as a metaphor of containment, of the careful protection of those things that are valued and held most dear, we might be led to consider the story of Vimy as one that captures the heart or the most important values of Canadians. The heart of the story of Vimy is closely related to the experiences of the soldiers: sacrifice in pursuit of freedom, endurance of hardships, innovation in the face of necessity, and victory achieved in the challenge to expected failure. Although twenty-first century sensibilities might suggest that new or different values are important, such notions as
freedom, truth, respect, knowledge and peace continue to stand as enduring values on which nations are formed, established and maintained. The large sculptures at the top of the Vimy Memorial pylons represent some of these values. Thus Walter Allward's memorial provides a place of mourning for grieving Canadians while it reminds them of their most closely guarded values.

The memorial function of the monument suggests another important reason why artists and writers continue to return to Vimy. I believe they find, in the complex discourse of national identity, cultural values and social constructs, a site that represents the Canadian public, but at the same time represents the private mourning of citizens and their understanding of those values that are, perhaps, bigger than oneself. The works of Berton, Urquhart and Thiessen continue to be significant because they raise questions about our nation—about who we are as Canadians, about what we believe in, about what we hold most dear. Their works ask us to imagine, to construct, and to examine the past for clues as to who we are now, and perhaps more importantly, who we might become.

Various cultural theorists have emphasized that historical narratives can be difficult to critique because they are dominated by structurally determinative ways of thinking. One such theorist is Michel Foucault, whose theory of discursive formations has been used to examine and critique conventional (and powerful) historical narratives which influence and shape historical, cultural and political discourse. Similarly, Linda Hutcheon refers to the work of Foucault in her discussion of "historiographic metafiction" in Canadian literature; she alludes to the challenges that postmodern approaches to historical events present, through parody and intertextuality (1). Sherrill Grace also approaches her discussion of Canadian depictions of the North through the
theoretical frameworks of Foucault, Bakhtin and several others, because she argues that these theorists agree that "texts of all kinds, discourse of all kinds, are representations and that representations have power" (xiii). Not only that, they are representations that are "based on a plurality of ideas" and are constantly "in flux" (xiii). As a result, the representations resist a fixed or static identity. Likewise, Canadian identity based on a particular narrative (in this case Vimy) requires scrutiny because of the changing nature of our social and cultural ethos. Therefore, these various approaches that I have mentioned remind us, as readers and critics, that historical meta-narratives need to be challenged, and one way to do that is through the work of artists and fiction writers. Literature, theatre and visual art (film, poetry and music as well, but I limit my discussion mainly to the first three) create a gap within which to explore, subvert, challenge and disrupt conventional "truth". Of course, these cultural and theoretical approaches are very useful in broader discussions of contemporary Canadian literature, but in my thesis I have chosen to adopt Vance’s use of the term “myth” to describe the Vimy narrative because it implies the epic proportion of the story as it relates to Canadian identity and nationalism, in the context of artistic representations of war. "Myth" is also productive because it refers to the imaginative element of artistic work as well as the subjective aspect of the truth that is presented through art. Works like Vimy and The Stone Carvers create a vision of possibilities—of how history might have unfolded, of possible outcomes and potential truths. But the most important work they do is to create dialogues, as Herb Wyile argues in Speaking in the Past Tense, between historical narratives and current understanding of those events and stories. He states that his primary concern in Speculative Fictions and Speaking in the Past Tense is with “contemporary writers whose work in some ways engages in a dialogue with the public historical record and identifiable historical figures but has also started to push the boundaries of that definition and of
the definition of history” (*Speaking in the Past Tense*, 4). Furthermore, this “dialogue is particularly important in the case of those whom the historical record has tended to exclude—women, the working class, and racial(ized) minorities…” (*Speaking in the Past Tense*, 4).

Similarly, Margaret Atwood argues that it is often the things that are left out of a historical document that make the fictional account interesting—that place where the imagination can “fill in the gaps” (35). Urquhart, in her interview with Wyile, agrees, stating that “the facts are points of embarkation for me rather than a final destination” (*Speaking in the Past Tense*, 82). If we acknowledge that myths such as the Vimy narrative are constructed from a collection of facts, speculations, eye witness accounts and forays into imagination, much as Urquhart does in *The Stone Carvers*, we can begin to understand the ways that these stories affect national narratives.

Acknowledging the presence of this dialogue about the Canadian myth of WWI is important to understanding the work that texts such as *The Stone Carvers* accomplish. Although some readers have criticized the romantic elements of the novel, we cannot dismiss its role in illuminating key historical Canadian events. Urquhart has recreated a vision of the Canadian home front in the early 1900s and she has successfully created a memorial to Allward. Likewise, Thiessen has successfully created an imaginative re-enactment of a key Canadian victory in WWI. Significantly, both writers acknowledge their debt to Pierre Berton, whose popular historical account of Vimy also includes some nostalgic, myth-like qualities in its celebration of the heroic actions of Canadian soldiers. But, unlike Berton who closes his book with a broad question about the importance of Vimy in Canada's journey to independence, and with his conclusion that all the death and loss that resulted was not worth the sacrifice, Thiessen refuses to engage in an evaluation of war and Urquhart keeps her focus firmly on life on the home front. Perhaps their reluctance to engage with Berton’s question is related to their distance from the
war itself. Unlike the autobiographical accounts written soon after the war by men who were
witnesses to the horrors of mass slaughter and carnage, Thiessen and Urquhart, as storytellers
rather than witnesses of the events, avoid making judgments about the war. Instead, they
contribute to the dialogue that surrounds the aftermath of WWI and the ensuing myth that
shadows the twentieth century. This dialogue continues to provide relevant questions that probe
the assumptions with which many Canadians have been raised. As artists working in the public
forum, Thiessen and Urquhart provide meaningful contributions to the critique of representations
of war as they participate in the ongoing conversation about war and the myth of nation-building
in this country in the current century. I think it is an important, even essential, role for artists as
Canada engages in war in Afghanistan and moves beyond its role as a peace-keeping nation.

A Brief Summary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and Construction of the Vimy Memorial

The Battle of Vimy Ridge took place as part of the larger Arras Offensive (or Battle of Arras)
that was initiated by Britain and France in 1917. The Ridge, a German stronghold for much of
the war, was considered a primary offensive objective for the Allied forces. Thousands of British
and French soldiers were killed in the Allied attempt to take the Ridge from German troops.
Complex labyrinths of underground tunnels and lines of above-ground trenches were built by
both sides. Because Canadian battalions had success in other battles against seemingly
impossible odds, Lieutenant-General Julian Byng sent Canadian troops to Vimy, under the
command of Major-General Arthur Currie, to attempt to break the stalemate and recover the
Ridge. After months of preparation that included the development of the trench raid, the use of
maps and air reconnaissance photography, a new emphasis on the responsibility of each soldier
to know and understand the battle plan, as well as the development of new artillery practices, the
Canadian divisions began a week-long heavy artillery barrage on the German line (called "The Week of Suffering" by the Germans), and garnered victory when all four Canadian battalions worked together to take the Ridge on April 9, 1917. The cost in lives was staggering on both sides and though the battle was won, the war was not over. The Canadian Corps became an important contributor to subsequent battles and ultimately emerged at the end of the war with a reputation as an elite fighting force. Thus, Canada’s identity as a young but powerful nation was established.

Following up on this international reputation, the Canadian government held a contest in the early 1920’s that invited artists to submit ideas for the erection of a number of war memorials in Europe at important battle sites. Canadian architect and sculptor, Walter Allward, submitted a design for an imposing modernist memorial. His design was ultimately chosen to be constructed on Vimy Ridge, in a position that would dominate the site. As a sign of France’s recognition of, and appreciation for, Canada’s contribution to WWI, a two hundred and fifty acre parcel of land was gifted by France to Canada’s use “forever.” The Canadian government’s decision to build the largest war memorial in Europe on this site underlines their awareness of, and intention to make use of, the story of Vimy, both as a national narrative and, perhaps more strategically, as a tool for propaganda. Although the memorial with its soaring white pylons and classical lines dominates the surrounding park, Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister during the construction of the memorial, chose to emphasize the importance of the landscape as a kind of sacrificial altar:

Whilst sculpture may do a great deal to commemorate the sacrifices of our men, Vimy itself is one of the world's great altars, on which a perceptible portion of our manhood has
been sacrificed in the cause of the world's freedom. As a national memorial nothing can equal the preservation of the ridge itself. (Borstad, 34)

Consequently, in the years following WWI, Vimy Ridge and the Vimy Memorial became synonymous with an image of Canada as an independent, heroic, innovative nation, in mourning for its "glorious" dead.

When the Vimy Memorial was finally unveiled by King Edward VIII on July 26, 1936 after eleven long years of public concern and construction challenges that began with Allward's search for the perfect white stone, government officials from France, Canada and England shared the memorial battle site with Allward and over eight thousand Canadian veterans and their families who had scrimped and saved to make the pilgrimage to Vimy. According to Veterans Affairs Canada, over 100,000 people attended the unveiling: mostly Canadian, French and English veterans and their families, as well as local French school children and teachers from neighbouring Arras and the five communities that donated the land (www.vac-acc.gc.ca).

The memorial site, as Figure 1.1 suggests, is a large park. The monument is surrounded by rolling hillocks that were once battle fields and which still contain the detritus of war, some restored trenches on both the Allied and the German sides of the line, a portion of the underground subway system, which can be visited through a guided tour provided by Canadian university students, an interpretive centre for visitors and two military cemeteries. Thousands of trees, native Canadian species, have been planted on the site and represent the sacrifice of the Canadian soldiers. Of the 750,000 visitors who come to the park each year, the majority is made up of students and teachers from Britain and France who have come as part of a tour or field trip. Only three percent of the visitors are Canadian (Bethune). A trip to Vimy for the average
Canadian requires considerable funding, planning and motivation, which raises the question: why did the Canadian government choose to create its largest war memorial in Europe, rather than in its national capital? Quite simply, because Vimy is a material site that reinforces the myth of Canada's international status in a place that was the seat of international power at the time, Europe.

Figure 1 The Vimy Monument as viewed from the entrance to the park. The grass-covered former battlefields contrast with the white pylons that identify the Vimy Memorial. Photo credit: J. Lermitte

In the post-war years, military and public historians, war veterans, poets, writers, artists, filmmakers, museums and government institutions have continued to look back to the site of Vimy Ridge as a key lieu de mémoire (or material site of memory, to use Pierre Nora's term) and iconic story for Canada. Although the Memorial and the missing soldiers whose names it commemorates have, at some points in history, been reduced to symbols of national pride, returns to Vimy Ridge have increased since the fifty year celebration that coincided with
Canadian Centennial celebrations. In the 1960s, several military historians, including D.E. MacIntyre and Alexander McKee, revisited the Vimy myth and reinforced its important role in Canadian national identity. Perhaps most notable was the publication of Berton's popular account, *Vimy* in 1987 (which I will discuss in more detail), followed by Sandra Gwyn's *Tapestry of War* in 1992. Four significant federal initiatives have taken place in the last fifteen years: the designation of the memorial and its lands as a National Historic Site in 1997, the declaration of Vimy Ridge Day as an annual day of commemoration on April 9, 2003, the opening of the Canadian War Museum at 1 Vimy Place, Ottawa in 2005, and the reconstruction and rededication of the Vimy Memorial from 2005-2007 at a cost of twenty two million dollars. These initiatives, when considered alongside the work of contemporary historians such as J.L. Granatstein, Jonathan Vance, Ted Barris and Tim Cook, suggest a national preoccupation with the site of Vimy.

**Pierre Berton and Popular History**

As a popular historian and journalist, Pierre Berton has been a central figure in the construction of Canadian historical narratives. The recipient of numerous awards, including the Order of Canada and Governor General's Awards for three of his books, and author of dozens of popular non-fiction accounts which outline significant Canadian historical periods and events, Berton has earned an iconic status of his own in Canadian culture. As noted earlier, Berton's text *Vimy* is cited by both Urquhart and Thiessen, and Canadian historian Ted Barris acknowledges Berton's influence on his book, *Victory at Vimy*. "I owe a great debt to Pierre," he writes, "who assembled much more of the human history of Vimy than one book could possibly portray, and to McMaster archivist Carl Spadoni and his colleagues, who helped direct me to the unpublished
resources that Pierre's papers contained" (xiii). These are only a few of the many references to Berton's work that emerge in contemporary books about Vimy and WWI, which underscore the key role he has played in the continuation and critique of the Vimy myth.

Berton's account of the Battle of Vimy Ridge is based on interviews with veterans, archival research, and an extensive bibliography of published materials. Arguably, the personal anecdotal style that Berton employs is part of the book's appeal. Filled with exciting accounts based on the stories of veterans, many of whom were ordinary privates, Vimy elicits an emotional, patriotic response from readers. He writes that "the real heroes were the masses of ordinary soldiers who fought and died in the belief they were making the world a better place, and their inventive leaders who stubbornly refused to follow the old rules of war. The single word Vimy stood for them all...." (295). He evokes the iconic status of Vimy, and thus equates Canadians with sacrificial heroes. Like many of the autobiographical accounts and the more dispassionate (but patriotic) narratives of military historians written in the post-war years, Berton's account is dominated by the male soldiers who marched off to war and he ignores the women and families that were left behind. Even so, his work is recognized as the forerunner of many other popular books devoted to retelling the stories of WWI, including Timothy Cook's Shock Troops, Jack Granatstein's Hell's Kitchen and Barris' Victory at Vimy.

However, when Vimy was first published, military historians such as Robert Craig Brown regarded Berton's use of anecdotes and veteran's stories as problematic because, as Brown writes in his review of the book, "recollections....are tricky material for historians" (628). He adds that Berton's tendency toward "exaggeration" and "selectivity of evidence get in the way" of truthfully conveying what happened. In short, as Brown emphasizes, Berton's account is
more "story" than fact. He concludes that Berton's book is "engaging" but not as "reliable" as it could be (629). Nevertheless, Brown acknowledges Berton's ability to create a myth for "a nation short on myth" (Berton as quoted by Brown, 626). Brown's use of the term "myth", albeit different in intent than Vance's, or mine, indicates his awareness of the important role of the Vimy narrative in national identity formation. Opinions such as Brown's are important to historians, but for the general public who bought and read the book and the veterans who supported Berton's viewpoint, the mythical quality of Vimy was reinforced by both Berton's entertaining style and his final conclusion that Vimy and the proud story of Canadian nationhood were not worth the sacrifice of thousands of good young Canadians, "typical of the very best the country had to offer." (Berton, 206). Ironically, Berton's conclusion serves to intensify the effect of his narrative: if we (Canadians) cannot be proud of the sacrifice of our best and brightest, then how do we live with the consequences of such loss? Politically and institutionally, the solution has been to reinforce the myth and, as I will argue, the return of various institutions to the Vimy story clearly indicates that Canadians (especially in their public life) have a need to extract meaning from our nation's sacrifice.

**National Narratives and Institutional Directives**

A long list of ways in which Canada returns to Vimy Ridge must include, at some level, an acknowledgement of the work of institutions such as the Historica-Dominion Institute, Veteran Affairs Canada, The Royal Canadian Legion and more recently, the Vimy Foundation. A brief summary of the work of these groups reveals only a small portion of the work that currently links Canadian identity to a particular vision of the Great War.
The Historica-Dominion Institute is a national, independent charitable organization that is, according to its extensive website, Historica-Dominion.ca, “dedicated to Canadian history, identity and citizenship.” As such, it offers many programs and educational resources, including The Canadian Encyclopedia, The Memory Project, which provides first person Canadian accounts of WWI and WWII, and The Canadian Battlefields Study Tour, which is designed to “introduce high school teachers to the most important Canadian battlefields and memorials in Belgium and France” and includes a virtual visit to the Vimy Memorial (Historica-Dominion.ca). Thus, their focus is primarily on education at various institutional levels.

Secondly, the work of Veteran Affairs Canada (VAC) overlaps somewhat with Historica-Dominion in their focus on war and remembrance in Canada. Dedicated to the support of veterans from all branches of the Canadian military, VAC is a government funded agency that continues to use the myth of Vimy as a touchstone to remember the sacrifice of Canadian soldiers. As recently as April 9, 2010 (Vimy Ridge Day), this organization cited Vimy as a "representative event" by which to remember the contributions and achievements of all WWI servicemen and women. The "End of an Era Commemorative Ceremonies" focused on the death (February 18, 2010) of the last WWI veteran, John (Jack) Babcock. Commemorative services and ceremonies were planned across Canada on that day, and notably, at the National War Memorial in Ottawa, The National Vimy Memorial site in France and the Canada Memorial in London, England.

Thirdly, the work of the Royal Canadian Legion is marked by a return to Vimy through educational programs. Historian Denise Thomson, in her article, “National Sorrow, National Pride: Commemoration of War in Canada, 1918-1945,” provides an interesting analysis of the
work of the Royal Canadian Legion since 1925. She argues that Canadian veterans continue to see their role as central to Canadian acknowledgement and commemoration of fallen soldiers. The annual poppy campaign and educational supports for public and private schools for Remembrance Day ceremonies are just two of the many services that they provide. Significantly, they employ artistic representations of war as their primary resources for teachers. Their teacher handbook begins with a photo of the Vimy Memorial, which suggests the key role the memorial plays in their remembrance ethos. The handbook also features poetry, short stories, war art and music, alongside the “symbols” of war for Canada: The Memorial Chamber and Books of Remembrance, the National War Memorial, and Vimy Ridge, which includes description of both the battle and the memorial. (RCL Teacher’s Guide, 15).

Finally, the Vimy Foundation also focuses its efforts on educating youth about the Battle of Vimy Ridge and its role in Canada’s history and national development through promotion of Vimy Ridge Day. As a private charity, the Vimy Foundation offers a “prestigious” scholarship to high school students as well as a national essay competition. In April, 2010 the Foundation also launched an annual educational conference for high school students called Vimy Foundation Week which brings together students and teachers from across Canada.

Why mention the work of these organizations in the context of an analysis of the artistic representations of war? I believe that they help us understand the scope of the myth of the Battle of Vimy Ridge in this country, and the way that Canadians are encouraged to think about Canadian identity based on familiar representations of Canadian soldiers as fair, innovative and self-sacrificing citizens. The use of artistic representations of war by these institutions to promote their agendas is also relevant. Familiar poetry such as McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," as
well as music, art, sculpture, and even the red poppy, continue to be employed by institutions as forms that reinforce the myth. Unless we acknowledge the pervasiveness of this return to Vimy Ridge, I don’t think we will truly understand the nature of this representation in our national consciousness.
Chapter 2:
Urquhart, Allward and the Artistic Return to Vimy Ridge

Jane Urquhart begins and ends her novel, *The Stone Carvers*, with the image of the Vimy Memorial and the man who created it, Walter Allward. In an interview with Herb Wyile, Urquhart describes the way she often begins to write a novel with the life of an important, but little known, Canadian as a starting point (*Speaking in the Past Tense*, 97). In this case, the work of Walter Allward was her inspiration. Although Urquhart's story of Allward and the construction of the Vimy Memorial is historically grounded, she writes in the novel's acknowledgements that "Allward is a character in this book and, as so, is used in the text in a purely fictitious manner" (391). She reveals that she is less concerned with truth or historical accuracy than with telling a story that explores possible truths or speculative notions of what life in Canada in the years surrounding WWI may have been like. In an interview with Laura Ferri, Urquhart describes how she began her story with a desire to create a written memorial to Allward, but found that as she began to write, his character was no longer the major focus of the story. Instead, he became, quite simply, one of several carvers whose stories are told in the narrative (Ferri, 20). Two things strike me as relevant: the lives of ordinary Canadians like Klara and Tilman Becker, and Giorgio Vigamonti, are as interesting to writers and readers as their famous counterparts and, secondly, artists are often more interested in the gaps or unknowns in historical narratives than in "telling the truth." Instead, they seek to create a dialogue between the reader and writer that engages with those unknowns. Although *The Stone Carvers* is grounded in the historical Vimy narrative and includes some familiar historical WWI details, Urquhart reinvents the story by exploring historical gaps through her experimentations with constructions...
of myth as represented by various characters (Allward, Klara, and Tilman), settings (Shoneval and Vimy) and generic elements (fairy tale, myth and romance), and through her treatment of the home front and the post-war construction site of the Vimy Memorial, as well as her subversion of prescribed or stereotyped gender roles (both masculine and feminine).

Unlike the narratives written immediately after the war that were primarily autobiographical, phallocentric, and based on "facts" as experienced by soldiers themselves as eyewitnesses to the horrors of war, Urquhart's story begins with an acknowledgement of the constructed nature of a local history, of life on the home front, as seen by women. The omniscient (or heterodiegetic, to use Gérard Genette's term) narrator notes that the history of the town of Shoneval is based on "a true if slightly embellished story," a "legend," or a "tale" that inspires Klara Becker and the local nuns through the story's connection to their local history, their work in the community, and the "great church" that has cast its shadow on their ancestors and the town (5). "The nuns and the one spinster clung to the story," the narrator says, "as if by telling the tale they became witnesses, perhaps even participants in the awkward fabrication of matter, the difficult architecture of a new world" (6). This allusion to witnessing the construction of history, the building (and decline) of a community and the creation of something new out of something wild and untamed, also represents the development of the new country of Canada through the colonization process and the arrival of immigrants who began to develop towns, farms and cities across the nation. In a similar way, it alludes to the social, economic and political rebuilding that must occur after the war when the traumatized soldiers return home to begin life in Canada again, minus limbs, money and emotional health. Gordon Bölling concurs, and argues that
*The Stone Carvers*, although staking out a claim to historical reality, does not aspire to the status of factual representation of Canadian history in the nineteenth century. Instead of accurately reproducing the past, Jane Urquhart’s historical novel is primarily concerned with the collective memory of Shoneval’s history. (298)

Although Bölling’s analysis is far more comprehensive than this short quotation indicates, his emphasis on memory is worth noting. *The Stone Carvers* is not only a collection of memories about the development of Shoneval; it also memorializes the lives of Canadian immigrants (German, Irish and Italian) and depicts the construction of collective memory through their work on the Vimy Memorial. Urquhart uses this metaphor of construction in her depiction of the building of the Vimy Memorial near Arras, France. We become witnesses to the fabrication of history because we see through the eyes of four Canadian carvers: Klara, Tilman, Giorgio and of course, Allward. The immense project, which takes place on land that has been torn apart, devastated by shelling, bombing and death on a scale unheard of, provides a backdrop for a remarkable process of healing and restoration that Urquhart cloaks in the language of memory, rather than facts. Urquhart's use of poetic language is consistent with the new feminine point of view that she is presenting, as well as with the generic style that she has chosen. Legend or oral history, forms that Urquhart is interested in, are often lyrical in style. The authoritative, masculine language of military historians is the rhetoric that Urquhart is most interested in challenging.

Urquhart’s “construction” of history and her desire to subvert the form of writing that was privileged after the war, namely autobiographical narratives by male soldiers who had first-hand experience on the battle field, depends on fantastic elements and imaginative descriptions
of events. These home front stories are the foundation of some of the "myths" Urquhart creates as a parallel to the "myth" of Canadian nation-building found in historical narratives. Rigelhof, in his article “Stone Dazzling,” compares Urquhart's approach to Homer. He writes that Urquhart, like Homer, “interweaves historical events, legends, folk tales, visions, anecdotes, longings and journeys into a constantly surprising but wholly convincing, complicated and unified exploration of history, perception, memory and transformation” (54). While Rigelhof celebrates Urquhart's use of various generic elements to create a new kind of war story, he doesn't make mention of Urquhart's challenge to gender norms. As a war story, the Homeric epic is dominated by a male hero whose wife must wait at home for his victorious return. Urquhart's novel, however, is dominated by a heroine who lives an independent life. Urquhart is actually challenging the conservative male-dominated war narratives that Homer represents. Nevertheless, Rigelhof does suggest that history is constructed in the gaps explored by the artist (in this case, Urquhart), which is consistent with my contention that a mythic national story such as the Vimy narrative is part truth and part invention. If, as Rigelhof states, Urquhart's version of history is “wholly convincing” (54), then how much more so is a cultural rhetoric that has been an integral part of the national discourse for decades? Urquhart’s exploration of historical unknowns can be seen throughout The Stone Carvers, but it is particularly interesting in her discussion of Klara’s life as a spinster and entrepreneur in her community. Klara’s ability to live on the margins of her community, without having to assume traditional female roles of wife and mother, allows her to explore non-traditional feminine occupations, such as farming, tailoring and carving. Although I will discuss this idea in more detail later, I believe it is an important aspect of Klara’s role as a local historian. Like the nuns who are also able to escape traditional
domestic gender roles and responsibilities, Klara moves within her community with a freedom that was not available to most women at that time.

Oral History and the Construction of Narrative in The Stone Carvers

In the structure of the first section of the book, "The Needle and the Chisel," Klara provides an embedded narrative framework as she tells her story of the community and her extended family. The slipperiness of historical narrative becomes evident early in the novel because we realize that the narrator is telling us Klara's version of an oral history or legend that has been handed down to her by her father (Dieter) and grandfather (Joseph Becker), and includes the stories of both men and their families. The fantastic elements of these legends include the story of Father Gstim, a Bavarian clergyman who is "startled by an announcement from God Himself" to "Go to Canada" because there is work for him to do there, and the story of the vagabond life of Klara's brother, Tilman (7). The novel's heterodiegetic narrator tells the story of Gstim's vision for the development of the village of Shoneval and his recruitment of the Becker family to support his plan for a local church and brewery. This narrator intrudes into the story by way of a parenthetical reference:

(The spinster always experienced a slight thrill of recognition at this point in the story, for the handsome young woman who agreed to embroider Father Gstim's spare vestment, and who promised to contact her old employer about the donation of heavy red cloth, was her grandmother. "It was a Corpus Christi procession in the backwoods," Joseph Becker would tell his granddaughter, "that brought together the chisel and the needle.")

(24)
Clearly, the narrator is telling us Klara's version of events, which are based on a "story" told to her by her grandfather. But as readers, we might ask if Becker's version of the story is true; that is, did he tell Klara the facts or did he embellish them for the sake of a good story? And does it really matter? Urquhart is imagining the story of German immigrants settling the Ontario countryside as she explores the impact of WWI and the subsequent Great Depression on that community. She is creatively filling the gaps often left out of historical narratives. As readers we are invited to share in the process and to imagine what might have happened in those early days of Canada's development, but we are not expected to believe Klara's story is "the truth." It is also worth noting that Klara is interested in the story of her grandmother and makes sure that she is included in the historical narrative. From the outset, Urquhart is establishing this war story as one told from a woman's point of view. Therefore, we have evidence of two things: Urquhart is constructing a historical narrative that is not primarily factual, but is based on family legend, and she is not interested in telling a war story from a male point of view, but rather through the eyes of women (Klara and the nuns) who witnessed the impact of war at home.

The story of the conception of Tilman, Klara’s older brother, also includes fantastic, myth-like elements which support a reading of the text as a version of a German fairytale. After a hunting trip, Dieter (Tilman’s father) returns home to his bride, Helga, excited, holding a brace of birds, and smelling of blood. Helga is surprised and embarrassed to find that she is attracted by his lust for her, and the two

…stood face to face in the dwindling light, like silent enemies. Then they fell groaning to the floor beside the stove, where they struggled to extract this new terrible pleasure from the other. Helga could see, as she and Dieter beat against each other, the wing of
one not quite dead bird methodically slapping the pine planks, yet by the time they had finished, the feathers were entirely still. The image, though she never spoke of it, stayed with her all through her pregnancy. (58)

The image of the bird, combined with the suggestively violent scene of the couple making love “like silent enemies,” prepares the reader for the violence and oddity of Tilman’s life. With this imagery, Urquhart seems to be suggesting that Tilman’s destiny is predetermined from conception. The recurrence of this bird motif in connection to Tilman, whose wanderlust is closely related to the migration of local bird species, becomes a touchstone to the violent story of his conception, as well as his compulsion to be on the road. The imagery of blood and death, as well as the words "enemies" and "terrible" also foreshadow the violence of the war that will change both Tilman and Klara. But the reader is never really sure who has told this story, because the narrator tells us that “Tilman, had known nothing at all about the circumstances of his birth or...his conception” (56). We can presume that it is part of Klara’s contribution to her family history, but the obviously symbolic conception scene is authoritatively presented by an omniscient narrator and understood to be part of a larger story that might teach us a lesson or impart some moral.

As background to the larger Vimy narrative, Urquhart’s inclusion of this incident suggests her interest in the way that history privileges certain stories over others and often has a larger, more public role of promoting a certain myth or view of history. Klara's story offers the reader a particular view of the war and of her life in the community of Shoneval. The story of Tilman's conception and childhood makes his eventual success as a soldier and sentry believable, especially in the context of his life on the road and his own retreat from the violence...
of his childhood (exhibited by his parents' use of a metal yoke and chains to keep him at home and Klara's assistance in releasing him from the yoke and ultimately from his family). Although his vagabond lifestyle is uncertain and potentially dangerous, Tilman finds his own community on the rural Ontario back roads. Like Klara, Tilman lives on the margins of society. Readers might expect that Tilman's story would focus on his life as a soldier, but the majority of his narrative representation emphasizes his role as an artist on the home front (or Europe during the post-war years). Tilman's work as a carver, who creates designs to decorate wood stoves, works in a factory making limbs for amputees and finally, carves decorative elements for the Vimy Memorial, remains in the foreground of the narrative. Ironically, in all of these settings, Tilman draws on his memories of his Canadian past to inform his artistic work. His carving experiences in the domestic and private spaces of his childhood serve as his apprenticeship for the more demanding work (both physically and emotionally) of the ultimate public monument.

The various stories that Urquhart includes in her narrative—the development of Shoneval, the struggles of immigrant families to "force western culture into a place where it undoubtedly had no business to be" (25), the personal lives of Klara and Tilman and the people who influence them, and finally, the story of the building of the Vimy Memorial—represent and reinforce some of the cultural and social myths Canadians share about the development of the nation. But at the same time, they encourage us to ask questions about the treatment of immigrants, the power of gender roles, the impact of war on society, and the role of art and memorials in the grieving process of a nation. The dialogue that begins with these questions is an important aspect of the artist's storytelling and must not be dismissed when the stories are uncomfortable or point to injustices supported by our own government. Urquhart (and Thiessen
in his play *Vimy*, which I will discuss in the next chapter) engages in this dialogue primarily through her representation of the memories of the characters she develops in her narrative.

**Subversions of Military Spaces: The Stone Carvers as a Story of the Home Front**

As I have already mentioned, *The Stone Carvers* marks a break with post WWI narratives in which the primary view was male, Anglo-centric, and the privilege of those who were witnesses to the war. Urquhart is the first contemporary Canadian novelist to reimagine the Vimy narrative from the point of view of both the returned soldier and the women who did not participate in the war overseas, but remained at home.\(^{16}\) As a woman born of German immigrant parents and raised in a small village, Klara would seem to be an unlikely heroine. However, Klara's role in Shoneval is an important one for a number of reasons. Her status as an unmarried woman allows her a certain amount of freedom to choose her vocation and to remain independent. "...Klara served no master" we are told; "she alone determined the tasks she would perform each day." (30). And Klara shares the entrepreneurial instincts of her parents and grandparents in her determination to be a tailor and a farmer—occupations that would typically have been considered "man's work." Although the townspeople consider her "eccentric," they excuse her because of the painful events of her past. In addition, her family's important contribution to the development of the town, and her "knowledge of the village's mythology" give her a certain social status (30). Moreover, Klara "was not averse to being called 'the spinster'" because she saw and experienced the power that came with not being confined to traditional gender roles (29). In one sense, Klara represents the lives of many young women who first experienced societal freedoms because of the war. If the war gave young men the opportunity to see the world, then it also gave young women the chance to break out of prescribed societal roles and
enter the work force. With the home front cleared of a dominating masculine presence, women began to contribute to society in new ways. As they began to take an interest in local politics and enjoy some of the freedoms related to earning their own money, women continued the work of the suffrage movement toward more permanent social change, including the right to vote.17.

These changes would have a profound impact in the future on women's willingness to accept society's prescribed roles. Of course, as historian Jay Winter reminds us, the many widows left to raise their children alone without adequate pensions or decent paying jobs represent the dark side of that situation.18 And when war veterans returned home to Canada, women were expected to give up their jobs and freedom without complaint. Klara, however, was able to continue working on her farm and to work as the village tailor because of her independence and her social position in the village. But this life, as Urquhart describes it, is marked by both loss and gain:

Klara had her memories, a cemetery full of dead family members, a village from which most of her schoolmates had fled, a brother who had vanished, an ancient religion replete with narrative, the knowledge of the village's mythology, two difficult skills learned from two masters (her mother and her grandfather), friends in the convent, and a solid sense of how to keep her mind intact, despite the constant loneliness. She had also the possession of something that only a very few spinsters have: independence and a past. (30)

Urquhart's description allows us to imagine a woman who can take care of herself, who doesn't need a man to look after her or pay her bills. Although Urquhart's depiction of Klara challenges the social norms of the time, it also offers effective cultural critique. This, I believe, is the most
important contribution Urquhart makes to contemporary examinations of historical narratives about life on the Canadian home front.

Urquhart manages to turn Tilman's story into one about the home front too. The narrative of his early life chronicles the life of a drifter—a child who must move from place to place in order to find food and shelter, or to be "adopted" for the winter by some charitable family or a tramp looking for an additional source of income. She also offers a glimpse into the lives of hobos who travelled the trains across Canada in the early part of the twentieth century. Rather than picturing them as derelicts and social outcasts, Urquhart portrays them as a group of people who move on the edge of society because of mental illness, homelessness, or unemployment. These are some of the men who would enlist when war broke out. The Italian-Canadian community (specifically in Hamilton) is also portrayed through Tilman's eyes. The warm and accepting family of Refuto (Nicolo) Vigamonti stands in stark contrast to the label of "foreigner" that is attached to the Italian immigrants who worked in the steel and stove works industries. Refuto describes the status of the Italian immigrant (a status that would apply to many immigrants at that time) as being "....on the payroll [but] . . . listed as foreigner. He didn't even have a name. . . I didn't either. I was, he was, a not-person" (211). Urquhart's alternative view of these communities becomes a tool to raise awareness of Canadian business and government practices that discriminated against immigrants and those who did not "fit" into mainstream society.

These examples provide additional proof of how an artist can create a dialogue about contentious issues and events through story. Giorgio and Tilman, as "outsiders" become part of the bigger story of the war when they enlist and fight. But Urquhart is more interested in their
lives at home; she devotes a chapter to the story of Giorgio, whose love of carving, especially of letters, leads him back to Vimy to carve the names of the missing soldiers on the memorial. Their lives on the battle field remain in the background of the story, relegated to a few paragraphs that describe Tilman's memories of "meaningless slaughter" (233) and of missing soldiers who were "blown to bits" (243). "You have no idea how awful it was," Tilman tells Klara. "No one here wants to know anything about it" (243). Urquhart reminds her readers that the family at home did not necessarily want to hear about the hardships the soldiers experienced. Instead, they wanted to focus on the myth of a developing nation. Even the problem of how to support unemployed and disabled veterans is raised by Urquhart through her depiction of Tilman's post-war job making wooden limbs for amputees in a factory in which he is forced to climb painfully up and down stairs, supported by his own wooden leg. Like contemporary historians such as Jay Winter and Jeff Keshen, Urquhart is interested in the social repercussions of war on the home front; like them she is interested in considering how Canadians at home grieved the loss of their young men.

**Gender Disruption: Tilman, Klara and the Vimy Memorial Construction Site**

Another way that Urquhart engages with the Vimy narrative is through her development of the story's depiction of gender. Both Tilman and Klara challenge their cultural standards in their sexuality and, in Klara's case, her willingness to take on work that was specifically seen as the domain of men—carving, tailoring (as opposed to seamstress work) and raising cattle—and her appropriation of a male identity that enables her to work as a carver on the Vimy Memorial. In each case, Urquhart speculates about how particular types of gendered nonconformity could be part of the context of memorial construction. For example, Tilman's sexual relationship and
eventual partnership with Recouvrir, a chef and former soldier, suggests a challenge to accepted norms (even today) with respect to homosexuality, especially for those who are, or were, involved in the military. Soldiers' relationships were expected to be based on camaraderie, not sexuality. Urquhart's scenario, while raising questions about representations of masculinity during the early twentieth century, seems to once again be like a fairy-tale in its simplicity and "happily ever after" conclusion. Although Urquhart is careful to describe the two men as "friends" when they are in the company of others, the ease with which Klara and Giorgio accept the men's relationship, and their almost seamless acceptance into Montreal society, seems unlikely, or perhaps, optimistic (383). Even so, their first more intimate meeting involves sharing the sites of memory of the war that they carry on their bodies:

'Shrapnel,' he said, knocking twice on Tilman's wooden leg. 'Verdun,' he added. The Canadian understood then that this kind man carried in his body fragments of the catastrophe of the battle of Verdun, fragments that now and then, like Tilman's own memories worked themselves to the surface. He...brought his fist down on his artificial leg. 'Vimy Ridge,' he said. 'Vimy.' (325)

The implication is that one's memories reside both in the body and in the place where they happened. Urquhart's frequent use of these sites of memory in her depiction of intimacy demonstrates the important relationship between emotional healing, grieving and remembering.

Klara's sexuality also challenges the norms of her society. As a willing partner to her boyfriend Eamon, Klara entered into a taboo relationship in a society and religious culture that forbade a sexual relationship outside of marriage. Klara, the narrator informs us, "had been delighted by his spontaneous nocturnal appearances, the hint of danger, the melting pleasure she
could never associate with sordidness or sin" (139-40). How she managed to avoid pregnancy after numerous acts of intimacy, Urquhart fails to tell us. But Klara's willingness to risk it seems unusual in light of the culture in which she was raised. This same attitude arises later in the narrative in her relationship with Giorgio. Although she has spent the past twenty years as a spinster, devoutly attending church and working with the nuns, Klara's reasons for holding back with Giorgio are more related to her age and the possibility of love unrequited. "Desire," she tells herself, "was a word that had no place in the vocabulary of a spinster" (344). Nevertheless, she gives in to that desire without much hesitation, perhaps in part because of her strong sense of independence and lack of concern about what other people think. She then becomes Giorgio's lover as they finish the work on the memorial. Urquhart is, once again, opening a contemporary discussion about societal mores and taboos. And again, she uses the language of memory and memorials to describe the emotions and hopes of her characters:

They made love quickly...and then later, more carefully, until she believed her body, the candlelight, and the walls of the tunnels were all turning to water, and that she might drown in herself, in him. And all around them, stretching as far as the market town of Arras, the dank tunnels, like graves, out of which thousands of young men had rushed into the brimstone air.

'Love, in such a place as this,' Giorgio said, finally. (355)

Urquhart expresses the loss of life and the sacrifice of young lives in the language of remembrance. She uses sites of memory, even intimate ones, to suggest the possibility of leaving grief behind. But she also suggests that love, depicted by the loving union of two people, is the antithesis of war. The fullness of life is represented by Klara and Giorgio's lovemaking; the
The destructive power of war is represented by the dark tunnels, "like graves." In this sense, The Stone Carvers is a hopeful story that invites us to consider life beyond war, engaged in healing and restoration through art and memorials.

The final section of the novel, "The Monument," also uses memory and the metaphor of construction to chronicle the building of the Vimy Memorial. The section begins with a description of Klara's life of independence, made possible by her position as a respected spinster in her community. Once again Urquhart emphasizes life on the home front after the Great War. Even the section on Walter Allward begins by describing Klara's interest in his life:

In the future, as a much older and much calmer woman, Klara would find that she wanted to know more about the man responsible for the huge Canadian monument in France, wanted to add to her own distinct memories some kind of chronicle of a life lived, of apprenticeships served, of tasks completed. (263)

Upon Allward's death, Klara begins a process of research into Allward's life that "would allow her to fill in the picture of the visionary man she had come to believe had transformed her life" (264). Like Urquhart, Klara fills in the historical gaps and constructs her own narrative of the life of Allward, which the narrator shares with the readers in the pages that follow. She combines her personal memories and experiences with the research she has done to create a representation of the artist's life and the building of the memorial. Klara's view is closely related to her personal identity as well as to her unusual decision to disguise herself as a man so that she can work on the monument in France.

Klara's decision to "change gender once she left Ontario behind" leads her to an unexpected sense of freedom and calm that reinforces her decision to go to Vimy to work on the
memorial (292). Although Klara has enjoyed considerable agency because of her job as the village tailor, which gives her independence and "a much cherished bank account of her own," the freedom she finds in France provides her with a means to rediscover her memories of Eamon (47). These memories, from which she has fled for years, are resurrected in the midst of her work with men, many of whom were soldiers, and her gradual reawakening of the memories of her love for the young lad who went off to war. When she resolves to carve Eamon's face into The Spirit of Sacrifice statue, she "think[s] little about her disguise, carrying her true self to the task” and finds she can remember both his physical appearance and his youthful passion for flight (331). She becomes engrossed in her task and doesn't hear Allward enter the carving room. When her gender is discovered, Allward surprisingly allows her to finish her carving of Eamon and to stay on the memorial site. But he insists that she reveal her disguise. Urquhart's exploration and challenge of gender in this section provides some interesting insights into the metaphor of construction. Klara has constructed a new identity for herself; she has also constructed the story and persona of Allward. Together, they create a new sense of some of the factors that might have influenced Allward's work on the memorial: "This woman had brought a personal retrospection to his monument, and had by doing so allowed life to enter. She had carved the uncomplicated face of prewar youth, children who were unaware they would be made extinct by the war" (340). Urquhart is suggesting that Klara's feminine perspective influenced Allward's vision of the potential for the monument to provide a site for not only commemoration, but also for grieving. Of course, the face that Klara carves into the Torchbearer figure is fictional; the figures on the real monument are Allward's own vision and work. However, this provides an interesting example of how Urquhart uses the imaginative historical gaps to present an alternative view of history.
Giorgio's work carving the names of the soldiers on the side of the memorial adds another layer to the element of grieving. "There is absolutely nothing," Giorgio tells Klara, "like the carving of names. Nothing like committing to the stone the record of someone who is utterly lost" (347). Giorgio has recognized the importance of remembering the lives of individuals that have been sacrificed. Thus, these letters carved into the stone also become sites of memory for the families who come to see them, and reminders of the consequences of war for those who see the memorial. In reality, the power of the monument to elicit feelings of grief and the beginnings of healing is noted by Laura Brandon in her discussion of the history of the Vimy Memorial. She describes the impact of the Memorial maquettes on the visitors to The Canvas of War exhibition and notes that the visitors "welcomed the opportunity of remembering and, in some cases, mourning those who had died. . . This was a chance to mourn at home" (Making Memory, 210).

The tunnels, the narrator tells us, were also a kind of memorial, as were the various sites of memory that are described throughout the novel: the pattern of Eamon's waistcoat pressed into the floor of Klara's workroom, the detritus of war that rose to the surface of the ploughed fields every year at the site of the battle of Vimy Ridge, even Tilman's damaged body. Urquhart, using Klara's voice, has created a memorial of her own about the life of Allward and the early development of small town Ontario. She portrays Allward as an enigmatic artist, obsessed with the colour of the stone, the allegorical figures on the memorial, and the dead boys whose flesh and blood he seeks to honour. She uses her description of the construction of the memorial as an allegory to aid understanding of the construction of a community as well as the construction of narrative. Klara's story is framed as oral history that has been recorded and seen from a woman's
point of view. As such, it provides readers with new insights into the period of Canadian history that she is describing.

Jane Urquhart's creation of a "wholly convincing" history of a family, a community and one famous work of art remains her most significant accomplishment in this novel. However, her engagement with various questions about that history and the way that she creates a dialogue with the present and the past through the construction of legend or myth is worthy of ongoing discussion. Although Urquhart has created a plausible story of an important Canadian, she admits that a "factual biography" of Allward's life and accomplishments needs to be written (391). In her work, she remains more interested in playing creatively with the slipperiness of facts and the uncertainty of recorded history as it relates to the memories of individuals and of the collective memories of a community (or country). The contrast of Allward's desire to use the memorial as a permanent source of memory with Klara's desire to embrace the present becomes clear when Urquhart reminds us:

He (Allward) had believed that he was making memory solid, indestructible, that its perfect stone would stand against the sky forever. With this certainty threatened, his world collapsed. (381)

Klara, however, is not concerned with making memory solid, but rather with enjoying the freedom that is created by combining memory and opportunity:

Klara...thought of the fragile plaster angels lifted by ropes toward a sky chosen by Walter Allward after much consideration. Their shadows gliding up the pylons. About how the difficult, amazing man had altered the angle of the ridge to accommodate the clouds, had not destroyed what she had created in stone, had given her a voice. (385)
Klara's voice, Klara's story, even Klara's art provide the central unifying force in *The Stone Carvers*. Through Klara we have a new feminine perspective on the period of Canadian history instead of the familiar one of male sacrifice and military prowess. More work could be done to assess the role of oral storytelling in the fabrication of history. More examination could take place of the role of women in the formation of communities across Canada over the past two hundred years. And finally, more work could be done to understand the role of memorials in the healing and grieving process of individuals and of communities. As a nation, Canada has relied on our image of the Vimy Memorial and the grieving mother to guide the process of remembrance and the veneration of sacrifice. In order to better understand the pervasiveness of this image, we must gain further understanding of the memorial itself, of the man who created it, and of his vision. Jane Urquhart provides us with a place to begin this process.
Chapter 3:

Vern Thiessen’s *Vimy: Revising the Vimy Myth*

The possibility of return to Vimy Ridge becomes even more public and more memorable in the theatre because *Vimy* offers the audience a chance to “witness” a historical event. In his recent book *Media, Memory, and The First World War*, David Williams argues that film creates a blurring or “collapse of boundaries between past and present” (5). A play that is based on historical events, as *Vimy* is, functions in a similar way. The play’s action creates a shared memory for the audience that may change or expand our view of the historical event (in this case our view of the Battle of Vimy Ridge). It can also depict actions or events that challenge traditional or socially accepted views that previously have been elided or ignored in historical narratives and/or public institutions. *Vimy* is distinctive because Thiessen includes a female perspective on WWI that is more reminiscent of a domestic space than a military one. He also examines issues of race, ethnicity, hegemony and religion that are outside of the context of war. These are issues found within the Canadian context. Thiessen's play reshapes and revises public understanding of the impact of war, not simply as a sacrificial duty undertaken by brave men, but as a life-altering event with reverberations at the level of individuals, communities and nations, both in domestic spaces and in military ones. Thiessen, like Urquhart in *The Stone Carvers*, disrupts traditional representations of war and creates a space to ponder the impact of WWI, not only in the traditional “Canada as British colony” context, but rather in a more inclusive manner, which refigures Canadians as representatives of various regions, cultures, ethnicities, languages, and religions. Through my discussion of Thiessen's purposes, his interest in historical accuracy, and his intention to challenge traditional understanding of religion, race, and regionalism in...
Canadian historical narratives, as well as artistic representations of song and dance, I will argue that Thiessen has contributed to a contemporary, socially and politically relevant depiction of Canadians serving in WWI.

Thiessen has stressed, in interviews and in his written work, that one of his motivations while writing *Vimy* was “to discover how small actions can define us as individuals and as a nation” (v). He uses battle imagery to expand on this idea and to emphasize several key words that appear in the play’s text: “memory,” “mythology,” “truth,” and “dream” (v). These are ideas that are central to any discussion of war: memory, myth, story, commemoration, sacrifice and duty. They are terms that suggest the constructed nature of narratives and the historical underpinnings of nationalism. These are ideas that are closely related to Canadian educational practices. Thiessen acknowledges the pedagogical function of the play, not only for students, but for the public at large which is increasingly distanced from and uninformed about Canada’s involvement and contribution to the two world wars. This pedagogical element draws parallels with the function and mandate of the Canadian War Museum (CWM), which I will discuss more fully in Chapter 4. *Vimy* offers some of the same experiences and education one might have on a trip to CWM: visual representations of war, aural simulation of artillery fire, material objects such as uniforms and guns that provide historical authenticity, as well as dialogue that refers to historically documented facts pertinent to the Vimy battle. It also performs a commemorative function in its acknowledgement of the sacrifice of Canadian soldiers and medical personnel.

In press releases and reviews of *Vimy*, the majority of writers draw attention to the educational aspect of the play because they acknowledge the need for Canadians to better understand our national history and the role of WWI as a watershed moment in Canada’s
development as an independent nation. They also underscore the commemorative role of the play, which, like the CWM, highlights sacrificial duty to Canada. Journalist Eva Marie Clarke reinforces this social aspect of Thiessen's work when she describes the events depicted in *Vimy* as “monumental” but notes that “the human drama of the soldiers and nurses involved is the fulcrum upon which it pivots” (*Edmonton Vue Weekly*, review October 24, 2007). The pedagogical and memorial function of the play is also emphasized by mounting the production in November. The premiere of *Vimy* at Edmonton's Citadel Theatre was planned to coincide with Remembrance Day events during the year of the ninetieth anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Likewise, Ottawa's National Arts Centre and Cape Breton University are mounting independent productions of *Vimy* in 2010 that begin their runs in the week of Remembrance Day. Some reviewers also note Thiessen’s concern that, in spite of the fact that “[it] has been argued aggressively by noted historians and average Canadians alike that Vimy Ridge was the symbolic birth of Canada as nation,” according to a *Globe and Mail* poll in 2002, “only 36 per cent of Canadians could name Vimy Ridge as the most significant Canadian victory of the Great War” (vi). Thiessen appears to be using his play to advocate increased public awareness of the role of Vimy in Canada's national and historical development. I believe that Thiessen's view reflects Canadian concern with remembering our past and the way in which this shapes current understanding of the nation and its identity, especially while Canadian troops are involved in Afghanistan. Furthermore, as the last of the WWII veterans die, notions of freedom and sacrifice become relegated to archives and threaten to be lost behind more pressing national concerns. Thiessen’s work remains relevant because he foregrounds iconic or epic national stories while he challenges traditional representations of soldiers.25 He displays and examines the complex, even morally questionable, actions that take place during wartime in the context of emotional and
physical wounds and trauma. This is reminiscent of the work of contemporary historians like Jack Granatstein and Ted Barris who include archival photographs that were not released to the public in the early post war years, and unsavoury details of soldiers’ lives (including statistics about venereal disease and alcoholism) in their own return to Vimy Ridge.\textsuperscript{26}

**Historical Accuracy or Revision?**

The introductory pages of Thiessen’s script devote considerable space to the playwright’s intention to present a story firmly ensconced in the historical event of the battle of Vimy Ridge. He cites historical details, states his purpose, and acknowledges the various individuals, books, journalists, composers and poets who influenced his work, including Pierre Berton and Paul Fussell. He writes: “Although *Vimy* is a work of fiction, it is based on factual events and inspired by real Canadians who served in the Great War” (ix). Thiessen clearly wants to place his work in the historical context of WWI. However, because Thiessen includes the stories of people from various ethnic groups and geographical regions, he undermines traditional depictions of WWI Canadian soldiers as British-born (or descended) men returning home to fight for the mother country. Instead, Thiessen (like Urquhart) underlines the ethnic and racial diversity of the troops, the various cultural traditions and languages that they represent, and the fact that as much as they are different, their concerns and their stories are similar. He also draws attention to often ignored statistics related to the disproportionate number of Aboriginals who enlisted in the war. Although it may seem that Thiessen is creating racial stereotypes, I maintain that his decision to use multiple languages and depict men from across the nation is a break from more traditional narratives which focus on the experiences of Anglo-Eastern Canadians. In effect, Thiessen stresses the common humanity of all soldiers, and emphasizes the difficult,
traumatic effects of warfare. As such, he creates a memorial of his own, one that honours the valour and sacrifice of all Canadians who took part in the Vimy battle. Thiessen, like Urquhart and Berton, sees the need to recognize, remember and re-visit a key military battle that has become the foundation of Canadian myth.

Thiessen articulates the importance of memory and myth in a way that is similar to Urquhart. He explores how memories define and create a “self,” the way that national myths are constructed through personal and shared stories, and the way that aspirations and hopes enlarge human experience, through the stories of seven soldiers and one female nurse who represent a variety of languages, ethnicities and regions in Canada. Most of these characters, as noted in Thiessen’s extensive acknowledgements, are based on the names, diaries and journals of Canadian soldiers and Clare Gass, a Nova Scotian woman who spent four years as a military nurse close to the front lines. Thiessen, like Berton, constructed his story within a framework of historical reports and personal narratives. This juxtaposition of historical facts with personal stories provides much of the complexity of the play because Thiessen portrays a less traditional view of military life. Like The Stone Carvers, Vimy features a central female figure who dominates a domestic space (the field hospital) but is not defined by traditional gender roles and actions (see Figure 3.1). Instead, Clare is depicted as a strong, independent woman who expresses herself by breaking down barriers between people. Likewise, the male characters reflect some of the social complexities (such as racism, religious diversity and homosexuality) typically ignored by historians immediately after the war. Thus his depiction of historical details in the theatre does public, commemorative work. Thiessen creates a visual and aural landscape that provides the audience with a deeper understanding of the complexities of war through depictions of human relationships.
Figure 2  This image was on the handbill for the premiere production of *Vimy* at Edmonton’s Citadel Theatre. Clare’s position in the foreground with four generic soldiers behind highlights her pivotal role in the play. Image from www.vernthiessen.com.

Not only has Thiessen included depictions of the variety of people who participated in the battle, but he has also included relevant details that are found in many historical texts. Weaving these small details into the play, Thiessen draws attention to some distinctive actions. For example, he describes a scene that is similar to one in Findley’s *The Wars*, in which soldiers urinate on their handkerchiefs and hold them to their noses as an attempt to protect themselves from the fatal fumes in gas raids. He also describes the soldiers’ practice of the Vimy glide, a dance-like movement that General Currie required his troops to practice for days to prepare for the creeping barrage. A third key detail is the fact that Canadian soldiers were executed by their own men for "desertion, cowardice" (such as failing to “go over the top” of the trenches), or other "war crimes" (Thiessen, vi). All of these images emphasize the harsh realities of war, but they do more than that. Thiessen uses them to further develop his characters while he opens a dialogue which critiques and challenges some of the weaknesses and actions of the military
system that, to our twenty-first century understanding and sensibilities, are deemed immoral or unethical, such as the failure of the Canadian military to provide adequate equipment for the troops or the practice of executing soldiers who may have been suffering from shell-shock or mental trauma, a condition that was not understood or accepted at the time.

The “landscape” of Thiessen’s set suggests a field hospital, with four beds placed in the shape of a cross. The original production at the Citadel included minimal props, but the stage was covered in a deep coating of peat, with the result that all the soldiers were dirty and disheveled by the end of the play. In addition to adding to the realism of the play, this staging also fore-grounded the importance of the land or landscape to the Canadian ethos. The soldiers fight for “their land”: “the cliffs at Five Islands,” (3) “a bank at Milk River,” (37) “the prairie,” (37) and "old Glooscap”(62). And, as Anne Nothof notes in her discussion of *Vimy*, these images become linked to the landscapes of home for each of the play’s characters (Nothof, 5).

Thus, the soldier's longing for the home he feels it is his duty to protect is emphasized by the juxtaposition of the domestic space of home with the staged battle space of Vimy. Much of the play takes the form of re-enactments of events in the characters’ pasts, as well as in dreams or even in the “present” of the play in which the four wounded soldiers (each from one of the four Canadian divisions that fought together for the first time in history) find themselves in the relative safety of a field hospital interacting with each other and with Clare. Three of the characters appear as ghost-like figures who re-enact the memories of the five characters on stage: Laurie (Clare’s boyfriend), Bert (Mike’s dead brother) and Claude (J.P.’s friend who was executed for a war crime). These scenes, in particular, support Williams’ idea of collapsed boundaries between past and present that allow the dead to "return" to interact with the living. The presence of these "ghosts" reinforces the sense of loss and tragedy that are the consequences
of war. In addition, Thiessen ironically suggests that the actors who portray J.P., a Québécois butcher, and his friend Claude, may also double as Bert, a Blood Indian from Alberta and his brother Mike, the four characters who exhibit the majority of racism depicted in the play. I imagine that this combination, as witnessed in a production, would underline the shared humanity of these men but would also criticize the racism they portray.

The plot of the play revolves around the main events at Vimy Ridge on Easter morning, 1917. The rising action leads at the end of Act One to the whistle that signals the soldiers' scramble over the top of the trenches into No-Man’s Land to take part in the creeping barrage. The second act more firmly establishes the various characters through a series of scenes from their recent pasts. The final scenes, however, move the action to the battlefield and the dramatic conclusion of the battle. The setting of the field hospital near the front lines provides a safe place at the beginning of the play for the characters to remember the past that brought them here, but the thundering of guns throughout the play also provides a constant reminder that the war isn’t over. The play's form, with short vignettes of dreams and memories juxtaposed with a barrage of lights, sound and action on stage, emphasizes the contrast between the simple stories of home and the mental and physical stresses of battle. The characters remember the landscape of their homes as they fondly recall details of their lives before the war. As the play progresses, however, the military spaces take precedence and the men become changed by their experiences. Laurie tells Claire in Act Two, “I ain’t the boy you knew when we was kids. And I ain’t the lad you met in Montreal. No. I’m a “man” now, see….You’re getting all the…mess what’s inside of me now” (65). Laurie's emotional change is representative of the experience of many soldiers who suffer with the effects of trauma alongside, or as a result of, their acts of bravery and heroism. This, in turn, emphasizes the way that war changes individuals, families, communities
and nations. The soldier's experience changes the way he will respond once he returns home. Moreover, because the events of the play are not chronological, the action moves back and forth between memory and reality, as Clare and the soldiers recall the events that led to their enlistment, the people with whom they have had meaningful relationships, and the ambiguity and complexity that the war has created in their lives.

**Disruptions of Representation: Religion, Race and Regionalism**

This ambiguity can best be seen in some of the themes that Thiessen explores in the play, including religious diversity, racism and the “Canadian-isms” that are regional and national in character. Thiessen's stage directions for the opening of the play suggest that he wants his audience to expect a traditional Christian approach to religion: "Four beds—as if a cross. Five men—as if spirits" (3). The cross created by the positions of the beds on stage echoes the Christian world-view that was the dominant ethos in early twentieth-century Canada, and is reinforced in post-war Canadian narratives by references to Good Friday and the beginning of the main battle on the morning of Easter Monday. The reference to spirits also has Christian connotations, but these would not be clear to the audience at this point in the play. However, lighting effects may make the men appear as ghost-like figures. Although writers immediately after the war emphasized the relationship between Christian sacrifice and duty to one's country, Thiessen disrupts this traditional depiction of religion in several ways. First, the aboriginal character, Mike, speaks of visions and describes his sacred duty in relation to the warrior heritage he comes from. In a dream sequence, he and his brother Bert sit atop a mountain, awaiting a vision. When they see the Northern lights “dancing,” they interpret them as fire.

BERT: Look at ‘em. That’s a fire, see?
MIKE: A fire!

BERT: Flames licking the top of Chief Mountain. It’s like they’re saying:

MIKE: “Go to the fire, boys.”

BERT: “Go fight under a sky of fire.”

MIKE: “Be warriors.”

BERT: Then that’s what we’re gonna do. We’re gonna be brave. You and me, Right? (29)

This passage emphasizes the “warrior” ethos typically (perhaps stereotypically) attributed to aboriginal soldiers, while it suggests a familiar symbol of the Canadian North –the Northern lights. Strength, self-sufficiency and survival are just some of the qualities suggested by this symbol. But even this familiar image is subverted at the end of the play when Mike lies on Vimy Ridge, wounded and gassed. He looks up and says, "The Sky. Red. From the shrap exploding in the air. White from the flares. Green from the gas. Just like, just like... Oh, Bert...I failed you, brother" (67). Mike recognizes that the vision he and Bert shared has ended, not with the glory and valour that comes from the military victory at Vimy, but rather with fear, injury and death. For Mike, the victory is overshadowed by the death of his brother. The Christian notion of sacrifice for the sake of duty and the love of country is not the belief system that Mike lives by.

Secondly, in another scene, J.P. invites the men to take Communion on the morning of the battle. This was common practice in the Great War, and many of the soldiers participated, especially before engaging in battle. However, in Thiessen's Vimy, Sid and Will declare that
there is "no time," which suggests their ambivalence about the act, and Mike declines. He mentions that some people pray to God, but he prays “to the sun” and then he offers a piece of skin from his knee in sacrifice (49). The blend of J.P.‘s recitation of the Lord’s Prayer with Mike’s prayer to the Creator in his own language immediately after underlines the religious diversity of Canadians while it critiques traditional representations of Canadians as Christian. Considered in the context of Canadian policy about aboriginals and the residential school system in the early nineteenth century, Thiessen’s depiction of Mike is ground-breaking. He is bringing a contemporary view to religion that would have been considered scandalous during WWI. Through this scene (and others), Thiessen offers an alternative view to the history that is accepted by most Canadians as fact. Although aboriginal (or Buddhist, or Sikh, or Jewish) soldiers may not have openly observed their own religious traditions in the trenches, Thiessen suggests that they may have wanted to do so.

A scene involving Claude and J.P. also troubles assumptions about traditional depictions of the faith of Canadians. Claude is angry when he is punished for speaking French, the language of his family, while serving in the military. Pointing to the hypocrisy he sees in Christian nations fighting one another, Claude says:

Which language you gonna speak to the Hun, Jean-Paul? Eh? You gonna yell in English or French when you stick your bayonet through him? And when he dies in front of your eyes, that Hun, what then Jean-Paul? You gonna pray in English my friend?

J.P. is silent.

Well I’ll tell you what, Jean-Paul. If they tell me to go over the top? And I gotta kill a Hun? Know what I’m gonna do? I’m gonna say no. I’m gonna get down on my knees
and pray. I’m gonna pray to the God of my pa and your pa and our grandfather and their father before them. I’m gonna pray for forgiveness, Jean-Paul. Et je vais te dire une chose, je vais prier en français. [And I’ll tell you one thing, I’m gonna pray in French.]

(58)

This speech highlights several key ideas in Thiessen’s play: the hegemonic structure of the military and the problem with assuming that a diverse people will all speak the same language and pray to the same God; the problems associated with conscription, in which men who do not sympathize with the war are forced to act in ways that are not consistent with their moral, ethical or religious beliefs—and then are punished when they refuse; and finally, the complexity of national identity as it relates to power, privilege and assimilation. Claude is executed for "cowardice and for missing battle," but the audience knows that Claude's reasons are related to his own religious and moral beliefs (69). The execution of Canadian soldiers by men in their own regiment (or perhaps even by friends, as is the case in Vimy) was a practice that was not discussed outside of the military until long after the war. Thiessen is drawing attention to the complexity of this issue, as well as the traumatic response of the men whose duty it was to participate in the execution. Such practices do not fit so easily in the context of doing one's duty, nor even in the context of ethical war practice.33

Thiessen also examines national identity construction through his references to familiar regional and national (some would argue “iconic”) symbols, material objects and landmarks such as “Labatt’s” beer, “Lowney’s” candy, “a bowl o’ Saskatoons” (6, 76), as well as "canoes" and "the Ottawa River" (22). Thiessen assumes that his audience will be familiar with these national references; therefore he uses them to highlight the common shared experiences of these young
Canadians, rather than their diversity. One short scene, which focuses on hockey and the “Stanley Cup” (42), refers to various celebrity players and favourite teams of the day. However, what begins as friendly banter soon dissolves into a racist argument as the men (primarily J.P. and Mike) focus on their differences rather than their similarities as Canadians.

Through this dialogue, Thiessen engages with the topic of racism. Thiessen augments his script with racially charged speeches that allude to the Québécois opposition to conscription and to Canada's involvement in the war in general, as well as to the maligned position of Aboriginals early in the twentieth century. The relationship between Mike and J.P., in particular, underlines the tensions experienced by soldiers. As the two men lie in their hospital beds, J.P. asks Mike, “Eh, ami?” Mike’s response is vitriolic: “You talking to me?”…You starin’ at me, Frenchman?!” (12). Later, Mike snaps at Clare when she mistakenly speaks to him in the Mi’kmaq language rather than the language of the Bloods. Although she attempts to break through racialized lines, Mike's comment, “We all look alike?” shows his expectation of racist assumptions from whites (25). Likewise, in the "hockey" scene, J.P. and Mike resort to racial stereotypes that are based on historical truth. For example, when J.P. asks Mike why he cares about fighting in the war, Mike replies, "Helluva lotta Indians signed up for this war. We got whole reservations don't have a man over eighteen on 'em. Now you tell me, Frenchie, how many of your guys signed up?" (35). This scene contrasts the different cultural and regional approaches of the French Canadians, who did not agree with conscription, with the young Aboriginal men whose response to war was to enlist en masse. Clare appears to be the only character able to interrupt this racist dialogue. Her ability to speak English, French and Mi’kmaq provides her with tools to negotiate various spaces with the men because she understands their languages. Although she doesn’t speak the language of the Blood people (Mike’s racial group),
she is still sympathetic to his racialized difference. She reaches out to him through language; she crosses the borders between race and tradition. Is this because she is female? Or because she is cast in the role of the nurturing nurse? Perhaps she is aware of her own struggle for identity and freedom from traditional roles, and this awareness provides her with empathy for these broken men. They can speak to her with a freedom that is not always evident with the other men, who become enmeshed in their own racialized positions. When Clare is finally able to get the men's attention in this scene, they are able to refocus, and more importantly, return to the task at hand: together, they prepare to launch the Vimy operation. This is a turning point in the play at which the men begin to listen to each to other and to work as a unit. They begin to talk about the landscape they share as soldiers: Hill 145, the Pimple, the Ridge. They remind one another of other battles: Ypres and the Somme. They practice their approach, but most importantly, they develop a camaraderie that will prepare them for the trauma of battle and the heroism required for victory. These linked scenes create a hopeful tone as they interrogate the fine line between racism and camaraderie.

**Representations of Song and Dance: "Here We Are," Doing the Vimy Glide**

Thiessen also explores the emotions, memories and trauma of wounded soldiers on the front through representations of song and dance. Included in the play is the entire lyric of a common soldier’s song of the time, “Here We Are, Here We Are Again,” as well as the depiction of the Vimy Glide, which was part of the “creeping barrage.” Thiessen’s use of these two historically accurate details of the Vimy engagement serves to disrupt conventional notions of the way that art serves people in society. In the play, the song becomes much more than an example of comradeship between soldiers on the battlefield. Instead, it becomes a marker of emotional
turmoil and social blindness to the traumatic post-war life of the soldier. Likewise, the Vimy Glide, which is marked by the words, “one, two, three, glide,” is very similar to dance steps, as the text of the play indicates. However, this dance is actually part of a strategy for killing the enemy, and in spite of its smooth and soothing action, it produces emotional stress and traumatic shock.

The Vimy Glide was a system of movement in which the soldiers moved across No Man’s Land at a precise pace behind the “curtain of fire” created by the artillery barrage (66). If the men moved too quickly, the artillery barrage would hit them. If they moved too slowly, they would be separated from the rest of the soldiers and vulnerable to the German artillery. The soldiers practiced the movement for weeks in preparation for the strategic battle on Easter morning, 1917 that the Allies hoped would change the course of the war. The practice proved to be worthwhile, for the barrage was successful and the soldiers of Division 2 took the Ridge in just four hours. Thiessen suggests the image of dance through his repetition of the phrase “One, two, three, glide” which echoes the precision of the waltz step and demonstrates the orderly, practiced movements of the soldier. Specifically, the word "glide" is repeated throughout the text, referring to the flight of a bird, the movement of a canoe on a river (22), and the movement of the soldier as he crosses no-man's land behind the creeping barrage. Describing the technique, Sid tells Will:

...don't get ahead of yourself. Exactly one hundred yards every three minutes.

WILL: Yes, Cap'n!

SID: One, two, three, glide. No, No, NO!
WILL: Sir!?

SID: You ever paddle a canoe back home?

WILL: Who hasn’t, sir?

SID: Know how you navigate a river?

WILL: Yes, sir.

SID: Well, then you know what I’m talking about. It’s a glide. (43)

The phrase, "one, two, three, glide" recurs in various forms, emphasizing the dance-like quality of the movement, as well as the boredom and frustration of practice. “Gone over it and over it,” laments Mike. “So many times,” repeats Sid. “Boring,” complains Will. “One, two, three, glide…damn!” (46). Ironically, this deadly dance will lead thousands of soldiers to their heroic deaths, or to actions that will change them forever.

As Will recounts his experience during the creeping barrage, he remembers that he felt like he was gliding, “Like I'm, I'm paddling a great river” (70). But when he gets through to the German line, a young German soldier jumps out at him. Will waits...echoing the glide: "One. Two. Three..." He waits a moment more, "And [he] stab[s] 'im" (71). Next, he is shot, and finds himself alone in a shell hole with a German corpse--the man he has just killed. The Vimy glide has saved him, but the cost is far too high. The peaceful domestic image of the Vimy glide is disrupted by the image of violence and death. These are not the emotions one feels when gliding down a river in a canoe or across a dance floor. Will is traumatized, upset by his memory of the staring corpse, the violent death “ripping at [his] insides” (71). Will is alone; alone with his thoughts, his fears and the horrible memories. The phrase “One, two, three, glide” is stuck in his
memory, along with his love for the glide of the canoe down the river, along with the sorrow, violence, noise and trauma of the battle.

Just as Thiessen uses the motif of dance to undermine the depiction of battle as a valorous act, he also uses song to disrupt the notion of music as an example of camaraderie. Frank Wheeler's song, "Here We Are, Here We Are Again," appears in two slightly different forms in two scenes of the play. It first appears at the end of Act One, while the soldiers wait for the whistle that will signal the time to go over the top of the trenches to engage in the battle and begin the creeping barrage. The men have been waiting underground for several hours, gathering their gear, rations and ammunition, writing letters home, and mentally preparing to engage in battle. Their conversation is reminiscent of gunfire, marked by short phrases dominated by consonants, such as “Gotta rest the guns” and “Cold, so cold” spoken to one another in quick succession, but reflective of memory and emotion. In the final minutes before engagement, the men sit silently, light cigarettes to calm their nerves, and then begin to sing, “softly and slowly” (53):

When Tommy went across the field to bear the battle’s brunt

Of course he sang this little song, marching to the front

And when he’s walking through Berlin he’ll sing the anthem still

He’ll sit down and say, ‘How are you Uncle Bill’

Here we are, here we are, here we are again…

There’s Pat and Mac and Tommy and Jack and Joe
When there’s trouble brewing

When there’s something doing

Are we downhearted…?

No! Let them all come.

Here we are, here we are, here we are again….

We’re fit an’well and feeling as right as rain.

Nevermind the weather, now we’re altogether

‘Allo. ‘Allo. Here we are again…” (54-55)

This first verse suggests the soldiers expectation to march “across the field to bear the battle’s brunt” and to survive, then triumphantly arrive in Berlin to ironically address “uncle Bill,” Kaiser Wilhelm II. Through the reference to common Anglo-Saxon names and the phrase “now we’re altogether,” the lyric also emphasizes the camaraderie that Berton argues is what many veterans refer to as the most meaningful aspect of their time on the front (Berton, 160). Music and singing were often considered actions that boosted the soldiers' morale—and in this passage, the men use the song to bolster their own flagging spirits as they wait in the silence of the underground tunnels, preparing for the battle that may bring their deaths. Irony and satire are also key aspects of this song (and many others that were sung) because the true circumstances of the soldiers lives were often far different than cheery phrases such as "fit an' well" suggest. As the men sing the final chorus of the song in unison, the sense of sharing in a communal act that will have important consequences is emphasized, and then reinforced by a drift into silence.
Thiessen’s stage directions “They now think, feel, breathe, as one” (54), support the sense of camaraderie that the song has established, as well as the strong sense of purpose and sacrifice that their service requires.

The second use of the lyric occurs in the “present” of the field hospital as the young men recount their memories of the battle. Sid is an infantryman, 4th division, from Winnipeg, and the first to sing in each scene. He has just shared his memory of being rescued by one of the Highlanders that took the Ridge, a man that we recognize as Laurie, Clare’s lover. As Laurie saves Sid’s life, he is killed. Sid describes his memories of Laurie’s death: “Feel over to his face. Blood. And he goes cold. So cold…But I was so warm…” (74). Clare, upset by the news, leaves. The stage directions state that the soldiers, in response, “don’t know what to do, what to feel” so they begin to sing. As they sing the final chorus, unbeknownst to the others, Sid succumbs to his injuries and dies. In this instance, a different verse is sung, one which emphasizes the role of the artist in remembering the sacrificial life of the soldier:

The poets since the war began have written lots of things

About our gallant soldier lads which no one ever sings.

Although their words are very good, the lilt they seem to miss.

For some we like the tricky song, the song that goes like this:

Here we are, here we are, here we are again…(74).

The cynical tone of this verse is evident in the reference to the songs that poets write about soldiers, but which no one sings. The bitter reality of the soldiers’ lives is barely remembered. Similarly, the word “lilt” is used ironically because the soldiers’ lives in the trenches are certainly
not marked by lightness or a spring in one's step. The "here" that the soldiers are singing about in their "tricky song" is a battlefield in which death and carnage are standard realities. This song contains the black humour that was typically employed in WWI as a way to deal with the harsh, even traumatic, realities of the front. Because the men often sang such dark songs boisterously and with gusto and bravado, they were not always understood by those at home.  

In this example from *Vimy*, the stage directions state that the men all join the song, ―slowly, quietly‖ but the song grows in tempo and intensity as they sing the words “We’re fit an’well and feeling as right as rain. Nevermind the weather, now we’re altogether. ‘Allo. ‘Allo. Here we are again…” and then laugh and cry together “with relief” (74). The audience senses that the act of singing has brought the men some kind of healing in the face of trauma, but when we, the audience and the men, recognize that Sid has died, silence ensues on stage, alongside various responses to the event—Mike turns his back and J.P. “goes somewhere, staring.” Only Will, who has pretended throughout the play that he doesn't know Sid because he has feared the suggestion of an intimate relationship with him, touches Sid, propping the man’s head in his lap and touching his cheek. By presenting an alternative vision of masculinity, these actions mark a break from earlier narratives that emphasize the manliness and stoicism of the soldier. As the play ends, any suggestion of valour and victorious celebration is absent. Instead the men sadly, or perhaps bitterly, share what should seem a happy occasion: mail call. Medals and postcards become artefacts of sadness and memory which underscore the losses they have experienced. Clare’s letter from Laurie, which is full of words of hope that anticipate their future together, emphasizes the irony of his desire to tell her "the story of Vimy over and over and over" (77), for the story is one of death and loss for both of them.
In the closing scene, Clare speaks to the ghost of her lover, Laurie. She speaks to him of home, of The Five Islands, of the Bay of Fundy, of the sea and the pines and the cliffs that form the foundation of her memories of home. And she wants to be there with him: “Us. There. Together,” she says (77). “Let’s go home.” But the audience knows that Laurie is only a ghost, and as he and the other men vanish from the stage, only Clare is visible, engulfed in the noise created by the thundering of the guns. The war is not over, the guns remind us. And the shock that the soldiers have experienced is “stuck,” just as Laurie has said. “You’re getting all the…mess what’s inside me now. And it ain’t never going to leave, Clare. Never” (65).

Thiessen leaves us with the powerful image of the damage caused by war. We, the audience, are changed too—by the shared memory of the event we have witnessed: the lives and deaths of those who served Canada in the Great War. As the boundaries of time, of present and past, have shifted in the theatre space, we find ourselves redefined in light of these new stories of Canadian women and men. This is not a play about victory or valour, but about the men and women who sacrificed their lives, their bodies and minds and emotions, for the sake of their country. As an artist, Thiessen makes us consider these lives and he reminds us that when the war is over, the joy and peace created by music and dance are no longer the same. The repercussions reverberate through the lives of the men, of their loved ones and their communities. Their memories become as much a part of their current lives as the details of the present. In this way, Thiessen prompts us to consider carefully the results of war, and reminds us that we too must remember the lives of those who gave them in sacrifice. Although *Vimy* questions and challenges the myth of a valorous war, Thiessen does ask us to remember those who “fought at Vimy Ridge, or dealt with its aftermath” (ix). As Canadians, we are asked annually, on Remembrance Day, to remember, “lest we forget” the sacrifices given so that we can enjoy the lives we lead. However, Thiessen
also asks us to rethink our understanding of the events of WWI and the Battle of Vimy Ridge by exploring the possible truths and historic fictions that comprise our understanding of history. Thiessen has created a new, relevant story to underpin the myth of our nation, an important contribution to the commemorative narrative of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.
Chapter 4:
The Memorial, the Museum and Why I Returned to "Vimy": Some Conclusions

To the valour of their countrymen in the Great War and in memory of their sixty thousand dead this monument is raised by the people of Canada.

— Inscription on the Vimy Memorial monument

First, our visitors leave this museum knowing that war has affected Canada and all Canadians. Second, their visit makes them aware that war is a devastating human experience. Third, they realize that war has affected their lives in Canada today. Finally, they leave with a simple but powerful resolution: I must remember.

— J. Geurts, "Foreword," Reflections on the Canadian War Museum

Art. Remembrance. Education. My motivation to travel to France to visit the Vimy Memorial in October, 2008 was based on my interest in these three entities. I was curious to see the monument that is so vividly portrayed in The Stone Carvers. I was captivated by the images of the classical figures on the memorial that I found on the website of Veterans Affairs Canada. I was intrigued by the story of Walter Allward. I was aware of my lack of knowledge about the Battle of Vimy Ridge and Canada's role in WWI and wanted to rectify that. And I wanted to understand and interrogate my feelings about war in light of my own role as mother to three sons who, if growing up in the early twentieth century, would undoubtedly have served as Canadian soldiers because of their age, their physical health, and their value system.

I found myself asking a series of questions about the home front during and after WWI: What might it have been like for women to say good bye to their sons, husbands or lovers who headed off to war? What kind of mourning and grief would these women have experienced
when they received the dreaded letter informing them of their beloved's death? Would a site such as the Vimy Memorial park have provided solace? Would art, in any of its forms and functions (sculpture, plays, poetry, story) have provided a means to cope with the realities of loss and change that war ultimately brings? Why is it important for us to remember those people who experienced war and in many cases sacrificed themselves or their loved ones for the sake of others, of an ideal, of a country that they believed in? The answers to my questions have been far more complex than I expected.

In this chapter I offer a personal testimony to the power of the Vimy narrative, in its form as a memorial and park, as an educational site of history and remembrance, and as part of the exhibitions at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. My goal is to provide, through text and images, some analysis of how my reading of this physical site has informed and expanded my readings of each of the texts that I have examined in the previous chapters. The challenge I have found as a literary critic is to bring relevant discussion to a subject that is constantly overshadowed by one of the most significant historical events of all time. The Great War has been examined, written about and debated for several generations, at local, national, international and global levels. Although I am interested in the subject of war in general, I am convinced that it is the stories, the oral histories, and the images of war that often speak to the "ordinary citizen." In short, it is a dialogue on the subject of war that is opened up by artists rather than historians that I am most interested in.

**The Vimy Memorial and the Canadian Ethos of Remembrance**

Although Vern Thiessen makes no mention of the memorial in *Vimy*, and appears to be most interested in the conflicts, history and mythology surrounding the Battle, the set of his play
repeats some of the formal lines and the religious overtones of the monument. His stage
directions describe the alignment of the four beds "as if a cross" and, in the premiere production
at Edmonton's Citadel Theatre, the large tree that towers behind centre stage suggests a crucifix.
The two imposing grey shapes on either side of the tree echo the cathedral effect of the
memorial's two pylons. The similarities, which can be seen in Figures 3 and 4, below, is quite
striking.

Figure 3  The set of Vimy at the Premiere production in November 2007. The shape of the Vimy Memorial is
echoed by the blue grey forms surrounding the tree on the Citadel stage. This effectively employs the
commemorative function of the monument in a play that is also a memorial to those who contributed to the

Figure 4  Front view of the pylons and the Spirit of Sacrifice figures. This side faces the Douai Plain. Photo: J.
Lermitte

I believe this similarity underscores the way in which the Vimy Memorial provides a
contemporary back-drop to the majority of discussions about Vimy. Almost every book that
centres on the battle provides some description or discussion of the commissioning and
construction of the Memorial, as well as the famous Vimy Pilgrimage in which approximately
six thousand Canadian war veterans and their families travelled by ocean liner to France to view the opening dedication of the monument and park on July 26, 1936. Berton's narrative includes the impressions of two soldiers: Will Bird, a man whose book Ghosts have Warm Hands has also been quoted widely in both documentary films such as Christie's For King and Empire and in books, and an "ordinary" sign painter named John Mould. Bird's comments (from Maclean's Magazine in 1930) suggest the international impact of the monument: "Europe will change her impressions of the Canadians as a people." (Bird, as quoted by Berton, 302). Mould's story, on the other hand, focuses on his memories of the battle which are re-ignited by his return to Vimy nearly twenty years later. Berton's description is dominated by his own omniscient narration that includes the thoughts and feelings of these two men along with his own impressions of the "lovely little park," the trenches "neat as lawns" and the sandbags "as regular as bricks" (306). For Berton, the most devastating effect is the visible reminder of the battlefield: the pits and hummocks of grassy fields that cover "almost every square foot of the two hundred and fifty acres of the park" (306). These, he writes, "remind the visitor that the flower of Canadian youth once passed this way to death and glory" (307). In contrast, the brilliant green hillocks that I saw on a sunny Autumn day (see Figure 5), spoke of regeneration, of growth, of hope for future generations. The tall maples and pines that cover the slope of the ridge are testimony of the potential for human beings to not only desecrate the land, but to rejuvenate it.
This human potential, this hope for the future is what Urquhart offers her readers. She describes how Tilman and Klara’s first glimpses of the memorial suggest its domination of the landscape: "Distant grey woodlots, this miraculous road, the ridge itself, even the stratified clouds in the sky leaned toward it as if a construction of this magnitude could not be ignored, even by the surrounding disarray, and even by nature" (301). This domination is perhaps the most striking aspect of the memorial—the sheer size of it. The concrete plinth is forty thousand square feet and provides a base for the twin pylons that rise 226 feet above what is already the highest point on the ridge, Hill 145. The white seget marble gleams as a result of the restoration work in 2007. The sculptures are much bigger than life size and appear profoundly sad, their faces either upturned to the heavens as if seeking help, or lowered in contemplation and despair. Most poignantly for me, they are the bodies of young people, with thin limbs and prominent ribs that suggest hunger or hard work or both. Even the figure of the grieving woman, Canada
Bereft, (see Figure 6) is that of a young person, representative of the young nation that mourns the sacrifice of its young on the altar of war. Figure 7 shows the grieving postures of the male figures, and the perspective of the photograph suggests the magnitude of the monument. Because of the height of the pylons, the figures that represent Truth, Faith, Justice, Charity, Knowledge and Peace, the values that were held as most important by the majority of Canadians at the time, are almost impossible to see without the aid of binoculars. (Perhaps this is an ironic comment on the current cultural concern that suggests Canadians may lack a decent value system!) My impression of the monument, therefore, is that its size and modern lines suggest the power and innovation of Canada and its influence on the global community, while its smooth white facade symbolizes the innocence of the dead and reminds us of our need for a material site in which to mourn.

Figure 6  Canada Bereft looks down in mourning at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier which lies below (and is not seen in this photo). Photo: J. Lermitte

Figure 7  The corner of the monument's plinth, as seen from below. The sculpture is Breaking of the Sword. Photo: J. Lermitte.
The names engraved on the monument (a tiny portion of which can be seen in Figure 8), however, had the most profound impact on me. 11,285 names in alphabetical order, of the Canadians who fought and died in France but have no known grave. These names surround the monument on every side. The nearby Canadian cemetery also contains a large cenotaph which is engraved with words from the Book of Ecclesiastes (Figure 9), chosen by Rudyard Kipling for all the Imperial War Grave cemeteries: "Their name liveth for evermore." This phrase speaks to me of the intent of the memorial: to give the Canadian public a place to remember their dead, not as a group, but as individuals. Jacqueline Hucker writes:

The Vimy Monument would thus serve three purposes: it would mark the site of the battle of Vimy Ridge, become this country's principal monument in Europe honouring the valour of all Canadians who fought in the First World War, and serve as testament to those Canadians who lost their lives in France and whose bodies were never identified ("'After the Agony in Stony Places,'" 284).

These purposes have not changed in 2010. In fact, Canadian institutions and even its writers and historians are intent on keeping these purposes alive in the public consciousness. And because the memorial is so far away, efforts have been, and continue to be made to bring the image of the memorial back home. Although I have described some of these efforts in Chapter One, I also want to pay attention (in the next section) to the work of the Canadian War Museum, which uses the image of the memorial and the names throughout.
Julian Smith, in his discussion of the restoration process of the Vimy Memorial, also refers to the importance of the names on the memorial. He is careful to note that the decision whether or not to restore the memorial was directly related to concerns about preserving the names. "These names," he writes,

engraved on the walls, are the only surviving vestige of so many lives sacrificed for the greater good. Since these are the soldiers whose bodies were never recovered or identified, there is no tomb at which to lay a wreath, no other place at which to honour their memory. The importance of the names was one of the reasons a full and careful restoration was chosen. The decay of the walls had become so severe that some of the names were no longer legible, and this translates into a loss of tangible fabric and intangible memory at the same time (55).
Here, once again, the importance of honouring the individual is emphasized. The role of the memorial as a site of grieving continues to be an emphasis that is supported and maintained by Canadian institutions such as Veterans Affairs Canada. In this sense, it is an ongoing project for remembrance and national identity formation in Canada.

The educational component of the Memorial park is also worthy of analysis because it is intrinsically related to the pedagogical focus of the various institutions that make use of the Vimy narrative, and is a critical part of identity formation in Canada. The park is set up in such a way that a visitor approaches by passing the Givenchy Road Canadian Cemetery, then choosing the left fork to go to the Memorial site or straight ahead to the Interpretive Centre and the Grange Subway and Tunnels. At the memorial, there is nothing provided by way of interpretation or signification. As with the majority of important art works, the viewers' understanding is left up to the individual. The memorial speaks for itself. The view over the Douai Plain is breathtaking on a clear day, and if you are familiar with the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the German domination of the Plain is obvious. In addition to the inscription of dedication that appears at the beginning of this chapter, the monument is inscribed with the names of the key battles and the years in which they were fought by Canadians, the name and title, “Walter Allward, Sculptor and Architect,” and surrounding each side of the plinth, the names of the lost soldiers. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is centrally located at the front of the monument, with Canada Bereft gazing down from above. Small red paper poppies attached to sticks like popsicles are propped up against the walls of the monument, particularly by the tomb and near specific names, which are often repeated on the small memorial sticks. This is a place of grieving. This is a place of remembrance. The names of battles and of men lost is enough explanation.
However, because no educational material is available at the memorial, I expected the interpretive centre to provide answers to my questions. Indeed, there was general information about the Battle of Arras, the victory claimed by the Canadian troops at Vimy, and life in the trenches for the average soldier. Information about the Battle of Vimy Ridge was also provided, alongside images of the original memorial to the soldiers on the site and images of war in the area. John McCrae’s iconic poem was depicted on a large information panel decorated with images of poppies. The particular strengths of the Canadian forces, such as artillery innovations, were celebrated. What was most lacking, in my opinion, was detailed description of the memorial, the figures and Allward himself. Described in the narratives of the centre as "a perfectionist" who personally oversaw the work on the monument and the choice of limestone, Allward's presence is as melancholy and ghost-like as his memorial. There is no photograph of him, no book describing his work. Books dedicated to the history of the battle and of the war in general are available, but no pamphlet describes in detail the meaning of the figures. They are described only as "allegorical figures to convey humanism and the concern for such universal values as truth, hope, justice, charity, knowledge and peace and the sacrifice it takes to defend them." Remember that some of these figures can barely be seen at all! As visitors we have no clues and no practical support to imagine what they might look like. When I asked our tour guide about additional information, she looked through her personal notes and dug through a box of old papers to find a leaflet that was created for the Rededication service in 2007. Only there was I able to see a map of the site and a detailed diagram of the Monument. Nonetheless, considerable information, including a short film, was available regarding the twenty million dollar project to restore the monument and improve the park. Apparently, the government understands that Canadians want to know where and how their tax dollars are spent. However,
in terms of remembrance, the material objects I brought home with me were my photographs and a small commemorative "Vimy Memorial" pin. Whatever education I was hoping to find was of the most general kind. Searching for answers about Allward and the memorial would come mainly by reading the work of CWM curator Laura Brandon, Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*, and a special Vimy issue of a Canadian architectural journal. As Urquhart noted, a biography of Allward is needed, as well as a factual account of the design and construction of the memorial, and even its reconstruction.

As a novel, *The Stone Carvers* offered me an imaginative glimpse of the construction of the memorial. The sense of hope and the potential for healing that the memorial might provide for soldiers such as Tilman engaged my own thinking about war. I arrived at Vimy with that sense of hopefulness already engaged. Walking through the Vimy Memorial Park reinforced the emotions that I had experienced as I read the novel. Berton's narrative provided me with stories about the men who fought at Vimy and with a sense of the story of the place. Thiessen's play gave me words to describe what might have happened there and images and sounds that reinforced those words. My reading of the Memorial site was profoundly influenced by my interpretation of these important works because they provided me with a reasonable framework for understanding the complex role of the Vimy narrative in the Canadian cultural story. Just as Urquhart, Thiessen and Berton were moved to engage with the Vimy myth through narrative as a result of their own visits to the Vimy Memorial, so I was moved to write a testimony to my experience. In turn, my visit to the Canadian War Museum reinforced and expanded my reading of the Vimy narrative in other ways.
The Canadian War Museum: Blurring the Lines of Past and Present

The complex history of the Canadian War Museum is, as Laura Brandon suggests in *Art or Memorial*, intimately connected to the creation and collection of Canada's national war art. Although the institution began as a militia museum in Ottawa in 1880, closed sixteen years later and then reopened in 1942, its current structure in Ottawa has been open since 2005. Brandon outlines not only the history of the museum, but more importantly, the internationally recognized status of its prestigious war art collection. My interest in the museum is directly related to this collection, which I believe is comparable in status and quality to the war art collection archived in England's Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London and which shares common historical beginnings and works by artists such as Eric Kennington and Paul Nash. However, unlike the IWM, which has displayed its collection since its opening in 1920, the Canadian collection was not displayed until 1942 and has, according to Brandon, "received limited public attention and remained relatively unknown" until after the *Canvas of War* exhibition in 2000 to which I referred in Chapter One (*Art and Memorial*, xiii). Brandon concludes that the collection "has functioned as an under-recognized war memorial or 'site of memory.'" Further, she notes that its "deeper, collective significance" is worthy of analysis (xiii).

Brandon's comment applies to the Vimy Memorial as well. Part of my interest, therefore, in discussing the CWM is to examine some of the ways in which the Vimy narrative is used there as a foundational motif for the museum. Not only does the Vimy narrative appear in the section of the museum devoted to the Great War, but it permeates Regeneration Hall which contains the Vimy maquettes, the Royal Canadian Legion Hall of Honour which includes art and description of the Vimy Memorial, and the Memorial Hall which houses the original gravestone of the
unknown soldier who is buried in front of the National War Memorial and whose remains were moved from a cemetery near Vimy Ridge to Ottawa in 2008. The symbolic association of Vimy with Canadian values such as honour, sacrifice, courage and innovation are thus further emphasized and more fully realized in the context of the museum's mandate to "Educate. Preserve. Remember" (CWM website brochure). Using the Vimy narrative as a key motif, the CWM provides a place for education of the Canadian public through resources available online and on site, while it promotes critical thinking about war and national narratives and histories. At the same time, the museum is directly involved in the formation of public understanding of, and interest in, defining Canadian identity. The leitmotif of remembrance is closely related to this depiction of Vimy.39

The work of Dean Oliver and Laura Brandon on Canvas of War, and Brandon's historical approach to the War Art collection in Art or Memorial are important contributors to public awareness of the relevance and importance of war art at the level of remembrance and grieving and also of understanding the harsh realities of war.40 But more recently, David Williams offered his own critique of the CWM. Williams' analysis of the way that modern museum practice incorporates technology and various media which blurs the lines between past and present, offering the museum visitor a sense of the "reality" of the war experience, is helpful to discussions of the relevance of the Vimy narrative. When visitors are confronted with the noise, visual effects, and material artefacts of war, they become, in a sense, witnesses to the event. Although Williams is interested in the CWM's use of media to construct historically accurate reflections while it confronts the visitor with questions that force them to take a more subjective position, he suggests that the viewer is influenced by the what and the how they remember. Addressing the reader, Williams states:
And you see at last that you are the ulterior subject of the museum, or, rather, that your subjectivity is the ground of its display. For how you remember is the key to the future, at least as much as what you remember. And the how is evidently shaped by the way you are interpellated in these displays, either to recognize, or else to resist, the call to history. You are thus situated within a network of voices inviting participation and dialogue, not to mention empathy and vicariousness—all hallmarks of an oral culture. . . (252).

Because the museum viewer is exposed to the Vimy narrative in a variety of ways, the message and story of Vimy, as well as the values that are held up as part of the discursive formation of Canadian identity, is appropriated through the national myth, social constructions, cultural expectations and educational priorities.

Although Williams' focus is predominantly on the First World War section of Gallery 2 "For Crown and Country," which concludes with a film that describes the legacy of war as Canadian "independence" bought "at a terrible price" (Williams, 251), I am interested in the way that the Vimy narrative is used as a primary leitmotif throughout the museum to reinforce the relationship between our military history and our national origins. The image of the memorial is also a primary signifier of remembrance and sacrifice because of the significance placed on the engraved names of soldiers.

In the Great War exhibit, the Vimy narrative appears in several forms: video, images, a replica of a small portion of the engraved names from the memorial, an archival grave marker, material objects such as artillery, and paintings. The short video, Vimy Ridge: The Soldiers' Story, provides historical information about the Vimy offensive through a sound and visual montage of veterans' memories of the horrors and joys of the event. A replica of Billy Bishop's
plane "flies" above the video screen and is augmented by a painting of the aerial battleground and a short biography of Bishop. Nearby, a large panel (which appears in Figure 10) lights up the image of the Vimy memorial and the words, "Vimy Legacy." "Canadians felt a surge of national pride when their Corps captured Vimy" reads the panel. If we, as viewers, are Canadians then we are compelled to ask ourselves, "Am I proud to be Canadian?" The imperative is clear: Canadians need to remember the legacy of those who died along the journey to an independent Canada. Whether or not we believe this is true, the format and message of the exhibition reinforces the mandate of the museum. In front of the panel are two material objects (see the bottom of Figure 10) that reinforce our understanding of loss and sacrifice: a large piece of artillery and the wooden grave marker of N. H. Pawley, recipient of numerous medals and killed in action. Alongside his memorial marker are his medals, donated by his family to commemorate his sacrifice. As the viewers leave this area of the gallery, they pass by a reproduction of a section of the wall at the Memorial (Figure 11), again emphasizing the sacrifice of those who fought and the imperative (and mandate of the museum) to remember.
The multi-media approach to this section of the gallery provides visitors with a sensorial experience of many levels. Sound, visuals, and material objects dominate but the historical information provided on placards and the evaluative questions and statements that augment the material inevitably lead the viewer to an affective response similar to the experience of watching a play (Thiessen's Vimy offers some of these same elements: sound, images, material objects and a connection to real human beings who share their own thoughts and responses to war with the audience). Who were these young men? What was their story? What was the cost to the nation? What was the reward? And was it worth it? How does all of this relate to me, and to our contemporary existence? Obviously these exhibitions are put together with the explicit purpose of drawing such a response. This fits the mandate of the museum and holds with the institutional directive to remember our military history and the development of our great nation. A similar situation can be seen in the Royal Canadian Legion Hall of Honour.41
Although a small bronze maquette of the National War Memorial dominates the hall, the presence of the Vimy Memorial is clearly important. Georges Berton Scott's large painting, *Unveiling Vimy Ridge Monument*, which depicts the opening dedication ceremony, shows various key figures related to the dedication in the foreground and the thousands of Vimy Pilgrims suggested behind them to describe the importance of the event in the eyes of the nation and in the international arena. The painting includes the figures on the memorial and a placard below invites you to visit the Vimy sculptures found in Regeneration Hall.

Religious symbolism is also present in the RCL Hall of Honour. Figure 12 shows the stained glass window in which the figure of the crucified Christ hangs above the *Model for St. Julien Memorial* (by Frederick Chapman Clemesha). Photographic portraits of two young men in uniform hang below the outstretched arms of Christ, and in front of the figures of saints, suggesting the connection often made between the sacrifice of Christ for humanity and the sacrifice of the soldier for his country. These men, the exhibition implies, are like saints in their loyalty and devotion to the cause for which they fight. Again, a small section of the wall of the Vimy Memorial with its series of names, is evident beside the brooding soldier figure. The symbolism of sacrifice and remembrance is layered and impossible to miss.
Not all of the museum displays, however, convey such a blatant message. The Remembrance Hall consists of a simple bench, a small pool of water, a single window and the gravestone of an unidentified soldier. This gravestone came from a cemetery in the Vimy Ridge area, along with the bodily remains which were placed in *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier* in a prominent position in front of the National War Memorial during Remembrance Day ceremonies in 2008. Once a year at 11 a.m. on Nov. 11, sunlight shines (one hopes) through the window in this room, lighting up the gravestone. Here, annual Remembrance Day services are held and serve as a poignant reminder of the Vimy narrative in the context of the Great War and the
development of the Canada's nationhood. The Vimy story is once again emphasized and reiterated.42

Like Remembrance Hall, Regeneration Hall contains very little explanation or interpretation of the items displayed, but the Vimy narrative is repeated through sculptures, paintings and symbolism. The Vimy maquettes dominate this industrial looking section of the museum, which suggest to me the Canadian innovations that military engineers used so effectively in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. It also speaks of modernism—a feature for which Allward is recognized. Likewise, Allward used some of the most technically advanced methods for constructing the Memorial (so advanced that they were untested, and ultimately failed).43 That this room holds the Museum's collection of Vimy sculptures seems entirely appropriate.

The landing above the stairs, which appears in Figure 13, emphasizes two themes through careful placement of art. The first, "sacrifice" is explored through Charles Sims' painting Sacrifice (see Figure 14), which includes imagery of both Christian crucifixion and Canadian nationalism framed beneath the word SACRIFICE and the provincial coats of arms. Described by Brandon and Oliver as "the most religious of the large Canadian War Memorials paintings" and "also the most nationalistic" (Canvas of War, 11), the work depicts war torn soldiers on the battlefield, and in the foreground below the crucifix, the old and young of Canada: men, women and children who stand in a position reminiscent of the family and disciples of Christ, but who reflect the "differences" of Canada in the faces of immigrants and aboriginals. The connection of Christ's sacrifice to the "Easter Battle" at Vimy would have been very clear to the painting's audience of 1918. For the contemporary audience viewing it in the museum, the word "sacrifice" would more likely become the dominant theme. The position of the painting at the top of Regeneration
Hall suggests its prominence, because the majority of the Vimy figures below are looking upwards, drawing the viewer's eyes toward Sacrifice, as Figure 13 indicates.  

![Figure 13](image1.jpg)  

**Figure 13** This photograph indicates the position of Sims' painting, *Sacrifice*, in a prominent position at the top of Regeneration Hall. A selection of the Vimy sculptures can be seen on the floor below. Photo: J. Lermitte

![Figure 14](image2.jpg)  

**Figure 14** *Sacrifice* by Charles Sims. Photo: CWM website

Directly across the room from Sims' painting is a large window through which can be seen the Peace Tower of the Canadian Parliament Buildings. Placed in front of the window, but just below the tower is Allward's sculpture *Hope*. The war veteran who toured me through this remarkable room explained the symbolic importance of this juxtaposition: through the sacrifice of our Canadian veterans, we have hope for a future of peace. On the long wall perpendicular to *Hope* are the four sculptures that speak more directly of sacrifice and Allward's desire for the lessons of war to result in peace (and are described in Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*).
Breaking of the Sword, Sacrifice, The Spirit of Sacrifice (Klara's Torchbearer figure) and The Sympathy of Canadians for the Helpless are exhibited in a row that leads the viewer to the cluster of sculptures that represent the ideals of Canadians at the time: Faith, Hope, Charity, Honour, Justice, Knowledge and Truth. These classical figures, as Brandon describes them in detail in Art and Memorial, are based on classical Greek and Roman virtues, but Allward has modified them to suit his own artistic vision and purpose (13). The figures are devoid of any description other than their titles. The curator of the room has allowed these sculptures to speak in their own way. However, their solemn, sometimes grief-stricken expressions effectively convey the message of loss that Allward is said to have desired.

Two more things are worth noting in this room. The first is the painting, Vimy Ridge (sometimes known as The Ghosts of Vimy) by Australian artist, William Longstaff, which hangs adjacent to the cluster of maquettes just described and which was very popular in the 1930s. The night scene of the Vimy Memorial, which appears in Figure 15, depicts the ghosts of soldiers marching on the fields of battle below the Ridge. It is reminiscent of Allward's visionary dream and once again reinforces the power the Vimy myth. According to the CWM website, "Walter Allward noted in 1921 that he had been inspired by a wartime dream in which dead soldiers 'rose in masses, filed silently by and entered the fight to aid the living. So vivid was this impression, that when I awoke it stayed with me for months. Without the dead we were helpless. So I have tried to show this in this monument to Canada's fallen, what we owed them and we will forever owe them." Urquhart also makes use of this dream in her novel. She describes it as a sign of Allward's obsession with his project and with the grief of the nation.
The second thing worthy of discussion is the looming presence of The LeBreton Gallery, which, as Figure 16 shows, can be seen through the doorway of Regeneration Hall. Here the vehicles and artillery pieces used in battle are on display. I found the juxtaposition of these two rooms quite chilling in the sense that embracing such values as truth, charity, faith and hope may seem pointless in the face of the plethora of weapons of destruction that are displayed in the next room. 46 But this seems to be the purpose of the museum: to encourage visitors to ask questions about the responsibilities that war requires, about the sacrifices that result and the real human beings who are profoundly affected by violence and conflict. The museum asks us to imaginatively engage with the Vimy narrative in a way that is similar to Berton, Thiessen and Urquhart. However, the CWM is informed primarily by its pedagogical function, rather than by the critical function of the writer.
Figure 16  The position of the artillery and vehicles of war in the LeBreton Gallery just behind Regeneration Hall and the Vimy Maquettes provides an eerie contrast. This figure, *Faith*, whose head is surrounded by a halo and who clutches a cross and points to the heavens, represents the Christian world view held by the majority of Canadians in the early twentieth century. However, her position near the Gallery prompts the question, what do we have faith in? Our military prowess? Our ability to innovate methods of war and destruction?

Photo: J. Lermitte

Why Did I Return? Some Conclusions

The theme of regeneration that is described by Regeneration Hall in the CWM, and that is visually and tangibly depicted by the maquettes, is described as the "theme of the Museum's architectural design" and evokes "not only the impact of war on the land, but also nature's ability to regenerate and to accommodate the physical devastation wrought by human conflict" (CWM brochure). This theme of regeneration is worth considering in the context of the Vimy Memorial and its surrounding park area. The planting of Canadian species of trees and the use of land that was once battlefields as grazing land for animals in the existing park area suggest the potential
for regeneration, even of land that was devastated in the process of war. It could also be argued that one of the themes of *The Stone Carvers* is this notion of regeneration, for it is in the process of creating the memorial that Klara, Tilman and Giorgio each find emotional healing and a kind of renewal of the "self." This, in turn, leads to the renewal of relationships and productivity or contribution to society upon their return to Canada. This leads me to broader questions about the role of art in the process of remembrance and re-building that comes after war. How can artists renew or regenerate healing in the act of creation? What role can and should artists play in the healing of a culture? What opportunities for dialogue does art present to the broken individuals and society that have been changed by war? The answers to these questions may well guide governmental decisions about the funding and restoration of arts programs in Canada. They provide important input into discussions about museum policy and practice in Canada. At an even broader level, they provide sound reasons for discussions about the public funding of the publishing industry and the role of theatre, dance, music and visual art in the public realm. Just as Father Gstr found hope and beauty in material ruins, so can we continue to see the potential for regenerative work in the context of the arts in Canada. The funding of the restoration of the Vimy Memorial is one example of the way in which Canada has supported this idea of regeneration. The building of the Canadian War Museum for the purpose of education, preservation and remembrance is another. The Canadian public needs to continue to support and encourage the ongoing work of artists through government funding at the level of the local, the provincial, the national and even the international in order to see the regeneration of our culture.

At the institutional level, Vimy continues to be a foundational story directly connected to the construction and maintenance of national identity and commemoration. Like the terms "multiculturalism" or "tolerance," "Vimy" is loaded with complex social assumptions that are
directly related to our understanding of the history of our nation and our current identity as Canadians. Vimy is also intimately linked to discussions of war and remembrance and the need for public sites and rituals of mourning.

My research confirms that the work of contemporary writers continues to critique and challenge the "traditional" values, ideals and perspectives of our Great War stories. However, they also look to historical narratives as sources of inspiration for their own imaginative interaction with foundational, historical truths. The work of Pierre Berton has had far-reaching effects on contemporary writers who see his populist writing as a source of inspiration in historical and artistic terms. Berton, unlike some traditional writers, made history interesting. He also made an important contribution to the critique of the Vimy narrative and to popular understanding of the Canadian role at the Battle of Vimy Ridge. In doing so, he broke ground for writers like Urquhart and Thiessen to write stories that subvert traditional narratives and engage in critical dialogue about gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion.

My research has also identified the valuable contribution museums and monuments continue to make at the levels of domestic and international, public and private. The use of art in these spaces contributes to more complex dialogue and critical thinking about war. The main strength of this research lies in the interdisciplinary approach to a subject that has been mainly focused on Canadian history, architecture and art history. However, its weakness also lies in the difficulties that an interdisciplinary approach creates, especially in terms of narrowing the topic or gathering sufficient background information from each discipline. In spite of this, by going to Vimy and to the CWM as a literary researcher, my understanding of the importance of interdisciplinary work has been greatly enhanced. At the same time, I bore witness to the Vimy
narrative and returned with a story of my own. Although my story is a personal one, it is, I think, reflective of the experience of many Canadians who are emotionally moved (and even changed) by representations of war in art and literature.

As contemporary Canadian scholars such as Laura Brandon (art history), Alan Filewod (theatre), Sherrill Grace (literary criticism and theatre), Jonathan Vance (history) and David Williams (literary criticism) make new contributions to interdisciplinary research about Canada in the context of the Great War, my discussion about Vimy provides a slightly different subject and approach that may shed light on their work related to other WWI battles and other wars in which Canada was involved.

Possible future directions for research related to my project include an analysis of Joseph Boyden's representation of Vimy and WWI in *Three Day Road*, in terms of race, religion, life on the home front, and gender roles and relationships; and biographical work on Mary Riter Hamilton, a woman artist who painted Vimy and other battle sites after WWI (before the major rebuilding began) with attention to memorials created during and after the war. More work could also be done on the role of oral history and legend in women's lives on the home front during the post-war period. Another related area of research could be analysis of works written by, or about the experiences of, ethnic minorities or immigrants who lived in Canada or did military service during WWI.

As Canadians continue to look to national narratives for assurance and direction in an age in which global conflict and terrorism remain potential threats, conversations and critique about war remains important and productive. The examination of artists' work on war, whether contemporary or historical, provides a valuable contribution to the work of both the private and
the public sector. The ongoing public and institutional support of the fine arts and the humanities in Canada depends on our understanding and commitment to engage with the national myths and historical narratives that shape who we are as Canadians. The return to Vimy is simply one example of that commitment—but it remains one of the most valuable we have.
Endnotes

Chapter One

1 The publication of The Stone Carvers, Three Day Road and Thiessen’s play Vimy marks an increased interest by the artistic community in the site of Vimy. These works are examples of a movement toward remembering and reimagining important historical events—especially, but not only, war. This movement has been analyzed at length by Linda Hutcheon in Rethinking Literary History, by Herb Wyile in Speculative Fictions and Speaking in the Past Tense, and most recently by Sherrill Grace in On the Art of Being Canadian (among others).

2 Notably, no other country names the Battle of Vimy Ridge as a key battle. England and France refer to Vimy as one battle in the larger framework of the Arras Offensive or Battle of Arras.

3 Laura Brandon provides the most comprehensive artistic analysis to date of the Vimy Memorial in her noteworthy study, Art or Memorial: The Forgotten History of Canada’s War Art. She describes the various Vimy sculptures in complex detail that includes discussion of the classical and religious influences on Allward’s work. Surprisingly, this information is not available in any detail at the Memorial’s visitor centre in France. The Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ont. displays seventeen of the original twenty plaster maquettes and provides the names of each one. However, no explanation is provided about Allward’s motivation to choose such subjects. Some of the figures on the memorial include: Truth, Knowledge, Charity, Justice, Honour, Hope, Faith, The Spirit of Sacrifice, The Breaking of the Sword, and The Sympathy of Canadians for the Helpless. Possibly the most familiar and often depicted of the figures is the female mourning figure that stands on the front of the monument, above the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and overlooks the Douai Plain. She is referred to by various names: Canada Bereft, Canada Mourning Her Fallen Sons, Spirit of Canada and Mother Canada.

4 See Sherrill Grace’s, Canada and The Idea of North, for a thorough discussion of discursive formation, as it relates specifically to Canadian literary and artistic works about the North. Linda Hutcheon’s work on “historiographic metafiction” also offers a more theoretical approach to Canadian historical fiction than my own work.
Because the battle occurred on Easter Sunday, it was often called "the Easter Battle" in early reports and historical documents. The Christian symbolism of sacrifice and resurrection were easily projected onto the battle, and supported the cultural and social framework of Canadian society at the time.

The VAC website, www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/ notes the terms of this agreement. Because the land is not technically Canadian, it is subject to French law and rule.

Recruitment posters for WWII include the image of the Vimy Memorial alongside the Torchbearer figure and a quotation from John McCrae's iconic poem, "In Flanders Fields." This suggests that Canadian men should take up the torch of sacrifice thrown to them by soldiers from WWI. A link to this image can be found at: <http://canadaonline.about.com/od/canadaww2/ig/Canadian-Posters-World-War-II/The-Torch-WWII-Poster.htm>

This event is represented in Georges Bertin Scott's painting, *Unveiling Vimy Ridge Monument* (1937). The painting is prominently displayed in the Royal Canadian Legion Hall of Honour in The Canadian War Museum, and depicts the important figures attending the ceremony, including King Edward VIII, French President Albert Lebrun, Walter Allward and Mrs. Charlotte Wood, Canada's first Silver Cross Mother. The position of the painting in the War Museum highlights the importance of the Vimy myth to the Museum's pedagogical and historical viewpoint. In fact, the recurrence of the image of the Vimy Memorial throughout the CWM is notable and is discussed in Chapter 4.

David Inglis' analysis of the myth of Vimy Ridge provides specific information regarding the decline of the myth, especially between 1967 and 1990. Through his analysis of high school textbooks, newspaper and magazine articles, historian's accounts, House of Commons resolutions and political speeches, he argues that the Vimy myth endures as a symbol of nationalism but has been modified according to the needs and/or agendas of the leading political powers. He points to key anniversaries of both Canadian Confederation and the Battle of Vimy Ridge (especially the Canadian Centennial and the Golden Anniversary of Vimy in 1967) as times when the myth is most apparent in Canadian media, and is often used by the current political leadership to promote their particular agendas. For example, in 1967, Prime Minister Pearson used the image of the Vimy Memorial to suggest the importance of Canada's role as a peace-keeper in international affairs. Although Inglis argues that the Vimy narrative continues to
lose prominence in Canada, I suggest that in the years since his analysis, much has changed to indicate an increased visibility of the myth in the Canadian cultural ethos.

Brown's viewpoint, from my 21st Century perspective, reflects a position that has changed (and continues to change) about the meaning of truth and reliability. Historiographic critique has revealed problems associated with hegemonic viewpoints, the exclusion of minority voices in the historical record, and a general failure to listen to all of the voices involved in historic events. Of course, certain factual evidence can be counted on as reliable and 'true,' such as locations of battles or the number of guns used in a particular conflict. But more subjective truth, such as veterans' recollections of experiences, raises problems that concern historians. A writer's decision to include a particular historic event in his story does not necessarily mean that he wants to present his version as truth. Instead, his broader purpose must be considered. In Berton's case this is somewhat problematic because he is writing a non-fiction account of a real event. Modern readers are likely to consider his version of events to be true.

The work of contemporary historians has taken a more critical approach to the realities of WWI. The collection of essays in *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*, for example, looks specifically and critically at Canadian concerns. However, the loss of so many lives—not only Canadians, but British and European as well—and the political failures that led to continued unrest and, ultimately, to the horrors of WWII, make the question of sacrifice a very difficult one. Canada's role at Vimy, while important to the construction of our own national identity, does not reflect the international complexities of the so-called Great War. I want to be careful, therefore, to suggest that some aspects of the Vimy narrative do need to be revised. And this revision can be approached by artists who challenge the early forms of the Vimy myth.

David Williams has written extensive analysis of this program in *Media, Memory and the First World War*. He is interested in the way that modern technology and media are recording oral history through digitalization, thus creating a world-wide audience. He also examines the way that the emotional responses of the viewer are created through subjective "viewing" of the event.
The National War Memorial stands as another important artistic representation of war. Situated near the seat of Parliament in Ottawa, it commemorates the involvement of Canadians from all branches of the Canadian military and the support services (lumbermen, stretcher bearers and nurses).

The Vimy Foundation website includes the following quotation and cites similar statistics to those Thiessen refers to in his play’s introduction: “A Dominion Institute poll taken at the time of the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge revealed that only 30% of Canadians recognized the unique importance of the event in the nation’s history. This startling statistic suggests that many Canadians do not immediately recognize the significance of this battle, and how its legacy contributed to Canada’s emergence on the world stage.” The primary work of the Foundation is to emphasize the importance of Canada's role in WWI via educational programs in an effort to change this statistic. For more detail of the Globe and Mail poll that Thiessen refers to, see Kim Honey's article from April 9, 2002 at http://www.canadahistory.ca/news/slippinghistory.htm. Note that there is a large disparity in the knowledge of Canadians between provinces. For example, 54% of British Columbians named Vimy Ridge as the pre-eminent WWI victory, while only 6% of Quebecers answered the same.

Chapter Two

James Skidmore argues that Urquhart uses what he terms "the German Cultural Imaginary" as a fundamental aspect of the architecture of her novel. He argues convincingly that "Urquhart's novel moves beyond myth...Folk and fairy tale, not myth are what propel this narrative forward"(329). However, I suggest that Vance's notion of myth is more helpful in the context of my discussion. Urquhart's interest (as Skidmore describes it) in the history of southern Ontario and the "contributions of immigrant cultures to the building of that society" (329) is worth noting; her interest in contributing to the discussion of Canada's myth of nation-building is what interests me more.

L.M. Montgomery's novel, *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921) is a home front story set in WWI; its focus is on the war in general, and not specifically Vimy. More recently, Joseph Boyden includes Vimy Ridge as one of several battlefield settings in his novel, *Three Day Road*; like Urquhart, Boyden also includes description of the Canadian home front, but focuses on a residential school in Moose Factory, Ont. Urquhart also acknowledges her debt to the work of

The Canadian women's suffrage movement in the early 1900s was an important political force which influenced social changes that coincided with women's increased presence in the work force. The Wartime Elections Act of 1917 gave the vote to women serving in the forces and to women whose relatives were serving. This was a controversial move in the midst of the conscription debates that were taking place. However, the final result was the *Women's Franchise Act of 1918* which gave all women over the age of 21 the right to vote in federal elections.

Jay Winter provides comprehensive analysis on the social situation of widows and veterans in the Post War period. See *Remembering War*.

Berton argues that the close camaraderie between soldiers develops because they assume that the truth about the realities of war is too painful to be shared with the family and community at home.

Jay Winter discusses the role of "commemoration as an act of citizenship" in *Sites of Memory; Sites of Mourning*. Although his view is primarily from a British position, his argument that the act of remembrance affirms community and asserts its moral character resonates with Urquhart's work. He is interested in "the theme of mourning and its private and public expression" (5). Keshen on the other hand, offers critique of a post-war Canadian attitude that emphasized an "upbeat interpretation" of the war. He sees the development of the nation as closely tied to myth of sacrifice. He also discusses the widely held practice of building war memorials to support the romantic association of war losses with "saintly deaths" and "heroic sacrifice" ("The Great War Soldier as Nation Builder" 11).

Urquhart manages to straddle both views, it seems to me, because Klara, Tilman and Giorgio experience personal healing of emotional trauma through their work on the Vimy Memorial; at the same time Urquhart acknowledges the problematic attitudes of a Canadian public that doesn't wish to think the soldiers died in vain.
The overwhelmingly positive public reception of the Vimy maquettes led to the eventual restoration and exhibition of the sculptures at the Canadian War Museum. Brandon also emphasizes the value of the memorial function of the sculptures as well as the extensive art collection in the CWM, while she discusses them as important sites of memory for the Canadian public. See "Making Memory: Canvas of War and the Vimy Sculptures" in *Canada and the Great War*.

Lane Borstad's essay "Walter Allward: Sculptor and Architect of the Vimy Ridge Memorial," (2008) is an important contribution to the (limited) biography of Allward's life. His work chronicles Allward's architectural career and provides detailed information about Allward's influences and challenges in the creation of the Vimy Memorial. Read alongside Brandon's analysis, Borstad's essay creates a more comprehensive depiction of Allward's vision and his work.

**Chapter Three**

*Vimy* won the CAA Carol Bolt Drama Award for 2009 which suggests its important contribution to theatre as well as to national narratives.

Thiessen’s website, www.vernthiessen.com, includes three reasons to mount the production. The primary one, the "audience," emphasizes the educational value of the play for a wide audience, including students, veterans and culturally diverse groups such as aboriginals and French speakers.

Thiessen is not the first nor the only Canadian playwright to challenge earlier traditional depictions of WWI. John Gray and Eric Peterson's musical, *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1978), endures as a classic of Canadian theatre. Both Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Dancock's Dance* (1996) and David French's *Soldier's Heart* (2001) explore the repercussions of the emotional trauma experienced by soldiers once they have returned home. Internationally, and as early as 1928, *Journey's End*, the famous British play that presents a troubling account of officers' lives on the front, challenged the view that war is an honourable and valorous operation. Similarly, the British musical, *Oh, What a Lovely War* (1963) offered a counter-heroic version of WWI which would have influenced Gray and Peterson.
Jack Granatstein's photographic depiction of WWI, *Hell's Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada's Great War*, is a good example. Likewise, Ted Barris' national bestseller, *Victory at Vimy*, offers previously unpublished accounts of Vimy. Barris cites his debt to Pierre Berton, to unpublished family manuscripts and to the CBC archives for new information about the Battle of Vimy Ridge. However, the patriotic and nationalist undertones of these writers suggests their concern with perpetuating the myth of Canada's "coming of age at Vimy."

Many other contemporary Canadian authors and playwrights, such as Joseph Boyden, David French and Marie Clement, to name just a few, are doing similar work.

Thiessen also acknowledges Will Bird, Mike Mountain-Horse and a number of others for their service to Canada in the Great War.

Although Thiessen's production notes suggest this placement of the beds, the Canadian premier of the play showed an alternative set up, with the four beds placed in a diamond beneath a large tree that becomes a form of crucifix late in the show. Both options support the Christian iconography that Thiessen is employing.

This idea echoes Deena Rymhs' UBC lecture, "For King and Country? War and Indigenous Masculinity," in which she discusses the high proportion of aboriginal men who volunteered to serve because of their belief in a ‘sacred duty’ to fight for “their” land, the terrain they have lived and worked on for generations. The political and national implications of this notion trouble the colonial framework of English Canada at the time.

These ghostlike figures and surreal events contrast with early war plays written and performed by soldiers and war veterans. Alan Filewod, in his presentation, “’The Richest Patriotic Color’: Playing the Great War,” at the UBC symposium “Canada and the Theatres of War,” argued that these plays emphasized “facts” and sought to authentically recreate some of the details of Canadian war experiences. He further argued that these plays emphasized “witnessing” the soldier’s experience.

They also allude to Allward's dream in which the ghosts of Vimy return to the battle field to aid their living comrades in their fight for the ridge. This dream is also depicted in Longstaff's painting *Vimy Ridge*, which hangs in Regeneration Hall in the CWM. See chapter 4 for more detail.
Jack Hodgin's *Broken Ground* and Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Danock's Dance* critique the same situation. In *Broken Ground*, Michael is traumatized when he is unable to prevent the execution of a young soldier who was his former student. In *Danock's Dance*, Danock is emotionally self-destructive because of his decision to execute a soldier who refuses to advance out of the trench.

Jonathan Vance, Joseph Boyden and Deena Rhymes (and others) all point to the complex reasons for this enlistment, such as solutions to poverty, potential for increased social equity, as well as a sense of duty to protect the land of their ancestors.

The CWM website's section on song, found in their "Canada and the First World War" pages, notes that songs often had "antiauthoritarian" or "antiwar" themes which were not comprehended by civilians or those "outside" of the military. Morbid songs such as *We're All Waiting for a Shell* or *Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire* were common. See <http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/guerre/songs-e.aspx>.

Chapter Four

Wilfred Owen's poem, "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" was very much on my mind when I visited the memorial, especially the final two lines: "But the old man would not so, but slew his son/ And half the seed of Europe, one by one."

The *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* published a special issue in 2008 that was dedicated to the Vimy Memorial. Articles written by various scholars discuss a wide range of topics related to the memorial, including Allward's artistic development, The Imperial War Graves commission, and the restoration process of the Vimy Memorial. This issue provides some of the most comprehensive information about the memorial that I have seen to date.

Unlike the CWM which has only two relatively small display areas that feature no more than 15 paintings, in addition to the individual works mounted as part of the multi-media exhibition galleries, the IWM displays the majority of its war art in a large gallery. I did not see an image of the Vimy Memorial anywhere. Mention of Canada was mainly in terms of its role as a part of the Allied military force. However, one important difference is
evident in the art collection. This is where Canada is most clearly represented because of Lord Beaverbrook's involvement in the formation of both Canada and England's War Art programs. The works of a number of artists are held in both museums: C.R.W. Nevinson, Sir William Orpen, and George Clausen to name a few. The "study" of Charles Sims' painting Sacrifice, which I discuss on page 80, is held in the IWM. This crossover effect clearly demonstrates the influence of British War Art on Canada and Canadian war artists.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the way that museum practice is being critiqued by the work of Sherman, Haake and others. Sherman writes extensively on the role of museums in cultural construction and the way that museum exhibitions are gendered, commodified, historicized and hegemonic (See Museum Culture). The CWM as a military history museum is mainly concerned with male viewpoints and the history of a predominantly male enterprise. However, recent exhibitions of women artists' work and the inclusion of women artists in the current war art program, as well as attention to life on the home front show their awareness of the need to broaden the scope of the exhibitions. Works such as The Stone Carvers, and contemporary plays such as Scorched by Wajdi Mouawad and The Monument by Colleen Wagner continue to break new ground in the depiction of the impact of war on women and on the home front, which in turn serves to impact institutional representations of culture and history.

Brandon provides additional analysis of war memorials (as art) in the international context in Art & War (2007). She names Allward as one of two "giants" in First World War memorial architecture. She compares Lutyens' British war memorial in Thiepval, France to the Vimy Memorial, noting, in particular, the importance of the names of the missing soldiers engraved on its walls.

As mentioned in Ch. 1, the Royal Canadian Legion has been at the forefront of remembrance projects in Canada. Their annual poppy campaign provides a visual link to the notion of sacrifice, and their use of the image of the Vimy Memorial in their student materials suggests their interest in preserving and promoting the Vimy myth in Canada.

Governor General Adrienne Clarkson's speech at this event provides an excellent example of the way that artists engage with themes of war and sacrifice. She asks a series of questions that remind us that these soldiers were young men with lives firmly entrenched in reality, as well as hopes and dreams for the future, all of which they
willingly sacrificed. She also reminds the audience that art helps us to understand war more fully: "What that first world war was like has been described in our poetry, novels and painting. Some of our greatest artists came out of that conflict, able to create beauty out of the hell that they had seen" (Clarkson, 16).

43 Julian Smith provides a comprehensive outline of the restoration process of the monument. Because Allward's use of innovative construction techniques resulted in wide scale decay of the stone due to weathering and water damage, careful consideration was made as to whether or not the monument should be restored. The final decision to restore it was, as Smith notes, closely related to the preservation of the names on the plinth (see page 69 of this thesis). The final cost of restoration far exceeded the original cost of construction.

44 The image of Sacrifice which appears on the CMA website appears below the statement "War made Canada." Once again, the development of national identity is framed in the notion of sacrifice for the sake of a greater good. See <http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/exhibitions/canvas/cwa101e.shtml>.


46 The entrance to the main branch of the Imperial War Museum in London opens up to a large space similar to the LeBreton Gallery at the CWM. Visitors can climb inside the tanks and vehicles on display. Planes are suspended from the ceiling. Artillery can be examined. The general interest in the "equipment" of war is obvious by the large numbers of people engaged in climbing on or into the various pieces on display. When I visited in October, 2008, each of the four floors was crowded with people. What surprised me most was the variety of people and languages that I witnessed there: whole families (often including grandparents) of various ethnic and racial backgrounds milled throughout. This was a marked contrast to the CWM which seemed to be visited mainly by retirees on vacation or school tours.
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