The Comforts of Home: Sex Workers and the Canadian War Novel

Retrouver le confort de la maison : la prostitution dans le roman de guerre canadien

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/eccs/643>

DOI: 10.4000/eccs.643

ISSN: 2429-4667

Publisher

Association française des études canadiennes (AFEC)

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2016

Number of pages: 31-46

ISSN: 0153-1700

Electronic reference

Zachary Abram, « The Comforts of Home: Sex Workers and the Canadian War Novel », *Études canadiennes / Canadian Studies* [Online], 80 | 2016, Online since 01 June 2017, connection on 02 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/eccs/643> ; DOI : 10.4000/eccs.643

THE COMFORTS OF HOME: SEX WORKERS AND THE CANADIAN WAR NOVEL

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Canadian cultural memory of the First World War is conspicuously asexual considering Canadians had among the highest rates for venereal disease in the British Expeditionary Force. There is an inherited reticence to discuss soldiers' sex lives. There is no such silence in Canadian war novels. In these novels, sex workers facilitate the forging of a distinctly domestic space. Indicative of the persistent schism between the front and the home-front, however, this proxy space inevitably becomes untenable and the relationship between soldier and sex worker comes to stand in for the fraught relationship between soldier and home-front and vice versa.

La mémoire culturelle canadienne de la Première Guerre mondiale est plutôt asexuée alors qu'il y avait un taux élevé de maladies vénériennes chez les soldats canadiens. Il y a une certaine réticence à discuter de la vie sexuelle des soldats. Pourtant les romans de guerre canadiens rompent ce silence. Dans ces romans, les prostituées recréent un espace familial loin de la maison. Mais, en raison des tensions constantes entre le front de guerre et le front au Canada, cet espace devient insoutenable. La relation entre soldat et prostituée incarne la relation tendue qui existe entre le soldat et son pays natal, et vice versa.

Canadian cultural memory of the First World War is curiously asexual considering Canadians had among the highest rates for venereal disease in the British Expeditionary Force, with an infection rate that reached as high as 28.7% (COOK 2008: 176). Anyone with a passing interest in the First World War is familiar with Trench Foot, and its symptoms are synonymous with the squalor of trench warfare. Yet, only 74,711 cases of Trench Foot were treated during the entire war (MITCHELL and SMITH 1931: 88). Venereal disease, on the other hand, accounted for 416,891 hospital admissions in the British Army (1931: 74). Although a British soldier was five times more likely to be admitted to hospital for syphilis and gonorrhea, in the popular imagination it is Trench Foot that persists. There is a reticence, perhaps the result of inherited Victorian prudery or the unwillingness to "sully the reputations" of the war dead, to discuss soldiers' sex lives. As a result, discussions of the First World War tend to forgo the bedroom in favour of the trench.

There is no such silence, however, in Canadian war novels. Sex workers are a conspicuous trope in Canadian war fiction.¹ They begin to appear

¹ Canadian war novels that feature sex workers are: *All Else is Folly* by Acland (1929), *Generals Die in Bed* by Harrison (1930), *God's Sparrow* by Child (1937), *Execution* by McDougall (1958),

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in novels of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Canadian war literature began to shy away from Romantic depictions of soldiers as Christian crusaders. Although there are some notable exceptions, like the staunchly anti-war *Aleta Day* by Francis Marion Beynon, the vast majority of Canadian novels written during the war and immediately after follow the “grand adventure” paradigm of war writing. These novels follow a set formula established by Ralph Connor, the era’s most popular writer. They were “rhetorical, romantic, idealistic, and national” (NOVAK 2000: 7). Many Canadian novelists, not only Connor, conceived of the First World War as no less than a Holy War. In Basil King’s *The City of Comrades* (1919), the war was “the great dramatic conflict between good and evil to which human nature has been working up ever since it committed its first sin” (2011: 281). In this battle, the Canadian soldier was no less than “Jesus in Khaki” (COOPERMAN 1967: 18). The archetype of the soldier as Arthurian knight adhered to the Protestant British values of a community that was staunchly pro-war at the outset of the conflict. When the markets crashed in 1929 and the world settled in for a protracted economic depression, Romantic panegyrics to the glory of war that had so dominated the literary marketplace began to recede. Novels began to be written by veterans who made a concerted effort to represent the war “as it was,” and such realist novels emerged as an antidote to the nationalist mythmaking of previous efforts.

One of the ways in which veteran-authors depicted the war “as it was” was to reckon honestly with the sexuality of soldiers, including the propensity of the enlisted man to pay for sex. These novels resist moralization. Rarely singled out for derision, sex workers are acknowledged to have played a vital role in the war effort. The more prurient aspects of their job are deemphasized in favour of praising their domesticating prowess. The sex workers of Canadian war fiction are usually one-dimensional and not afforded much of an interior life. They exist primarily to help the protagonist recover from trauma. Yet, there is value in reading these stock characters because of what they reveal about wartime concepts of women’s work, how war influences sexuality, and how soldiers overseas conceived of the home front. In many veteran-penned Canadian war novels, such as *All Else is Folly* by Peregrine Acland (1928) or *Generals Die in Bed* by Charles Yale Harrison (1930), sex workers facilitate the forging of a distinctly domestic space so far away from home. Indicative of the persistent schism between the front and the home front, however, this proxy

The Wars by Findley (1977), *Broken Ground* by Hodgins (1998), *Three Day Road* by Boyden, *Maclean* by Donaldson (2005).

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space inevitably becomes untenable and the relationship between soldier and sex worker comes to stand in for the fraught relationship between soldier and home front and vice versa.

Until recently, representations of sex work in Canadian literature have been remarkably homogenous in both theme and form. Fictional sex workers tend to fall into two categories: the fallen woman, like Hoda in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*, or the hooker with a heart of gold in countless novels. In the *Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work*, Shawna Ferris writes that many Canadian novels published in the wake of the First World War "expose and question many lingering Victorian moral codes [...] and examine social and cultural anxieties associated with women's growing economic and sexual freedom" (FERRIS 2006: 77).

When a British soldier was deployed to the Front in 1914, a short message from Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, was folded into his Pay Book: "In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both" (ARTHUR 2013: 27). What is absent from Lord Kitchener's edict is exactly how this was to be accomplished. In his memoirs, Private Frank Richards wrote of Kitchener's message: "They may as well have not been issued at all for all the notice we took of them" (MAKEPEACE 2012: 67). The young, lonely, and frightened soldiers were understandably insubordinate and frequented sex workers with regularity in both the brothels of England and the *maisons tolérées* of France. "Rouen has been ruinous to my purse (not to mention my morals)," wrote Lt. James H. Butlin, "but I have enjoyed myself" (MAKEPEACE 2012: 69).

Although army brass was well aware of what happened when its enlisted men were on leave, the policy towards hiring sex workers vacillated between crude pragmatism and Kitchener's idealism. In a 1917 parliamentary debate on the harmful effects of prostitution on Canada's enlisted men, Sir Hamar Greenwood lamented that so many Canadian soldiers needed treatment for venereal disease after a stay in England:

During a recent visit to the Dominion I met many fathers and mothers whose boys had been sent back to Canada debilitated and ruined for life because they had been enmeshed by some of the harpies who are still allowed to go very near the camps, and especially in this great Metropolis, and again and again these parents have said to me, "We do not mind our boys dying on the field of battle for old England, but to

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think that we sent our sons to England to come back to us ruined in health, and a disgrace to us, to them, and to the country, is something that the Home Country should never ask us to bear.” (MACLAREN 2015:117)

It is hard to believe that any parent would prefer a son be killed overseas than return the subject of scandal. Despite Greenwood’s high rhetoric, the British army never addressed this issue; it continued to encourage abstinence though there was never any punishment for contracting VD, only for concealing it. The stifling silence surrounding the issue is represented in Canadian veteran W. Redvers Dent’s short story “The Original,” first published in a 1930 issue of the pulp magazine *Adventure*:

“There’s one man I would like to report sick, sir.”
Again they exchanged glances.
“There are a few others in other platoons; I will tell the M.O. [Medical Officer] about it and get them sent to field ambulances.” (1930: 22)

Though it remains unsaid, it is clear from context clues that the soldiers are discussing venereal disease.

In addition to acknowledging the sexual lives of soldiers, Canadian fictional representations of wartime sex work also disrupt the accepted narrative of women’s work in the First World War. Often characterized as a period of liberation, the war supposedly hastened the integration of women into paid work and relieved many women of their tether to the domestic sphere. This belief, however, serves as a politically comforting national imaginary that entwines the First World War, and women’s performance in it, with an unstoppable march towards progress. J.G. Sime’s short story, “Munitions,” participates in this narrative by depicting the sense of freedom that enfranchised work afforded women:

Hard work. Long hours. Discomfort. Strain. That was about the sum of it, of all that she had gained [. . .] but then, the sense of freedom! The joy of being done with cap and apron. The feeling that you could draw your breath—speak as you liked—wear overalls like men—curse if you wanted to. (2001: 75)

There has been some resistance to this narrative of female social and economic advancement in recent scholarship. For Catherine Speck, “War is particularly

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gender-biased, dominated by the physical and cognitive spatial organization of 'the front' and the 'home front' that categorizes the roles of men and women in wartime and implies that the location and contribution of women on the home front is on a lesser scale" (SPECK 2014: 2). Penny Summerfield argues that the First World War served as a catalyst for the segregation of women into lower-paying "inferior" sectors of work while not relieving them of their domestic duties at all. Still, only one perspective of women's wartime work has been permitted to exist in cultural memory. Even Summerfield's worthwhile study is insufficient because it fails to adequately address one important facet of the wartime economy – sex work.

As Simone de Beauvoir wrote, "In a world where misery and unemployment prevail, there will be people to enter any profession that is open" (1952: 524-525). This was certainly the case during the First World War. Sex work has always been a reality in London, and the influx of lonely, scared and temporarily rich soldiers made for an eager clientele, which resulted in greater supply. In his survey of Canadians in the First World War, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918*, Tim Cook quotes one Canadian soldier: "The brutalizing influence of militarism tends to lower the best of men. Add to this the absence of church life, home life, wives, mothers and sweethearts and the wonder isn't that so many fall but that any go straight at all" (COOK 2008: 175).

The experiences soldiers had with sex workers were by no means monolithic. There is plenty of evidence in the letters and memoirs of soldiers to suggest that many of them queued up behind their comrades for a brief turn with a woman. Brothels were easily identifiable by their red lamps, and queues and crowds of men were usually seen milling about outside. Corporal Jack Wood described the scene outside one such establishment as "a crowd, waiting for a cup-tie at a football final in Blighty" (MAKEPEACE 2012: 71). In his popular memoirs, George Coppard recounts a similar scene:

There were well over a hundred and fifty men waiting for opening time, singing Mademoiselle from Armentières and other lusty songs. Right on the dot of 6PM a red lamp over the doorway of the brothel was switched on. A roar went up from the troops, accompanied by a forward lunge towards the entrance. (1969: 56)

In a letter back home, one Canadian soldier described English women as "snakes from hell with fire in their mouth all over" (COOK 2008: 176).

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Canadian novelists, however, tend to deemphasize these mercenary encounters and depict more domestic affairs that almost resemble courtship.

Performative courtship best describes the relationship between Alec Falcon, the protagonist of Peregrine Acland's *All Else is Folly*, and his temporary paramour, Myra. The novel's epigraph from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly" (ACLAND 1929: vi), espouses an essentialist view of gender which the rest of the novel never fulfils. Falcon, whose name reveals his status as authorial stand-in, has been traumatized by his experience in France but hopes to convalesce while on leave in London. The woman he loves remains aloof because her husband is a prisoner in Germany. Although her husband is an abusive alcoholic, she remains faithful to him out of obligation and guilt. Falcon, therefore, is alone and set adrift in London. In an attempt to cheer himself up, he watches a musical comedy, the spectacle only making him more miserable: "To go through all those months in the trenches – for this!" (1929: 184).

Falcon is able to find a measure of respite only with a woman. He meets Myra at the Prince Rupert Lounge, where "most of the women wore too much make-up [...] But not much more than their non-professional sisters" (1929: 185). Indeed, a large part of Myra's appeal is her ability to seem like a "normal woman." She is a Russian ex-art student whose lover was killed in the war. She is vehemently anti-war: "Myra surprised Alec by the bitterness of her passion against war. The natural consequence, perhaps, of the loss of her lover" (1929: 190). Falcon, himself increasingly disillusioned with fighting, is smitten: "He had discovered in himself a great liking for Myra – this girl who lived outside the conventions, who saw life only in terms of passion" (1929: 191). Although they make love, in his descriptions of their congress, Acland resorts to an unconvincing sentimentality that is entirely out of character considering the realist aspirations of the rest of the novel:

Mutely, she told of the rhythm that sways the vast, slow-moving seas.
Fiercely, she showed him the fire that whirls the stars in their courses.
Limply, she lay when the last wave of passion had burst like a breaker
assaulting a cliff, ascending to heaven [...] falling. (1929: 192)

Acland's seeming inability to describe sex might indicate that the crux of Myra and Falcon's relationship does not rest in their sexual chemistry. Myra redeems an otherwise torturous leave with companionship and compassion. She affords

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Falcon the domesticity he craves. She says, "I am young, I am full of vitality. I don't know that I could use it better than by giving a few hours of pleasure to some officer home, tired, from the trenches" (1929: 189). Their relationship is the performance of courtship wherein Myra stands in for Falcon's real love and Falcon plays the role of her deceased lover.

Although their relationship is predicated on something other than mere transactional sex, Myra is still a sex worker and needs to be paid. This too, however, is filtered through several layers of performance. First, Myra refuses payment. When Falcon insists and produces a roll of cash, Myra's adeptness with handling paper money momentarily punctures the veil of the domestic scene she has created:

Myra laughed at him.

"The more you hurry, the slower you are," she said – "and you trying to catch a train. Here, give them to me. My fingers are quick."

Too quick, thought Alec, as he watched her dexterously strip off not five notes, but eight. (1929: 194)

The conclusion of Myra and Falcon's relationship is inevitable, and Falcon's brief reprieve from the horrors of the trenches is partially marred by the expedient nature of their parting. Nevertheless, Acland depicts a relationship between soldier and sex worker that is something other than what the Lord Kitcheners and Sir Hamar Greenwoods of the world could conceive. Falcon is not ruined or debilitated for life and Myra is not some harpy. They are two people in an extreme situation who were in a unique position to help one another.

In her article, "Male Heterosexuality and Prostitution During The Great War," Clare Makepeace identifies the two primary motivations for soldiers who chose to frequent brothels and hire sex workers. The British Army chose to turn a blind eye to brothel visits because of a prevalent belief that it was unhealthy for men, especially married ones, to abstain from sex for too long. Rather than as a means of satisfying a physiological impulse, however, soldiers' letters and memoirs reveal that they visited sex workers either as a reward for surviving battle or as a means of escape from a culture of immanent death. Second Lieutenant Dennis Wheatley asked, "Why should a man who had been deprived of women for possibly many months and might be dead within a week, be denied a little fun?" (MAKEPEACE 2012: 69). Canadian novels of the First World War confirm this view, but add an element not discussed by

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Makepeace – the desire of Canadian soldiers to forge a proxy domestic space overseas, the desire for the comforts of home.

The domestic dynamic hinted by Acland in *All Else is Folly* is fully delineated in one of Canada's most enduring anti-war novels, Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed*. The novel, a blistering indictment of war as violent folly, is told through the perspective of an unnamed narrator. His anonymity heightens his everyman qualities and, more importantly, points to the interchangeability of the enlisted man: "all a soldier needed was a strong back and a weak mind" (HARRISON 2007: 73). Harrison's cynical tone is so tinged with irony that the novel would lapse into satire if it were not so brutal: "Out on rest we behaved like human beings; here we are merely soldiers" (2007: 49). As the narrator parades down Montreal's Ste. Catherine Street before his regiment is shipped to Europe, it is a sex worker who provides him with comfort: "All day long the military police had been rounding up our men in saloons, in brothels. We are heroes, and the women are hysterical now that we are leaving" (2007: 17). As he makes his way to Bonaventure Station, "A befurred young woman puts her soft arm around my neck and kisses me. She smells of perfume. After the tense excitement of the day it is delightful [...] I do not want to go to war" (2007: 17). Though their encounter is fleeting, the woman comes to symbolize home for the soldier and his life before the war, "I am only eighteen and I have not had any experiences with women like this. I like this girl's brazenness. She is the last link between what I am leaving and the war" (2007: 17).

In the trenches, the narrator is compelled to commit acts of brutality. Like Falcon, he is traumatized by what he must do in Europe. While on a raid, he stabs a German soldier named Karl with his bayonet: "My tugging and pulling works the blade in his insides. Again those horrible shrieks! I place the butt of the rifle under my arm and turn away, trying to drag the blade out. It will not come" (2007: 63). Unable to extricate his blade from the German's ribcage, the narrator must fire his weapon to break free. This moment is significant because the soldier cannot help but see his own plight in the scared face of his German counterpart. When, by coincidence, the narrator takes Karl's brother hostage, he insists that the prisoner "be treated nicely" (2007: 66). Karl's brother thanks the narrator and says, "Du bist ein guter soldat" (2007: 67). The narrator is incredulous.

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This encounter haunts the narrator who cannot shake his sense of culpability about Karl's death. Like Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith, he believes that he has committed a crime and is incapable of equivocating by invoking clichéd platitudes so common in war. In London, he attempts to replicate the sense of calm he felt on Saint Catherine Street by enlisting the services of an English sex worker named Gladys. For the narrator, Gladys is "that delightful combination of wife, mother, and courtesan – and I, a common soldier on leave, have her!" (2007: 94). The Freudian implications are obvious: "She does not call me by name but uses 'boy' instead. I like it. In a dozen different ways she makes me happy" (2007: 94). The physical act of sex is barely mentioned. Instead, Gladys satisfies his other non-carnal needs: "There is a glorious breakfast on the table, grilled bacon, crisp and brown, two fried eggs, a pot of marmalade, a mound of toast, golden yellow and brown, and tea. I fall to. Gladys looks on approvingly. How well this woman understands what a lonely soldier on leave requires" (2007: 93-94). For Gladys, sex work is the performance of domesticity: "She is a capable cook, and delights in showing me that her domestic virtues are as great as her amorous ones. I do not gainsay either" (2007: 94).

The Oedipal implications of these encounters are hard to ignore. There is a well-established tradition of representing soldiers as children and reinforcing the maternal qualities of the state and, ergo, the home front. In these novels, the relationship between soldier and sex worker "evokes a long and potent tradition of both state and civilians mobilizing motherhood as the symbol of sacrifice in wartime."² The symbolic mother was a potent image for wartime propagandists and recruiters. Depictions of good and bad motherhood were mobilized to garner support for the war and drive up recruitment numbers. To achieve his goal of mobilizing 500,000 recruits in 1916, Robert Borden and his team of propagandists enlisted a veritable army of fictitious mothers for posters, pamphlets, and stories. One famous British example was an anti-pacifist letter, first published by *The Morning Post* in 1916, signed by "A Little Mother" who, despite allegedly only having one son, assured her readers that she would remain steadfast:

We women pass on the human ammunition of "only sons" to fill up the gaps, so that when the "common soldier" looks back before going

² EVANS, Suzanne (2015), "Raising 'Human Ammunition': Motherhood, Propaganda, and the Great War," *Active History*, <http://activehistory.ca/2015/08/raising-human-ammunition-motherhood-propaganda-and-the-great-war/>.

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“over the top” he may see the women of the British race at his heels, reliable, dependent, uncomplaining. (GRAVES 1960: 188-89)

From a modern perspective, this type of rhetoric might seem remarkably callous. At the height of the war, however, and in the face of immense community pressure to “do your bit,” these themes, which conflated motherhood with duty and sacrifice, were quite powerful. Canadian war novels have examined the maternal aspects of war whether by depicting literal mothers, as in Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*, or by commenting on this dynamic through proxy mothers, like Gladys in *Generals Die in Bed*.

After the guns fell silent, motherhood once again proved useful to those who wished to solidify the war’s narrative and legacy. Now, mothers were vessels of bereavement. There are few women depicted on war monuments, but the ones that are tend to be allegorical. They are mourning mothers, “portrayed in art and literature as grief-stricken but steadfast, holding true to [their] faith and ideals, and demanding that we remember and value the sacrifices they and their sons have made.”³ The controversial *Never Forgotten* memorial, colloquially known as *Mother Canada*, a \$25 Million twenty-four-metre statue of a veiled female figure once planned for Cape Breton, is a testament to the fact that the figure of the grieving mother remains as compelling as ever. Though the now defunct *Mother Canada* was supposedly meant to symbolize the country beseeching its war dead to return, it is undeniable that an identical symbol of faithful motherhood was invoked to send them overseas in the first. It is likely only a matter of time before such a powerful image is deployed once again for similar means.

Despite the maternal happiness Gladys affords him, the narrator of *Generals Die in Bed* remains haunted by the trenches. He confesses, “I am a criminal. Did I ever tell you that I committed murder?” This takes Gladys aback. When the narrator clarifies that the “murder” he committed was of an enemy in the trenches, Gladys is relieved, “You silly boy. I thought you had really murdered someone” (2007: 95). The disagreement Gladys and the narrator have over the nature of murder is part and parcel of the ideological schism between the front and the home front. The faux-domestic space that Gladys creates can last only for so long because the narrator cannot bear being around those who have not experienced what he has experienced. The soldier/civilian schism is exacerbated when Gladys takes the protagonist out for

³ Ibid.

a night on the town. In an echo of *All Else is Folly*, rather than allowing the soldier to escape, the spectacle serves only to alienate him further from the non-military population. As burlesque dancers sing an up-tempo version of “Oh, It’s a Lovely War” in front of the Union Jack, Gladys and the rest of the audience erupt in cheers and applause. The narrator, however, feels miserable. Gladys suggests that perhaps those cheering are searching for a means of escape. The narrator disagrees and shouts, “These people have no right to laugh [...] They have no business to forget. They should be made to remember” (2007: 89). His protests fall on deaf ears, and those who do hear dismiss his outburst as evidence that he is “shell-shocked.” Gladys admonishes that he is “spoiling [his] leave. Can’t you forget the front for the few days you have before you?” (2007: 91). The narrator cannot forget, and the disparity between propaganda and experience manifests itself in hatred for those who are not at the front. For the civilian, the Germans can remain the beastly, baby-murdering “Huns” of propagandistic leaflets and posters. The narrator can see only the face of Karl, his murder victim.

When he must leave to go back to the front, Gladys asks through weepy eyes, “Have you been happy, my boy?” (2007: 97). Although she likely adopted her profession out of financial necessity, she still sees herself, and rightly, as an important part of the war effort. She shows kindness to the soldiers during their rare moments of respite even if this kindness is only artifice. The narrator is grateful for the break Gladys has given him, but the disparity between propaganda and reality reveals the pretence of their domesticity, and he returns to the front as cynical as ever. Major George McFarland likely summed up the narrator’s feelings when he said, “I realized bitterly the truth of the old saying that the man who is most in need of leave is the man who has just had it” (COOK 2008: 178).

In the Canadian critical imagination, novels of the First World War have far outperformed novels of the Second World War. Findley’s *The Wars*, Jane Urquhart’s *The Stone Carvers* (2001), and Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road* all persist in academic and popular discussions. No novel about the Second World War holds an equivalent position. This imbalance only further cements the First World War’s reputation as Canada’s de facto war of independence. Even today, writers are reticent to critique the First World War, and especially the Battle of Vimy Ridge, as Canada’s founding myth. In *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada’s Great War*, Jeffrey A. Keshen notes, “There [...] persists the picture of soldiers who, through their extraordinary bravery, won the hardest and most important battles – particularly

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Second Ypres and Vimy Ridge – and thus emerged a singular and heroic force in transforming Canada from colony to nation” (1996: xvii). In *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, Jonathan F. Vance confirms that the representation of the First World War “as a nation-building experience of signal importance” has been propagated since “the earliest days of war.” He writes, “Canada’s progress from colony to nation by way of Flanders, an interpretation born in the early days of war, has become the standard method of judging the impact of 1914-1918” (VANCE 1997: 10). Neta Gordon sums up Canada’s complex relationship with the First World War as an unspoken cultural agreement: “war in general is condemned even while Canadian participation in *this* war is commended” (GORDON 2014: 6).

The prudery of collective memory that characterizes the First World War, therefore, does not extend to the Second. Discussions of the Second World War would not be complete without mention of Betty Grable and the other pin-up girls who adorned the walls of barracks and the noses of airplanes. Discussions of the First World War omit mention of Raphael Kirchner’s lingerie pin-ups that were a fixture of the dugouts or the so-called Khaki-Fever that swept the young female populace when in the presence of a man in uniform. The way Canadian novels of the Second World War depict sex and sex work is also different.

Colin McDougall’s *Execution* (1958) is an emblematic example. Traumatized by his participation in the execution of two Italian deserters, *Execution*’s Lieutenant Adam tries to forget his sin by becoming a hyper-competent soldier. Adam strives to be the best at following orders and does not engage his moral consciousness until an encounter with an Italian sex worker, named Elena, in the town of Bari. Elena pleads with Adam to repeat “*Io ti amo*” before they have sex so that she does not feel like a commodity. Adam obliges, and the words have a profound effect on him as well: “It was pretence, but he had given her something; and, oddly, he felt better at once as though he had also given something to himself” (2005: 102). This time it is the soldier that forges an artificial domestic space for the sex worker. Adam continues, “*Io ti amo* [...] He knew they meant something of immense significance; at this moment they were the only words in the world that mattered” (2005: 102). His encounter with Elena shocks Adam out of the cycle of denial and efficiency, “There was only one difference in his state before and after Bari. Now he was aware of the emptiness inside him: and he knew that not all his competence, nor all his passion or concern for the men of his Company would ever suffice to fill

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it" (2005: 108). Like the relationship between Falcon and Myra, Adam's display in Bari is pure performance.

At novel's end, Adam must acquiesce to another pointless and bureaucratic execution – this time of a fellow soldier named Jones. This execution is somehow different from the first because the final execution of Jones functions in much the same way as the performance of love between Elena and Adam. Warren Cariou argues that the second execution is a "ceremonial performance Adam creates in order to transform the act of execution from the most vicious, pointless slaughter to something else... The execution is really a ritual of love, in which *amo* becomes ammo, and Jones becomes a Christ-like figure who does not die in vain because the ceremony of his death enables the moral salvation of others" (2005: 277). As in *Generals Die in Bed*, sex, love, and death form a theoretical matrix through which a soldier can cope with the constant violence he must commit and witness. This time, however, the soldier invokes the rhetoric of domesticity for the sake of the sex worker.

Why does cultural memory of the Second World War allow room for the sex lives of soldiers while the First World War seems so reticent? It is likely due to the unprecedented efforts at memorialisation that occurred immediately after the First World War. The sheer magnitude of casualties in the First World War, and the enormity of the collective grief, necessitated the self-conscious creation of monuments as sites of mourning. As a result, monuments were constructed to honour the dead and missing with unparalleled rapidity. The unprecedented speed with which these monuments had to be constructed resulted in a uniformity of who and what was represented. To what extent, however, was the construction of these memorials an act of equivocation or even erasure? Memorials necessarily resist experimentation and innovation. This traditionalism was a wartime necessity: "Traditional modes of seeing the war, while at times less challenging intellectually or philosophically, provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind" (WINTER 1995: 5). Modernism and other forms of the radical avant-garde could express the sense of outrage felt by many people during and after the war but, according to Winter, "it could not heal" (1995: 5). The strength of traditional forms of art and culture, like war memorials, "lay in their power to mediate bereavement" (1995: 5). Nuance, therefore, lost out to allegory, and the representation of the soldier rarely transcended archetype. Soldiers remained the knights of Arthurian romance.

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In contemporary novels written about the First World War, sex workers tend to be portrayed as yet another facet of the war's tragedy and confirm the widely held conception, perpetuated by Paul Fussell and others, of the war as an unforgivable transgression against civilization. In *Broken Ground* by Jack Hodgins, for instance, one character describes the scene outside a brothel: "Two hundred men lined up outside the *maison de tolérance* waiting their turn. I heard of one place where there were only three women. They last two weeks and have to retire. It's pretty hard to think of those two hundred men as anything more than 'two hundred men lined up for a call of nature'" (1998: 112). Similarly, in Allan Donaldson's *MacLean* (2007), sex workers are folded into the stifling chaos of wartime London:

Masses of people, soldiers, civilians, tremendous noise, talk, shouts, engines, a line of parked ambulances with red crosses on the sides and roofs. A faint mist of rain. And a girl in the shadows just inside the archway saying to him in a low voice as he went past towards the station, "A little comfort, soldier, before you go back over there?" (2007: 11)

Novels written closer to the war, often by veterans, tend not to portray sex work as such a debased or utilitarian activity. Sex workers are not part and parcel of the war's culture of death, but rather a means of escape from that culture. Modern novelists, however, employ sex workers as another example to add to their litany of tragedy.

Sex work remains an understudied aspect of the First World War. The centenary of the war in 2014 prompted a great deal of renewed interest and remembrance but the contributions of Great War sex workers are still largely forgotten. It is not clear what has caused this cultural amnesia but it does a disservice to the enlisted man not to conceive of him as a full person with desires. It also does a disservice to the sex workers who, although they may have chosen their profession out of financial necessity, provided soldiers with a brief reprieve from the chaos and violence that defined their lives. The two most enduring archetypes of the Great War soldier simply cannot accommodate this discussion. The image of the soldier as the saintly knight of Romance still persists to some extent. Arthurian knights tend not to frequent prostitutes. The other lasting archetype, the young innocent sent to his death by old fools, similarly does not allow for much nuance. State-sanctioned efforts at memorialisation, in addition to allowing for sincere expressions of grief, lean heavily on allegory and tend to reinforce socially conservative values. In order

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to maintain continuity with tradition and social values, memorialisation emphasized that the soldiers had not died in vain and that it was incumbent upon the survivors to protect the status quo to render themselves worthy of the dead. Fiction, on the other hand, allows for the representation of a person's interior life. In a realist novel, characters transcend allegory and soldiers are permitted to be flawed human beings whose sexuality and sexual choices were understandably influenced by the war. It is no surprise, then, that novels offer a unique space for dealing with taboo aspects of the wartime experience.

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