

**THREE SOLDIERS
AND THE ETHOS
OF SERVICE**

JOHN BURGE

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The First World War and what we left behind

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Cover photo: The two figures at the cenotaph designed by Walter Allward, Stratford, Ontario. (Photo by the author.)

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She reached the farther shore and paused on her stick beside the Artillery Memorial's bronze figures: private soldiers deep in thought, heads gravely bowed, a fourth lying dead, his tin hat on his chest. Survivors of 1914-18. Eleanor knew them well. She had over the years, when you still drove into London by car, stopped beside them stuck in traffic for ten minutes at a time. She was a pacifist and had regularly marched to Aldermaston but these four had always humbled her, exalted her: obedient, silent, unassailable heroes.

-Jane Gardam, from her short story "Hair of the Dog"

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This book is dedicated to my parents, Thomas Whitfield Burge (1912-1987) and Margaret Eleanor Stewart Burge (1916-1997), no strangers to service and duty.

JB, April 2015

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Introduction

A recent *New Yorker* cartoon shows two men in suits seated across a desk. The more senior – the one with glasses, holding a file – is a prospective employer, but it's the other man who seems relaxed and self-assured, with an easy smile and crossed legs. He's not surprised when the employer says: "I'm fascinated by your résumé, particularly the advertising supplement."¹

Self-advertisement is key to the way we live now. Immodesty is encouraged, especially in the marketplace and social media, and we are pressed to be our own top sales rep. In 1959, Norman Mailer published *Advertisements for Myself*, a collection of his shorter pieces. At the time, the title was startling. Fifty years ago, self-advertisement was revolutionary, but Mailer was a man of his times, even a little ahead of them.²

In Britain, "I'm Alright Jack," a comedy, was released the same year. Starring Ian Carmichael as the guileless and terribly decent young Englishman bewildered by the selfishness he finds everywhere and at all levels, "I'm Alright Jack" depicted an emerging culture of self-interest. The year before, a very different film was released: "Ice-Cold in Alex," the story of three men and a woman who survive the North African desert in the Second World War by pulling together and relying on each other. "I'm Alright Jack" reflected a contemporary way of looking at things, "Ice-Cold in Alex" an older, more traditional one. The late 1950s was pivotal that way.

Fifteen years earlier, in the real desert war of 1940-43, Keith Douglas, a young British officer, reflected on his public school officer-contemporaries in "Aristocrats":

*Peter was unfortunately killed by an 88;
it took his leg away, he died in the ambulance.
I saw him crawling on the sand, he said
It's most unfair, they've shot my foot off.*

*How can I live among this gentle
obsolescent breed of heroes, and not weep?
Unicorns, almost,
for they are fading into two legends
in which their stupidity and chivalry
are celebrated.*³

These men, Douglas wrote, with their “famous unconcern,” were both fool and hero. The First World War, stripping the modern world of its nineteenth century ideals, values, and faith, left these brave, uncynical men the object of social ambivalence. The selfless, modest, and sangfroid heroes of France and Belgium had had their day. With the breakdown of social norms after 1918, something brasher, more restless, and more individualistic came into play. We won’t be fooled again, the next generation said, and the century rolled on.

Percival Molson and Talbot Papineau were among the millions who didn’t survive the war. Born to privileged families in Quebec, their pre-1914 lives had intersected repeatedly, and early in the war both joined the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). They served with distinction on the Western Front, and both commanded rifle companies at the time of their deaths in July and October 1917. Percy was my great-grandfather’s first cousin.

Walter Allward, sculptor and architect of the Vimy Monument, is also part of this story. Several years older than Percy and Talbot and, unlike them, a man with a young family, he didn’t join up. Instead, he spent the rest of his life serving through art those who had served in the flesh. His example, as much as Percy and Talbot’s, is one of service and duty.

These men grew up decades before we crossed what the American writer David Brooks calls the narcissism line.⁴ Though very different from each other, Percy, Talbot, and Walter shared social values and ideals we view as obsolete, quaint, charming in an old-fashioned way, and brave but unwise. They didn’t view gallantry ironically, and for them a man or woman’s success and reputation were measured,

to a striking extent, by the principles he or she stuck by. In the end, they believed that character, not personality, was paramount.

In January 1917, Herbert Molson, Percy's oldest brother and an officer with the 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada), wrote to his young son:

My dear old Tom,

. . . I'm pleased at your report and glad to see you doing so well in your classes, but don't neglect athletics & the other accomplishments that go to make a real man and gentleman. Remember what I have often told you: try to be proficient in all manly sports, and accomplishments such as dancing, music, etc. are most useful & necessary in after life if you wish to take your proper place in the world & command the respect of men & women who count. Above all things, though, it is character that counts, & the more one sees of life the more one realizes this. . . . Do not stand bullying, & remember that manners count for much in the world.

The Western world cracked during the First World War and was never the same. Ninety years later, it cracked again: the first decade of this century birthed a new age, one based on digitalization, globalization, and sovereign corporate capitalism. Profit, personality, and promotion are the game, and public life is largely about winning and losing. Like Keith Douglas's gentle, obsolescent breed of heroes, earlier values, ideals, and social norms seem passé. Like all things passé, however, they show us where we came from and what we left behind.⁵

Chapter One

Percy Molson, that selfsame excellence



Percy Molson. (McCord Museum, accession number II-226375.0.)¹

In 1944, a former McGill University hockey player looked back on a game played forty years earlier. Recalling a match with Queen's University when he'd been McGill's goalie, Frederick Tees wrote:

One amusing but characteristic incident occurred in the game played between Queen's and McGill, where George Richardson and Percy Molson . . . were the respective captains. The referee proceeded to put Molson off for a heavy body check on Richardson, but the latter, picking himself up and seeing what was happening,

*protested that the check was a fair one. The referee agreed and cancelled the penalty. Subsequently Molson was given credit for a goal, but he pointed out to the referee that the puck had gone in off his arm and the goal was disallowed.*²

Percy and George later served in the Canadian infantry in the First World War. Both were regarded as exemplary men of principle, and both were killed in action, again as captains.³

Percy was born in the resort community of Cacouna, Quebec, on August 14, 1880.⁴ The son of John Thomas and Jennie Baker Butler Molson, he was the great-great grandson of John Molson, founder of the Molson brewing and business empire. The fifth of seven children, he was part of the Anglo-Protestant Montreal elite, and the inheritor of position, privilege, and wealth.⁵ He was educated at Montreal High School, where he played a range of sports.



Percy's family around 1885. He is third from the left, sitting in a small wicker chair. Photo by Montreal's Notman and Son Photographic Studio. (Courtesy Karen Molson.)

Percy went directly to McGill after high school, entering at sixteen. While John Thomas, his father, didn't see university as an option for his daughters, the four boys – Herbert, Kenneth, Percy, and Walter – were expected to attend McGill and distinguish themselves.⁶



In croquet gear and miscellaneous objects at the family home. (Courtesy Karen Molson.)



At McGill: the university's top all-round athlete three years in a row. (Courtesy Karen Molson.)

Percy won every athletic award McGill had, and in his second, third, and fourth years was named the university's best all-round athlete, a unique achievement. In 1899, as an eighteen-year-old, he won gold medals in the 100-yard dash and 880-yard race at the Championship of Canada, and the following year he set a world record in the running long jump at the American Athletics Meet. He also excelled at rugby, racquet sports, golf, cricket, billiards, and swimming, and at sixteen played at least one game with the Stanley Cup-winning Montreal Victorias.^{7,8}

In *The Molsons: Their Lives & Times, 1780-2000*, Karen Molson writes that Percy's parents wanted him to study law, "but he chose instead a business career, and after gaining his Bachelor of Arts he took a year of Applied Science (later called Engineering)." Bernard Sandwell, in his privately-published *The Molson Family* (1933), writes that Percy was elected president of his senior year:

This honor, according to the unanimous testimony of a great number of his fellow-students, was absolutely unsought by the recipient, who had all of his family's

antipathy to electioneering politics, and was conferred upon him purely as the result of his personal popularity and his obvious executive ability. One of his fellow-students . . . has expressed the view that the quality in Percival Molson which most impressed itself upon the under-graduate body was the profound simplicity and directness of his mind. "We felt," says this observer, "that there was not a devious thought nor a hidden or obscure motive in any of his actions and utterances."



Studying with his sister Evelyn. (Courtesy Karen Molson.)

McGill's Alumni Online Community says that Percy was a member of Alpha Psi Chapter of Zeta Psi Fraternity and left Alpha Psi a house in his will.^{9,10} When he graduated in 1901, he was named to McGill's Board of Governors, the youngest member ever, and in due course chaired the Board's Finance and Stadium Committees.



In his room. (Courtesy Karen Molson.)

After McGill, Percy worked for the National Trust Company, starting as a clerk and reaching the position of manager of Montreal's main branch.¹¹ Career was balanced by participation in several sports, including hockey and track and field. Canada's Sports Hall of Fame notes that in 1903, in addition to being the long jump winner at the U.S. Outdoor Track and Field Championship, he won the 400 metre race at the Canadian Championship, beating the great American runner Harry Hillman. He competed at the 1904 Olympics in St. Louis, was a member of the 1906 Quebec Rugby Football Union champions, and played Canadian football.

A charter member of the Canadian Football Hall of Fame, he was "regarded as a sure-handed, brilliant running back and exceptional kicker," playing for the Montreal Football Club from 1902 to 1906 and captaining the team for two of those years. After his playing days, he promoted amateur football and in 1909 was named one of the original trustees of the Grey Cup. He was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame in 1975, and in 1996 into McGill University's Sports Hall of Fame.¹²

Remarkably, he was never penalized for misconduct in any sport. As Herbert Molson said at the 1919 opening of the Percival Molson Memorial Stadium in Montreal, his brother really had believed that sportsmanship was more important than winning or losing.

Almost as remarkably, Percy found time for an astonishing range of clubs and associations. As a member or director of at least a dozen organizations – from the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association to the Park Tobogganing Club and the Select Vestry at Montreal's Christ Church Cathedral – he appears to have been inexhaustible and in demand.

Then there was his social life. As a young man of means, standing, and personal appeal, he spent a lot of time golfing, playing tennis, yachting, and simply having fun with friends, one of whom was Talbot Papineau. Great-grandson of Louis-Joseph Papineau (la Patriote of the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837),¹³ Talbot grew up in Montreal and at Montebello, the Papineau family's vast estate between

Montreal and Ottawa. Talbot threw large parties at the estate's *manoir*, and Karen Molson writes that Percy and his siblings Walter and Mabel were Talbot's guests at these "weekend fêtes."

Taking part in the round of social, cultural, and recreational events, the young Molsons also relaxed at family properties at Métis Beach and in the Laurentians. Métis Beach, on the fashionable south shore of the St. Lawrence River north-east of Quebec City, was a summer resort; the Laurentians property, which the family called Ivry, was closer to home and a year-round retreat.¹⁴

And so it went, rather sweetly it seems, until August 1914.

One of the Molson family's distinguishing characteristics is the steady and innovative industry that saved it from fading away after two or three generations, as many wealthy Anglo-Protestant Montreal families did. Another is a keen sense of public duty. John H.R. Molson, known to the family as "Jackie," was patriarch to the fourth Molson generation in Canada. As he lay dying in 1897, he wrote:

We live in an age when possession of distinguished ancestry brings little but an obligation to more than ordinary service, and those alone have any right to pride in their forbears who use the talents and the position which they have inherited for the good of their fellow men.^{15.16}

This sums up the Molson ethos of social responsibility,¹⁷ which, less than twenty years later, would be tested in ways John H.R. could not have imagined.

As Donald MacKay points out in *The Square Mile: Merchant Princes of Montreal*, Anglo-Protestant businessmen traditionally served in the militia, and most prominent families sent sons to the First World War. The Molsons sent thirty, he writes, "of whom five were killed and thirteen wounded."

Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914. For most Canadians of British descent, the implications were clear, and Canada, as part of the British Empire, was drawn into the war on Britain's behalf without debate.

In September, Percy joined the McGill contingent of the Canadian Officers' Training Corps (COTC) and served in the militia first as a lieutenant and then as a captain. His principal achievement over the next few months, in collaboration with his friend George McDonald, was to set up a system for the recruitment and training of reinforcements for the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Because the PPCLI had been raised privately – by Hamilton Gault, another McGill graduate – Colonel Sam Hughes, Canada's Minister of Militia and Defence, saw it as elitist and barred it from drawing on Canada's regular forces for reinforcements. Looking for another way to support the Patricias, Percy and George approached Hughes for permission to recruit, specifically for the PPCLI, McGill students, alumni, and professors, as well as non-McGill men attracted to the special nature of the unit. Their initial training would take place at the McGill campus, not with the regular troops. Hughes agreed.

The Student Union at McGill became the mobilization point for recruits from every Canadian university, and the "University Companies Reinforcing PPCLI" was often referred to as the McGill Companies. Two full companies were formed at the start, one with George in command and Percy as second in command. Over the next year, 1,239 reinforcements were sent to the PPCLI in six companies. Most of these men could have qualified for commissions in the regular army but elected instead to serve as enlisted men with the Patricias. David J. Bercuson writes:

Many of the university men took a sort of perverse pride in not seeking to join the commissioned ranks . . . and deliberately chose to fight shoulder to shoulder with working men, farmers, day labourers, and store clerks. For them, the war was a crusade to save the world from German militarism and to build a better and more just society. Some thought it almost profane to use their class position or education to get a leg up on the men with whom they would have to share the trenches. So the new PPCLI became a somewhat strange mix of war-weary veterans, mostly working-class in origin, and fresh-faced, educated, young Canadians, most of whom were men of means by the standards of 1915. By the end of the war, just over three-quarters of these university recruits had been killed or wounded.

In his postwar history of the regiment, Ralph Hodder-Williams, a former PPCLI lieutenant, wrote that the men who organized the University Companies may well have saved the Patricias from extinction.¹⁸

Percy left the militia and joined up in April 1915. His military attestation papers give his height as 6 feet, ½ inch, his religious denomination as Church of England, and his next of kin as his mother, Mrs. Jennie B. Molson, 556 Pine Avenue West, Montreal.

Appended to his service record, Percy's Last Will and Testament is an impressive and poignant document. Signed June 28, 1915 before his cousin Ronzo Heathcote Clerk, a lawyer, it details his estate: the distribution of personal effects, the fate of "all automobiles and attachments in connection therewith" (bequeathed to his sisters Lillias and Mabel), the discharge of a large loan to a close friend, and generous legacies to, among others, the Montreal General Hospital, the Shawbridge Boys Farm, and named friends, including George McDonald.

Two sums are left to the Reverend Dr. Herbert Symonds, the first to the man himself, the second for his use "in his absolute discretion in relieving cases of sickness or distress." Percy's four godchildren are remembered, and he ensures that adequate provision would be made for "the support of my Cousin, Alice Erskine, during the remainder of her life." Most famously, he leaves a lot of money to McGill:

I give and bequeath unto the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning (McGill University), the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars as a Special Legacy, to be applied towards the cost of the erection and of the development of the Stadium at present being erected in the City of Montreal under the Supervision of a Committee of Graduates of the said University and for the purpose of discharging a Loan made by the said University in that connection.

The next day, June 29, he sailed for England. Three months later, having reverted to the rank of lieutenant in order to join the Patricias as soon as possible, he left England for France and reached his unit in the field.

Percy's early letters home are messages of reassurance. Most are addressed to his mother and, though meant to be shared with other members of the family, written with her in mind. They are intended, above all, to set her mind at rest, and we learn as much from what they don't say as what they do. In general, they focus on harmless details and happy social encounters and turn to others' lives and the well-being of family and friends.

Percy's writing isn't colourful. It's chatty, affectionate, and on the whole mundane. He discusses letters sent, letters received, the contents of parcels, the round of birthday and Christmas gifts for nephews and nieces, and, above all, the activities of friends and family at home or away at war. There is a profound thoughtfulness in this, and a fundamental reticence. He reveals little about the dark side of his war, still less his thoughts and feelings. The reader is left with the sense of a brave, kind, gentle, and ultimately private man.

In some letters, it's as though Percy meant the war to seem an extended social outing with the very best of their set: "It is really astonishing the number of people here whom we know."

In addition to fellowship with brother officers at the front, some of whom his family knew and trusted, there was the company of familiar women in England: his sister Evelyn and his friend Nell Mackenzie had left Canada to be closer to their husbands serving overseas. Subsequent leaves in England meant golf, fine dining, the theatre, motoring trips, and an endless round of socializing. Just like home before the war.

In mid-October, Percy wrote from the training camp in Shorncliffe, Kent:

Six of us are to go forward to the Princess Pats in the course of the next few days and can you imagine anything nicer? Our four Montreal officers are all going out together, a thing we never expected. . . . I hear our boys are still in a quiet spot and have had very few casualties, so don't worry. We will be happy all together and everything will come out all right.

Five days later, “Somewhere in France”:

We do not know exactly how we are to be placed, but I fancy we will each be put in charge of a platoon. There are now 8 University Company officers here including ourselves, and with Hamilton Gault and Talbot Papineau we will make quite a Montreal family party.

And two months later: “The men certainly are splendid,” and Christmas was “a very jolly time and a splendid dinner.”

Best of all from Jennie Molson’s point of view, in late 1915 Percy and Herbert wrote that the PPCLI and Herbert’s 42nd Battalion were to be “brigaded” with two other battalions to form the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade in the Canadian 3rd Division. Soon these units, and therefore her sons, would be closer.^{19,20}

Several days after sending Jennie this happy news, Percy wrote again, but this time in anger. A fellow officer, someone his mother knew or knew of, had, in Percy’s view, let his men down through self-interest and a sense of personal grievance. “There is such a thing,” Percy wrote, “as learning to take things as they come and not complaining but continuing to play the game until the whistle blows.” A rare instance of ill humour in his letters home.

In January 1916, he had his first tour in the trenches. He’d enjoyed it very much, he wrote his mother, though the mud was very bad. He and his old friend and fellow-officer, Philip Mackenzie (Nell’s husband), were about to go on leave, and he looked forward to seeing “hosts of friends everywhere in London.” Later he wrote that they’d had “a lovely trip across the channel.”

In March, after another tour in the trenches, he came closer to candour. He’d just visited a fine old church and cathedral:

In both, R.C. services were being held, and it was wonderfully strange and beautiful after the rough experiences of the last month or so to stand and listen to the fine organ and the chants and responses. The whole day in fact has been a most enjoyable change from the mud and discomfort of the past few weeks.

Later that month, attached temporarily to a tunneling company, he wrote that the men were a fine lot, but he felt cut off from his own battalion. Three weeks after that, in a letter to his sister Evelyn, he wrote something similar after saying that it was nice to get “all the news of the kiddies.” Still with the tunneling company, he said he had “a rather uncomfortable feeling of being away from the battalion when I should be with it.”

In another letter that month, he wrote Mr. Rundle, a senior colleague at the National Trust, saying that after the war the company “will be ready and equipped to take a hand in helping people solve their new problems.” And to his mother, whose birthday was coming up: “We will have many happy birthday parties to spend at home after the war.”

In late May he wrote his mother that he’d seen a lot of Herbert, who seemed very well. “Just at present I am up to the neck with company and regimental duties. I am acting as machine gun officer whilst our regular one is on leave. This does not mean that I know anything about the guns, but an officer is needed to look after the men, and keep things going while we are out in rest.” And later: “Things seem fairly quiet, so don’t worry. We are getting along all right, and should continue to do so.”

A week later, on the morning of June 2, the Battle of Mount Sorrel (Sanctuary Wood) began, the Germans attacking Canadian units in Belgium’s Ypres Salient with heavy artillery and detonated mines. The PPCLI, in the front line at the time, suffered particularly heavy casualties. Referring to No. 2 Company – led by Captain Hugh Niven and four platoon leaders including Percy – Hodder-Williams wrote:

While casualties among the men during the morning bombardment were surprisingly light, all the officers were hit by noon. . . . The right trench became untenable as the bombardment increased, but Lieutenants P. Molson and W.E.C. Irwin with great coolness withdrew their men to the left trench, which . . . was held all through the day and proved a very valuable position from which to enfilade the Germans advancing on the right. When the Germans came over, the right half-company

under these officers held them in a short sharp fight, . . . Irwin fell badly wounded in both legs, but Molson continued to lead “a desperate and successful resistance to German attacks.” He in his turn was painfully wounded in the face, and the command fell for many hours to N.C.O.’s.²¹

Percy was unable to get out to a dressing station until after dark. The rifle bullet that struck him had entered his left cheek and exited his right, sparing his teeth but breaking both jaws, damaging his tongue, and “splintering the bone a bit on the exit side.” Though he was able to walk out, he was, as his commanding officer said, dangerously wounded. His jaws were wired at No. 7 Stationary Hospital in Boulogne, where he stayed for close to two weeks before being moved to the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital for Officers in London.²² His first letter home – written on June 8 from Boulogne – was typically comforting and upbeat:

. . . I am rather an awkward mess for a few weeks but after that I believe will be as good as new. It has not been very pleasant but might have been so very much worse. I am really very lucky. I am having lots of fun just now devising means and ways to eat, talk & sleep. I have such a lot of friends here it is very awkward to be unable to talk to others.

He hoped, he said, that his mother hadn’t had an anxious time and, since of course she had, wouldn’t worry any more. He reassured her by saying that the PPCLI would be out of the line for a while, and that Herbert had been only slightly wounded on June 2, not enough to force him to leave the front. It’s true that Herbert’s wound, though painful, had seemed relatively minor at the time, but it turned out to be even more dangerous than Percy’s. Struck in the back of the head by a piece of shrapnel, Herbert had ignored the pain and led his battalion to the front line to reinforce what was left of the PPCLI. According to Lieutenant Royal Ewing, one of his platoon commanders, Herbert did “wonderful work.”²²

On June 16, Percy wrote his mother again, stressing that “from the time I got down to the Dressing Station until now I have been surrounded with kind, willing friends, all eager to do what they could for me.” Nell visited the hospital in London every day, bringing, among other things, new pyjamas and a dressing gown.

Later that month it became clear that Herbert had a fractured skull and, because bone fragments were close to the brain, needed surgery. On July 1, Percy wrote that the operation had been a success, that Herbert would have to rest up for a while, and that he, Percy, was now “quite comfortable and happy.” He was more concerned about “poor little Nell,” who daily expected Philip on leave and was daily disappointed. Then, before adding in a postscript that he’d been promoted to captain:

I spent a splendid day out at Amersham with Nell and her father & mother. I took Stuart Forbes, one of our wounded officers, out with me. We had lunch at the Golf Club and sat around or strolled about, and it was a great treat. I am to repeat from time to time, and when stronger take up golf. . . . I received a letter from George McDonald today, dated the 28th. Leave has been stopped, so Philip will be delayed in coming over.

By mid-July, Philip, ill with trench fever, was still expected daily. A week or two later, Percy and Herbert received their medical leaves and sailed for Canada to begin the next stage of their recovery.²³ On August 27, writing his brother Kenneth from Little Métis Beach, Percy said that he and Herbert were doing well, but it was taking a long time for his jaws to open up, and he was still on soft foods.

In fact, his recovery was slow, and his medical leave was extended twice. Resolved to rejoin the Patricias as soon as possible, he resented the prolonged rehabilitation. We know from a letter written by Hamilton Gault – who had lost a leg at Mount Sorrel but was still with the 3rd Division – that he urged Percy to return for the battalion’s sake, but little urging was necessary.

It wasn’t until late March 1917 that he was able to leave for England, and the following month that he was passed fit for active service. Herbert, who had healed faster, was by then a staff officer in England. He’d been awarded the Military Cross for his courage at Mount Sorrel and was impatient to return to the 42nd, but his administrative skills were considered invaluable and he was assigned to staff duties. Philip Mackenzie also received the M.C. for bravery at Mount Sorrel, and Percy received his in June 1917, around the time he returned to the front.

Characteristically, he played down the medal, telling his mother that he probably received it “because they thought I would be disgraced if I remained the only officer of the 2nd University Coy. who did not get it. We all have it now except poor Hagarty who was killed on June 2nd 1916.” And: “I have had a number of very nice cable grams etc in connection with my M.C. They make me feel rather rotten when I think how many real ones there are.” And to his brother Walter: “My M.C. is rather ridiculous as I did nothing at all, and lots of others have done a great



The gravestone in France. (Photo by the author.)

deal & have nothing.” Shortly after his brother’s death, however, Walter said that Percy had been “happy & satisfied” with the decoration.²⁴

In August 1917, responding to the family’s criticism of the Medical Board for having passed Percy fit for active service, Herbert wrote his mother from London:

As far as the Medical Board was concerned, the only question raised was whether Percy could keep up his strength. As Sir Francis Farmer [Percy’s London doctor] had said “Yes” and Percy, after drilling hard for 3 weeks, felt splendid, they of course passed him as being fit, which was what he wanted. . . . Percy wouldn’t consider anything but going back to his old battalion. They wanted him, of course, and short of applying force, he could not be kept here.

Surely more aware of his mortality than he’d been in 1915, Percy had written a long codicil to his will, signing it on March 22, again before Ronzo Clerk and shortly before his second departure for England. Like the will itself, the codicil is beautifully written and generous. Noting that one of his earlier beneficiaries, Dalzell Browne, had been killed in action since the original will, Percy directed that the \$10,000 bequeathed his dead friend be considered cancelled. Instead:

I give and bequeath to Philip Mackenzie . . . a Special Legacy of Fifteen Thousand Dollars, and this Legacy shall be in addition to the Twenty Thousand Dollars mentioned in Paragraph Fifth of my said Will, . . .

Moreover:

I give and bequeath to the said Philip Mackenzie and to George C. McDonald, of the City of Montreal, and the survivor of them, the sum of Five Thousand Dollars, which said sum I desire them to use in relieving cases which they know would meet with my sympathy and approval in connection with the University Companies C.E.F. and the P.P.C.L.I.

Philip survived the war. So did George, though badly wounded.

On May 18, Percy, now with a reserve battalion in Sussex, wrote Evelyn. Explaining that his commanding officer, Colonel Agar Adamson, had requested him, he said he might be rejoining the PPCLI in the next few weeks. Eleven days later, on his way to France, he wrote his mother:

We leave in a few hours and I should be back with the battalion in a few days. They are at present out in rest, and likely to remain so for another week. Charlie Stewart & George Little are with me. We have had quite a time in London during the last week. Our C.O. Colonel Adamson is back from France for a week's leave and Hammy Gault, George McDonald etc. also being there, we had quite a reunion. . . . Talbot Papineau is rejoining the battalion and there is a chance of Hammy coming out even if only "attached" at first, so you will see that we will be quite a family party again.

By the time Gault reached the PPCLI in June, Percy and Talbot – the latter returned from staff duties – were there to meet him.²⁵

Percy's final letters are a good source of how he felt that month. He wrote that he and his friends had played golf on their way back to the battalion: "Does that not seem very extraordinary? Golf in France in wartime?" He was happy to see old friends in the PPCLI and the 42nd and was playing sports again ("kicking the ball

like a 2 year old”). On June 25, he wrote Walter: “They are after me to get out and run in the officer’s race in Divisional Sports to take place in about a week. I do not know whether they are trying to get me back to ‘Blighty’ through an athletic channel. [To safety in England, in other words, with a disabling injury.] I am feeling first rate & my jaw condition continues to improve.” He now commanded No. 2 Company, and Walter received several letters from him. Percy, he said, “seemed so pleased to have taken up the work again.”

On June 26, Percy wrote Walter’s mother-in-law that they’d been having a quiet time since he rejoined the battalion. That must have changed. On July 5, Talbot wrote Walter: “I visited Percy in his dug-out yesterday late afternoon. He was in good heart and spirits despite the fact that he had been in rather an unpleasant spot.”²⁶

Several hours later, he was dead.

We could say that Percy was killed by war. Or by a set of values and a sense of duty. The immediate cause was a German mortar shell lobbed over the line, almost randomly, the night of July 4-5 as he and one of his subalterns, Lieutenant Donald MacLean, inspected a platoon on the outskirts of Avion. They and at least one other man were killed, Percy from concussion, instantly and without a mark.

Because this platoon had been temporarily attached to the 42nd Battalion, Percy was killed within the 42nd’s lines, and it was Royal Highlanders who found him. In fact, it was men from “B” Company, the unit Herbert had brought to France and with which he’d served until Mount Sorrel.²⁷

Hamilton Gault wrote Herbert two days later:

My Dear Herbert,

You will have received [the] wire giving you the sad news of dear old Percy's death. He was doing the night rounds of his posts and was standing in the street of a suburb . . . with one of his Officers and two runners when a Trench Mortar came out of the night and got the four of them. Percy and his Subaltern were killed instantly and also one of the runners. Today we buried them in the Military Burial Ground at Villers au Bois Station. The R.C.R. Padre conducted the service with our Padre (McCarthy the R.C.). . . . We are all more deeply grieved than words can say. Percy had had his company since his return to France, and needless to say was doing splendidly with it.

*I shall ever regret having urged the needs of the Battalion upon him, for had he not returned to the Regiment he would have been spared to the Canada of the future and to his friends to whom he meant so much.*²⁸

Several weeks later, Herbert wrote his mother that he was sending a photo of Percy's grave. "Since this was taken," Herbert said, "the grave has been sodded & planted by loving friends."

The cemetery itself is lovely. The country around Villers au Bois is flat but attractive, and the eye is drawn to the low hills of Artois not far away. Like all cemeteries maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Villers au Bois is beautifully and respectfully cared for.

Since the early 1920s, each grave has had a permanent stone marker, even when the identity of the remains could not be confirmed. Percy and Donald's headstones stand side by side with that of Private O.H. Bulmer, the runner. Officers and non-officers had lived, fought, and died together. Now they were buried together.²⁹

In 1917, of course, there were no stone markers. It was all white wooden crosses. Someone wrote on Percy's: "A Gentleman." It was saved and is in the Molson vault at Mount Royal Cemetery in Montreal.³⁰

Agar Adamson, the PPCLI's commanding officer for much of the war, led a colourful life but is remembered principally for his almost daily letters from the front

to his wife, Mabel Cawthra Adamson. On July 4, 1917, he wrote Mabel a long letter from a Corps Rest Station. He included a tale about Percy intended to show that “poor simple old P.” had “too gentle a nature,” that he was a bit unworldly, innocent, even naïve. The extraordinary thing, however, is Adamson’s preface to the tale:

. . . this [story] is pretty and sweet and shows what a beautiful nature even a man may have. You remember P. who was shot through the jaw at Ypres a year ago, he is a great sportsman with the mind of a child with infinite sight. We would probably find a halo constantly around his head.

A rifle company captain with the mind of a child with infinite sight.

The next day, July 5:

I sent you a story about Molson yesterday. I have now had a D.R.L.S. [a signal] from the Division telling me that he and MacLean were both killed yesterday with one shell. . . . The former was one of the richest men of his age in Montreal, with an extraordinary sense of honour.³¹

In *McGill University at War*, R.C. Fetherstonhaugh writes that when Percy rejoined the PPCLI in 1917, he was welcomed, “in the words of the Patricia’s history, as ‘a fine fighting officer and an administrator of great experience.’” “An officer and man peculiarly admired and beloved,” the history went on, he was, in Gault’s words, “the coming man in the Regiment.”³²

In the 1980s, retired Brigadier-General James de Lalanne, who had served in Percy’s company, said that “as soon as you met Percy Molson, you couldn’t help but love the man.”³³ When another soldier from that company learned of Percy’s death, “he broke down and wept.”³⁴

Reading what others wrote about him, it’s tempting to see Percy as a modern descendant of Chaucer’s *parfit gentil knight*. And then there’s that other Percival, the Sir Percival of Arthurian legend. Simple, naïve, even foolish when young, he’s ultimately heroic and supremely capable while remaining pure at heart. Like the other knights of the Round Table, he swears an

oath of chivalry, and like any good knight he'll stand by his oath and live by the code that comes with it.



The cemetery at Villers au Bois, France. (Photo by the author.)

Affluent Canadians in 1917 were familiar with letters of condolence and skilled in their composition, but there's a rawness in the letters Percy's family received. There's nothing practiced or formulaic in Gault's letter to Herbert, quoted above, or in Talbot's letter to Walter:

I know you will be anxious to hear about poor old Percy. He was killed last night while in the front line but he was mercifully spared all pain and disfigurement. . . . I don't think we ever had an officer more universally liked and respected. He was truly without fear and without reproach. I have never known him to say or do anything which would not have satisfied the highest standards of thought and conduct.

It is in Philip and Nell's letters, however, that the loss and distress are most obvious. On July 9, in a letter to Kenneth, Philip, who had been invalided home the year before, wrote:

I have just received Creighton's telegram – an hour after our little girl was born – telling me of Percy's death and the whole damned world is upside down. Of course, I could try to express my sympathy to you in a hundred ways, but what is the use and why should I – for I have lost the truest friend a man ever had. It hurts to think of Mrs. Molson. Forgive this, but I cannot realize that our dear old Mole is gone.³⁵

And to Mabel, the sister whose love and bereavement were greatest:

Dear Miss Molson,

I have written a very short note to Mrs. Molson and another to Kenneth . . . and now I am writing to you. God knows what for, perhaps because I am selfish enough to want to shift some of my burden on to you. I must talk to someone. My heart is sore and with it a feeling of rage – that will last until the end of time. The real feeling of loss, I suppose, will come later when I realize fully that I am not again to see the truest man I have ever known and who made up for years practically the whole of my life . . . I may tell you, and I think you will believe, that I would, if possible, express my love for him by changing places with him now so that he might be given back to his family and friends.³⁵

Advised by Nell's doctor not to tell her of Percy's death, Philip kept it to himself for two weeks. When he did tell her, she wrote Mabel:

My dear,

Philip only told me last night. I think he felt that we both loved the old Mole so greatly that the shock might upset me and therefore the baby & the doctor advised him to wait until I was stronger. . . . The Mole was so much to us both. So much more I think than most people realized, that I think we can understand in a small measure what you are going through.³⁶

On June 12, Percy had written Philip. The letter began *My Dear Sploot*. It included the lines “Please give my best to Nell. I am not writing to her as this letter & all my letters are for you both” and ended with:

And now for the present

Au revoir

Yours as ever

Mole

Philip and Nell had planned, if they had a boy, to name their son Percival. Soon after their daughter’s birth, and before Nell knew Percy was dead, Philip suggested they name her Percival in any case and call her Percy. Percival Molson Mackenzie, later Percy Ritchie, became a respected artist and lived until 2004.³⁷

In part because of the money Percy left McGill to repay the bank loan needed to build Graduates’ Stadium (as it was first known), it was renamed Percival Molson Memorial Stadium and dedicated to Percy when it opened in October 1919. According to Bernard Sandwell, McGill had needed another \$60,000 to complete construction, but that was raised “from friends and admirers of the deceased officer.” Renovated and expanded over the decades, Molson Stadium serves as, among other things, the home of the Canadian Football League’s Montreal Alouettes and is a major source of income for the university.³⁸

The stadium is Percy’s most famous legacy, but he left behind as well his reputation as an exemplary figure and “symbol of his age.”³⁹ Almost mythical, he stood for all that was best in Keith Douglas’s breed of heroes. In 1938, George McDonald wrote: “After graduation it was my lot to work closely with Percy in business affairs, in graduate activities and later in the war. I think the word “gentleman” was made for him and I know of none more gallant.”⁴⁰

So much of Percy's legacy rests in what he meant to others.⁴¹ "Let us look upon his death as an inspiration," Herbert wrote his mother shortly after Percy died, "and while mourning him not give way to unavailing regrets but remain steadfast, doing our duty as we see it, and carry on." In keeping with Percy's inspiration and the family's conviction that it had an obligation to more than ordinary service, many of Percy's descendants did just that. Their belief in duty, sustained by the "tremendous pluck and fortitude" that Philip saw in the "lines laid down by the House of Molson," ensured that the family's sense of social responsibility did not end with Percy's generation.⁴²

There will always be unusually fine, unselfish, and principled men and women, but it's hard not to worry that people like Percy are dated, passé in more than style and manners. In "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," W.B. Yeats reflected on a portrait of his friend Lady Gregory ("all that pride and that humility") and mourned not only her passing but the thought that the future might not see someone of her quality:

*And I am in despair that time may bring
Approved patterns of women or of men
But not that selfsame excellence again.*

Percy and his generation were influenced by an approved pattern, an ethos or characteristic spirit of selflessness, humility, altruism, and integrity. Things have changed, and the code of duty and modesty Percy took for granted is out of fashion. But things of enduring value do endure. They're preserved in memory and myth, in stories and a persistent sense of loss. Under pressure, we recall the best of what's been left behind.

Chapter Two

Talbot Papineau, the future all before him



Talbot Papineau, 1916. (Library and Archives Canada, C-13222.)

Sandra Gwyn's 1992 book *Tapestry of War* focuses on the lives of several Canadians in the early twentieth century. Talbot Papineau is its central figure and tragic hero. "The beau idéal of his generation," he was "handsome, clever and athletic, a gifted orator and writer, impeccably bilingual, and possessed of a charismatic personality."^{1,2}

Talbot Mercer Papineau was born on March 25, 1883 at Montebello, Quebec, in the Papineau family's seigneurie of Petite-Nation. As the great-grandson of

Louis-Joseph Papineau (“la Patriote” of the 1837 Lower Canada Rebellion), Talbot inherited a famous name and considerable standing in Quebec society, though three of his four grandparents were American, and his mother, the former Caroline Rogers, was from Philadelphia. Strong-willed and estranged from her alcoholic husband by the time Talbot was a teenager, Caroline raised four boys on her own. Gwyn writes that Talbot:

. . . grew up completely at home in either culture, . . . The Papineaus had long been free-thinkers, so he was not brought up Catholic, and thanks to Caroline’s



*Talbot (on the right) and Walter Molson, Percy’s younger brother.
(Courtesy Karen Molson.)*

influence (cleverest and handsomest of her sons, Talbot was the apple of her eye, and she to him was “rather a deity”), he was educated almost exclusively in English alongside the sons of the Montreal Anglo-Scottish ascendancy at Montreal High School, McGill University, and subsequently, Oxford.³

Despite his urban education, it was Montebello’s streams, hills, and woodlands that shaped his interests and made him happy. Montebello was somewhere he could play, explore on foot and by canoe, and sketch. It offered harmony and a retreat from study and ambition, and it drew him into the natural world.⁴

Classmates at Montreal High remembered Talbot as “gregarious, competitive, cocky, and handy, when need be, with his fists.” In 1920, George McDonald spoke to the Canadian Club in Montreal about his former schoolmate, friend, and fellow officer:

My earliest recollection of Talbot Papineau goes back to an affair that took place in the lane between Peel and Metcalfe Streets in which he acted as one of the principals. It was an affair of honour. He acted with courage and with chivalry and earned the admiration and respect of all his schoolfellows. That admiration and respect



*Talbot, dressed formally in an informal setting, time and place unknown.
(Library and Archives Canada, PA-185550.)*

continued in whatever walk of life his subsequent career found him and it increased as he developed.⁵

At McGill, Talbot described himself as French Canadian, and while editor of the student newspaper showed a tendency to mischief and contrariness. Gwyn notes that he “stirred up a row by writing an article

arguing that the students themselves were the best judges of their professors, and then answering himself in an angry reply signed with a pseudonym.”⁶

In 1905, Talbot, with Percy, founded the Montreal Chapter of the Canadian Club. (Seventy years earlier, their ancestors – John Molson Jr. and Louis-Joseph Papineau – had helped found the Mechanics Institute of Montreal.) Percy, the Chapter’s secretary-treasurer, was 24 or 25. Talbot, its president, was three years younger.⁷⁻⁹

A year later, Talbot left Canada for Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship. He studied law at Brasenose College for two years, rowed for his college, became secretary of the Boating Club, and played hockey for the Oxford Canadians but, academically, managed only a second class degree, not the first he and his mother had set their sights on. Sports aside, he wasn’t happy at Oxford. He missed Montebello, and in June 1908, after his Finals, he wrote his mother:

. . . all is over now, and I am delightfully and happily free. . . . I am tremendously pleased to leave Oxford and delighted beyond expression to be returning home. I am so anxious to see the stables and the horses and all the improvements, and to be there generally with you again.

To mark the occasion, he rented a canoe and paddled the very long way to Richmond with a puppy.¹⁰

In 1909, a year after returning to Montebello and Montreal, he was called to the Quebec Bar and set up a law practice with his friend Andrew McMaster, a fellow Liberal Party member. He spent the next five years practicing law, involving himself in party politics, and speaking on behalf of the Canadian Club, “specializing in explaining Quebec to the rest of the country.”¹¹ And he socialized. “He played as hard as he worked. No Montreal bachelor was more sought after, the ornament of many ballrooms and tennis parties and weekends in the Laurentians.”

His own weekend parties were premier social events for the moneyed young of Montreal, and in its Talbot Papineau fonds, Library and Archives Canada has photos of the era, including several of “leisure activities at the Papineau manor Montebello, such as badminton, canoeing, and dance.” Several of Talbot’s drawings and paintings, often of Montebello, are also in the fonds. In this relatively idyllic pre-1914 world, he developed an interest in Quebec history and culture, subjects rooted for him in Montebello’s beauty, to which he returned whenever possible.¹²

Restless and ambitious, however, he found this period trying. The Liberal Party’s defeat in the 1911 federal election frustrated the political dreams he shared with his mother, who was determined to see her son succeed in public life. Unable to get on with his plans, and impatient with marking time, “he became a compulsive traveller, testing his mettle climbing mountains in Switzerland and driving the terrifying cornice road along the Amalfi coast of Italy at breakneck speed.”

In August 1914, everything changed. Talbot, now 31, was in Vancouver at the Canadian Club’s annual convention when war was declared. Speaking to the

membership from a prepared text, he broke off to exclaim: “Canada did not have one word to say in the diplomatic negotiations leading up to the war, nor in the declaration of war.”

Nationalist pique notwithstanding, he tore back to Ottawa after telegraphing his old friend Hamilton Gault. Volunteering for Gault’s brand new Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, Talbot found himself an instant lieutenant despite a complete lack of military experience or previous interest in the military. A past critic of the Boy Scouts for its “militaristic overtones,” Talbot was now a very junior but bona fide army officer.¹³

His reasons for volunteering, Gwyn writes, were straightforward:

The war was an adventure and a calculated risk. Unlike so many young British aristocrats, he was not half in love with the idea of dying a hero. Instead, he wanted to have a brilliant career. A “good war,” as the saying went, would enable him to leap up the ladder, bearing battle-honours.

But nothing about Talbot was straightforward. There’s no doubt that he was motivated by the desire to get ahead – with Talbot, ambition was usually at the core of things – but he was also motivated by patriotism. He believed that the war was Canada’s chance to come into its own, to recognize its unique and separate identity, and to be seen and treated as a country in its own right. He was, as the next three years show, ambitious not only for himself but his nation as well.

The commission as a lieutenant with the PPCLI was due no doubt to Talbot’s friendship with Gault, and to their mutual respect. At the same time, as we saw earlier, the regiment, though determined to recruit men with military or militia experience, was a privately-raised unit and hence ineligible to draw on the militia for junior officers. Suitable candidates may have been scarce in the PPCLI’s heady and hurried first days.

In late August, Talbot wrote his mother:

I do not allow myself to think and therefore I cannot write about my feelings at leaving you. You must know that I love you more than anything else on earth.

*I will not speak as though this were more than an ordinary separation and I want you to keep the same thing in mind. I should be mad with sorrow if I allowed myself to imagine what might occur. I am steeled to take things as they come and not to anticipate sorrow. You must do the same. You simply must.*¹⁴

He also wrote that he was growing a moustache, “a very poor thing yet but growing rapidly.” He wasn’t keen on it – “I do not consider it very becoming” – but Colonel Farquhar, the regiment’s first and very British commanding officer, patterned the PPCLI on a traditional Guards unit, so the moustache came with the commission.¹⁵

In late September 1914, the Patricias sailed for England, where they were stationed first on Salisbury Plain, then at Winchester. Talbot wrote his mother about his best friend among the officers, Charlie Stewart, a roguish adventurer, man of the world, experienced soldier, and supremely unusual figure. “He is the most pronounced character I have ever met,” Talbot later wrote. “He has the vitality and appearance of Hercules but remains normal by constant undermining operations – such as fifty cigarettes a day and the output of a whiskey factory.” In early December, however, the friendship proved near-fatal when the tent they shared caught on fire as they slept and both men suffered serious burns.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ While convalescing, Talbot was “taken up” by Lady Donoughmore, Farquhar’s mother-in-law, who had him to tea and encouraged him to write to a young American named Beatrice Fox.

By late December, Talbot and Charlie were fit enough to leave with their regiment for France. Serving with the British Army at this stage of the war, the Patricias went into the trenches in early January 1915, the first Canadian fighting unit at the front.

In late February, Talbot and Gault took part in a trench raid at St. Eloi.¹⁹ The first of its kind, it yielded intelligence about German trenches and served as a model for future raids. In recognition of their daring success, Talbot and Gault were awarded the Military Cross and Distinguished Service Order respectively, and the raid was, as David J. Bercuson writes, the first Canadian attack of the war.²⁰ Recalling this period, George McDonald later said of Talbot’s early service at the front:

*His personal courage, his untiring energy and his resourcefulness soon proved his sterling worth. He served with his battalion in the trenches during the first hard winter and he was in the forefront of all the engagements in which it was concerned during that period. He was the first Canadian to win the Military Cross. . . . He was a pioneer in the aggressive form of trench warfare for which the Canadians afterwards became famous.*²¹

In a letter to his mother, Talbot described his part in the raid. Dated March 3, 1915 and addressed to Dearest old Mother, it is conspicuous for its boasting, bathos, and Boys Own brand of splendid, dashing, derring-do. It begins: “We have made our attack at last and I have led it!” (It’s true he’d led part of the attack, and done it well, but that’s all.) Then he tells his mother how he shot a German: “I dropped on one knee and fired point blank. He disappeared. I said to myself I have shot him.” But the most ghastly part of the letter is a detailed, sensational, and maudlin description of a fellow officer’s head wound. Major J.S. Ward, mortally wounded – as was Farquhar – suffered for hours before a stretcher-party moved him to the rear:

Poor Ward . . . sank back into my arms. He bled frightfully. He had been shot in the back of the head. I bound his head up as best I could. The brain matter was oozing out. I put on about four field dressings and staunched the blood. I loved old Ward. . . . It was terrible for me to see him like that so suddenly. . . . I made Ward as comfortable as I could. He was now conscious and could recognize me though his mind wandered. He was in great pain and I gave him a good deal of morphine. He would hold my hand sometimes. He said “Talbot, you’re an angel.”

The letter closes with:

*I am feeling splendidly now dearest, and full of hope and confidence. This is a time of trial but it will make life worthwhile, which it would not be otherwise. I have faith in your courage, so I tell you what I am doing. Good night now, my loving, lovable little mother.*²²

Even allowing for Edwardian style and taste, not to mention mother and son etiquette, this is a tough, uneasy read.

Two months later, in early May 1915, the PPCLI was broken at the Battles of Frezenberg and Bellewaerde Ridge. Most of the “Originals” – the officers and men who had joined the Patricias in August 1914 – were killed or wounded. Talbot lived, unwounded but “shattered,” and for a while wrote nothing more.²³⁻²⁵

In late May, after promotion to captain and a brief leave in England, Talbot returned to what was left of the regiment and resumed writing to his mother almost daily. As Gwyn notes, however:

The feverish quality of these letters suggests a man living on his nerve ends. As recently as April, still on a high from the trench raid at St. Eloi, he'd written Caroline jauntily, even a little calculatingly – about his Military Cross. “It is very pleasant to have such a fuss made, and when I come home it will be a help, I am sure, ‘in my business.’” Now he was sombre. “It is a good thing to have this ribbon on my chest. I cannot show fear, can I, when I am labelled brave?”

He tried to describe what had happened at Bellewaerde Ridge on May 8, when the regiment suffered 450 casualties, but stopped part way. Then: “Any courage I have comes from you and not the Papineaus. I am tired of this grandfather business. . . . On that awful 8th of May, it was your confidence that again and again gave me the courage to go on.”^{26,27}

He still hoped to get through the war and return home. In his letters, the subject was often Montebello, its beauty and serenity and his fear that it and the way of life it signified might not endure. When he learned that two of his brothers might enlist, he wrote his mother: “Don't let them come. Their duty is there. Canada must not be too seriously hurt. I am afraid and depressed today – not for myself, but for our civilization, our people, our world.”



Beatrice sent Talbot this miniature of herself for his thirty-fourth birthday. It is “the most precious thing I have ever had,” he told her. He returned it, saying he hoped she’d give it to him in person someday. (Library and Archives Canada, C-137034.)

He continued to sketch, and Gwyn includes three of his pieces in *Tapestry*. One is of a fellow officer (Capt. R.A.S. “Beau” Nash) reading Stephen Leacock’s *Nonsense Novels*, and two are of Montebello. About the latter, which depict the estate’s chapel and lodge gates, Gwyn writes that they “were done from memory and speak of his longing for home.” Around this time, in the early summer of 1915, he wrote Lady Donoughmore’s young American, Beatrice Fox, that he was the only officer of the regiment’s original forty not killed, wounded, or invalided out.^{28,29}

He had taken “Lady D’s” advice and started an exchange of letters with Beatrice, a 24-year old sculptor from a wealthy family in Philadelphia. Gwyn covers their correspondence in detail and describes the complexity of their relationship, which, on Talbot’s part, veered from the romantic, intimate, and hopeful to the cool, harsh, and dismissive. Beatrice saved Talbot’s letters. Since he was serving at the front and had to keep his kit light, he didn’t save hers, so the reader has to rely on his responses for a sense of what Beatrice wrote and what she was like.^{30,31} At first, their letters were tentative, though Talbot’s could also be surprisingly direct and urgent:

Since August I have been a licensed killer, since January I have tried to kill – I have succeeded in not being killed at any rate . . . rather a record of good fortune but a record which may be broken this evening or in ten minutes for all I know . . . I should sleep, but the fresh adventure of writing to an unknown rather appealed to me. Would you forbid this appeal, and deny a poor soldier?

Like the man himself, his letters were mercurial, by turns superficial and guileless. Reflecting his increasing confusion, some were light-hearted and flirtatious, others sad, bleak, and jumpy:

*I hate this murderous business. I have seen so much death – and brains and blood – and marvellous human machines suddenly smashed like Humpty Dumpties. . . . Never shall I shoot duck again or draw a speckled trout to gasp in my basket – I would not wish to see the death of a spider.*³²

Also, most revealingly:

It is over a year now since I volunteered and since then life has seemed like the ball in a game of roulette. . . . In the meantime I have moments of gaiety with companions – moments of sadness when I think of home – moments of terrific anxiety and responsibility – and black moments when I question myself, my courage and even the final success of our cause. . . . It is a great mistake for a soldier to have too keen an imagination or to allow his thoughts to dwell morbidly on his dangers. . . . I am not by nature intrepid, not even quarrelsome enough to make fighting enjoyable. On the contrary I shrink from the naked disclosures of human passions – I dislike intensely loss of control – drunkenness, insanity, hatred, anger – they fill me with a cold horror and dread. . . . There should be no heroism in war. No glorification – no reward. For us it should be the simple execution of an abhorrent duty – a thing almost to be ashamed of.

And:

Had I been born under Prussian influence I should have believed their cause and fought for it, but I have been differently trained and so I fight against it.

Talbot was careful when writing to family and friends, but with Beatrice he expressed his fears, erratic impulses, mounting inner conflict, self-doubt, self-contradiction, and hurt. He could be gentle one moment, sarcastic the next, first vivacious then dark, or charming and anguished at the same time. “You are the best correspondent I have ever had,” he wrote. “You are almost a dream come true.”³³

By late 1915, the PPCLI had to decide whether to go to a different British division or join a Canadian division. Gault and Agar Adamson argued for the former, while Talbot and several other officers made a case for the latter.³⁴ In the end, as we've seen, the Patricias went to the 3rd Canadian Division, over Gault's strong objections, and was brigaded with three other units, including Herbert Molson's 42nd Battalion. As the only formation with front line experience, the PPCLI was considered the senior unit.

For Talbot, however, the autumn of 1915 was a particularly unhappy time, and his next leave in London made things worse. The city in wartime had descended into what Lady Diana Cooper termed the "nightmare years of tragic hysteria." Talbot hated the frenzied, sybaritic excess and detested himself for taking part in it. On October 3, he wrote Beatrice:

How I have come to hate London! Not so much London's fault, I suppose, as my own, but for me it has come to mean – long walking in an alien crowd, the ceaseless flow of money, innumerable dashes in taxi-cabs, feverish excitements of nightclubs and music halls, health-destroying restaurants and lounges, and the ceaseless passing of painted faces, the hideous pageantry of commercial affection. If I have been drawn into this side of life I blame myself a great deal, but I also blame disturbing influences of the war, and generally, the extraordinary moral laxity of the people.³⁵⁻³⁷

Ashamed of himself for his own moral laxity, he confessed:

I wanted affection – beauty – laughter – companionship – I wanted them immediately and so I bought them – the cheap, readymade articles, and so I have cheapened myself until I was sick with disappointment and glad that tomorrow I go back to the front and so perhaps end it all.

If, under the circumstances, that seems self-pitying, overwrought, or far too self-critical, it says something about Talbot's sense of right and wrong, his belief in personal integrity, and sticking to an exacting standard of conduct.

At the front, things got worse. The cold autumn rains started, Talbot's lucky penknife vanished, and, worst of all, his little dog "Bobs" disappeared. It was too much. A week after losing Bobs, Talbot was sent to hospital for acute bronchitis, though by his own account he was "more hurt in mind than in body."^{38,39} He was no longer the breezy, confident junior officer who, after the Second Battle of Ypres six months earlier, had written: "I understand that the Canadians were used in some heavy fighting last night and there will be many sad hearts. . . . Some reports are appalling. I should feel dreadfully if they are true, yet what a glorious history they will have made for Canada."



With Bobs in France. (Library and Archives Canada, C-13224.)

In early 1916, after almost two months in hospital and another short tour at the front, Talbot accepted a staff appointment at Canadian headquarters and left the regiment. Arranged by Max Aitken, who Talbot had met in London, this appointment made him aide-de-camp to the commander of the Canadian Corps, which could only further his military career and his post-war prospects. He was both excited and wretched: "Yesterday I cried like a baby when it came time to say goodbye. . . . All the NCOs in my company paraded to say goodbye and I couldn't say a word."

Talbot was on staff for almost a year and a half, though he was seconded to the Canadian War Records Office in France after several months. Run by the increasingly powerful Aitken (later Sir Max, Lord Beaverbrook), the War Records Office made full use of Talbot's energy, versatility, and drive. Among other things, he wrote communiqués and supervised cinematographers visiting the front. He worked hard but lived well, in comfort, and far enough from the firing line to imagine surviving the war. "By his name," Gwyn writes, and by "his education, his fluency in both French and English, his network of friends and kin, not to mention his vaulting ambition, he possessed all the credentials to reach for the top once the war was over."⁴⁰

Meanwhile, as part of Max Aitken's empire, he was spared the misery of the trenches: "His office at Canadian Headquarters in France," Gwyn says, "was in the middle of a beautiful park with a château nearby that reminded him of Montebello." He had a personal secretary, a Daimler and chauffeur, and a bay mare he named Queen Bee.

As for his letters to Beatrice at this time, they were inconsistent, even baffling. He was "very happy at the rate of progress in Romance which we have made," he wrote, then added that in a relationship between a soldier and a young woman it was impossible to gauge its seriousness:

We cannot possibly tell, not until after the war. In the meantime, it is safer to play. I want you to love me and write me love letters for they will charm and amuse me, but I don't want you to really care. I want in return to charm and amuse you. I don't want to cause you any anxiety or sorrow. It is bad enough to have Mother thinking about me that way.

"I should like nothing better than a honeymoon in cathedrals and libraries," he said. "I could show you Oxford and Touraine and Capri . . ." But then: "The strange thing is that whereas I have loved others and yet did not think them suitable, I think you are suitable but do not love you . . ." But then again, in a sort of daisy petal back and forth rhythm – he loves me, he loves me not – there's

a reversion to giddy romance: responding to a coded telegram in which Beatrice declared her love for him, he replied: “We are engaged. We are lovers! I have hastened to the Signals Office and directed a cable to your address with the one word ‘Congratulations’ because it is the code word you suggested.”

In the end, nothing seems to have come of this, and, as far as we know, Talbot never expressed his love for Beatrice plainly and credibly.⁴¹

Romantic inconsistency was matched and perhaps fueled by Talbot’s confusion about his role in the military. Success as a staff officer no longer seemed enough, and, drawn in different directions by conflicting impulses, he felt badly about leaving the Patricias. “Should I go back to the Regiment?” he asked Beatrice. “I cannot make up my mind. I should really be happier [there], but it is such a temptation to remain here and feel important and be comfortable.” The work and status – he had become Aitken’s Official Eyewitness at the front – appealed to his vanity but left him, in his words, “simply looking pretty.” He wasn’t a real soldier. He was respected for his work, but being a staff officer, a “red tab,” ate at him.

The year before, demoralized after combat, Talbot told Beatrice that his profession was “speeching not fighting,” and in July 1916 he did make a kind of speech. In an open letter to Henri Bourassa, his first cousin and the formidable editor of *Le Devoir* in Quebec, Talbot argued that a hesitant French Canada must throw itself into the war. A week later Bourassa replied, coolly and adroitly, and their exchange brought Talbot a sudden highly partisan fame at home and abroad. His arguments failed to move Bourassa and many other French Canadians, but in a clash of nationalisms (the one for Canada, the other Quebec) Talbot’s heated, patriotic language and tendency to high rhetoric played well in London and English-speaking Canada:

As I write, French and English Canadians are fighting and dying side by side. Is their sacrifice to go for nothing or will it not cement a foundation for a true Cana-

*dian nation, a Canadian nation independent in thought, independent in action, independent even in its political organisation – but in spirit united for high international and humane purposes to the two Motherlands of England and France?*⁴²

A Canadian nationalist ahead of his time, Talbot wrote Beatrice: “My whole inclination is towards an independent Canada with all the attributes of sovereignty, including its responsibilities.” For Talbot, the war was “the great national opportunity for Canada.” If Canada played its part, “a strong, self-reliant spirit of Canadian nationality” would result.⁴³

Talbot’s political war had begun. A public relations success, he leapt at Aitken’s suggestion that he go on a speaking tour of Canada, then changed his mind when Liberal Party friends said it might make him seem Sir Max’s man. Aitken, a Tory with many enemies, had become a political liability, and Talbot began to distance himself. Writing to Beatrice, he explained: “My name was becoming associated with Sir Max. He is a power in the land. He has immense influence in both Canadian and English governments and consequently the greatest influence upon the Army. This is wholly pernicious. I am deeply opposed to political influences (particularly Tory!)”⁴⁴

Around this time, Talbot visited the Patricias. Adamson, now commanding officer, “shooed” him away, describing the event in a letter to his wife, Mabel:

Papineau turned up two days ago with a cinematographic camera and wanted us to pose for him. I suggested he take photographs of the graves of the fallen and ordered him to get out of the lines as I did not think it fitting that in the present critical situation officers should be going about with a Punch and Judy Show.

The general heard of it and quite approved, but my views are not shared by many Commanding Officers, who are only too anxious to advertise themselves. . . . If Papineau returned to the Regiment and did his bit, it would be more to his credit than playing into Max Aitken’s hands and driving about in motor cars and sleeping in a comfortable bed 16 miles behind the support lines.

In fairness, Talbot had become even more unhappy with his staff role. To Beatrice: “More friends have gone. By what strange law am I still here? What right have I to selfish pleasure any longer? Should my living life not be consecrated just as their dead lives have been?”⁴⁵

After the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917, his tension, confusion, and sense of remorse became intolerable. His last task as Aitken’s representative was to write the Canadian Corps report of the battle. On April 11, two days after the first assault, Talbot wrote his mother that he was safe, that he’d slept only four hours in the previous forty-eight, that he’d been along the new front line, and that the Canadians had won a “splendid victory.” What he didn’t say, Gwyn writes, “was that never in his life had he felt more frustrated than during those forty-eight hours. While he looked on, scribbling notes and sketching out maps, the Canadians had scored . . . the most important British victory of the war thus far.”^{46,47}

Talbot’s natural polarity and uncertain future continued to shape his letters to Beatrice, and she must have been alternately charmed and stung by his remarks, with their mixed signals and ambiguous, even contradictory implications. He returned over and over to their relationship and whether they’d be together after the war, but he ran hot and cold. At times romantic and dreamy, at others curt and careless, he could be both abstract and erratic. Was their relationship mere friendship, he wondered, or the first stage in a sublime romance that would last forever? Nor was he erratic solely on the subject of romance. A derisive comment on Beatrice’s art or character would be followed, in a subsequent letter, by abject contrition: “I am a miserable worm!! . . . I am contemptible.”

Sometimes vain and self-indulgent, Talbot almost certainly took advantage of Beatrice. In his defence, there was the war’s vile horror and his fear of death, mutilation, or disgrace. As others had learned, however, he tended to be inconstant, and it was probably in his nature to be not merely rash but immature and

inconsiderate. In any case, while Beatrice was clear about her love – “When I say I really love you, there isn’t any comeback” – he wasn’t clear at all, and his letters, while often extraordinary, make uncomfortable reading.

Gwyn is candid about Talbot’s selfishness, egotism, and capacity for melodrama. She likes and admires him but can write: “The flip side to Talbot’s flair and panache was arrogance and conceit. His own opinion of himself was golden; he was more than ready to use his charm to curry favour in high places, and not above bullying those whom he considered to be his inferiors into doing what he wanted.”

If Percy Molson (“poor simple old P. with too gentle a nature”) was kin to Chaucer’s parfit gentil knight, Talbot was Shakespearean in complexity and paradox. Self-doubting Hamlet and headstrong Hotspur warred within him, turning him this way and that.

In June 1917, motivated by loyalty, ambition, and the need for self-respect, Talbot returned to the Patricias. Percy and Charlie welcomed him. Adamson did not. Though Talbot told his mother, who had moved to London to be closer to him, that his commanding officer was delighted to have him back, the opposite was true. Agar wrote Mabel that when he talked to Talbot about the terms of his return, the latter behaved as if he were doing the regiment a favour. He expected immediate promotion to major, appointment as second-in-command, and:

He wants to go to Oxford for five weeks to get fit rowing, playing tennis racquets and running, then two weeks with his mother in the country, then six weeks military training at some school in England. . . . He said he intended to go into public life after the war, and thought that he would have a better chance of getting the support of the public if he could show that he had been with the Regiment through some big push like the last one. . . . I told him that if he came back he must do so as a Company Commander, and that he must make up his mind to stay as I did not propose to make the Battalion a training ground for the convenience of staff officers. . . . He can think of nothing but himself and annoyed me very much, although I did not comb him down as much as the self-seeking bounder deserved.⁴⁸

As always with Talbot, idealism and ambition went hand in hand, if uneasily. Though he dreaded the front and the risk he took in returning to it, he felt compelled to do so: “if I have the necessary courage and character to see it through, I shall have proved myself much more of a man than I can ever do as a scribe.” In practical terms, he was right: without more service in the trenches, he couldn’t expect further promotion in the military or the first-rate war record he wanted for a future in politics. At the same time, in characteristic self-conflict, he wrote his mother: “Why oh Why am I so ambitious, my dear mother? Could we not be happy with less honour and glory, more security and comfort?”

Soon, however, he was simply back, all indecision gone. He set to work, focused on his duties, shed his ambivalence and self-doubt, and found that his courage hadn’t left him. Within a week or two, Adamson had revised his opinion. Describing an action in which Talbot distinguished himself by his cool, intelligent leadership under fire, Adamson wrote: “Papineau is really very good.”⁴⁹ And though he remained a company commander, he was promoted in August: “I am a major and a real one,” he wrote his mother. “I have put up my crown and I feel very important indeed.” Gwyn quotes one of Talbot’s corporals: “Our company commander is Major Papineau, of whom you have no doubt read. He is a gentleman and a sport, and very popular.” In 1920, George McDonald said of Talbot’s reputation that he’d won not only the Military Cross but “the love and respect of his men and of his brother officers. He always looked after the comfort of his men before thinking of his own and he never ordered his men to do anything or go anywhere he did not personally lead them.”⁵⁰

So the summer passed and the war went on. Talbot threw himself into his regimental role, which included organizing sports and a company concert. He wrote upbeat letters to his mother – a dangerous daylight raid had been “all great fun” – and kept from her the awful events of the time, except Percy’s death in July.

In an early letter to Beatrice, Talbot had written: “I have had a man apparently uninjured die from the shock of the explosion as his elbow touched mine.” Now something similar had happened to his friend.⁵¹

Since coming to France, Talbot had kept his mother informed about Percy and other old friends. In early letters, he wrote: “I shall be very glad indeed when Geo. McDonald & Percy Molson come.” And: “Gault is back and with him George McDonald . . . Percy Molson, Phil Mackenzie, Currie and Cornish. We are a very jolly crowd once again. I suppose we shall play lots of bridge.”

After the Battle of Mount Sorrel in 1916, while Talbot was at Corps headquarters, he wrote: “The regiment has suffered very severely. They say it was worse than last year even. De Bay is dead. Percy Molson is shot through the chin, tongue and jaw.” And in June 1917, after Talbot returned to the regiment, he wrote that “Col. Adamson & Charlie and Percy Molson are all here.” Ten days later he wrote that he was about to play bridge with Percy, and then, on July 5:

Dearest Mother,

. . . You will be very sorry to hear that Percy Molson was killed last night. He and another officer were standing together and were both killed by concussion of a big trench mortar bomb which appears to have exploded between them.

*This is a serious loss for the Regiment & I lose another old friend. . . .*⁵²

By then, things had cooled between Talbot and Beatrice. The problem seems to have been his retreat from intimacy, but once he'd returned to the regiment it must have been hard to think about a future with Beatrice or anyone else. Dogged by the very real possibility of death, he wrote her in late September: “Please dear B., don't think you mean any the less to me but I have rather felt strain recently and somehow have lost interest in everything except my work.” And to his mother:

Sometimes, I feel I am not doing enough. I should be writing or speaking but I suppose that by just serving and waiting, and even by being killed I can accomplish far more in the long run . . . nearly 35 I am and very little or nothing done, and just as young as ever in some ways.

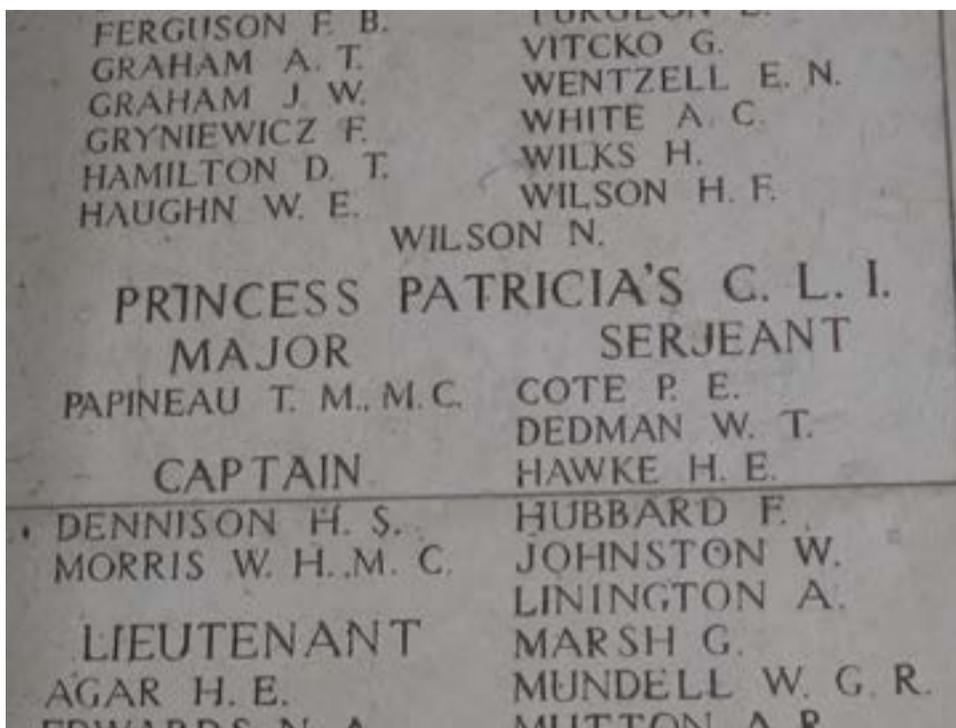
In early October, he went on leave to England. He saw his mother in London, then travelled to Oxford, where he visited former tutors and punted on the Cherwell. At the end of his leave, during a weekend with friends in Surrey, he had a romantic and perhaps sexual affair with Sarah Shaughnessy, the young widow of an old friend from Montreal. Talbot was, in spite of what he'd said to Beatrice, desperate for passion and experience. "The critical difference between Beatrice and Sarah," Gwyn writes, "was that Sarah was there."

On October 15, the day after leaving Surrey, Talbot wrote Sarah: "I wish the future were not so uncertain. I have nothing to depend on, not even you." He left England the following day, rejoining the Patricias as they moved from France to Belgium.⁵³

On October 21, he wrote Beatrice: "I am on the eve of grave events. I have only a short minute in which to write but I wished to make sure you heard from me." In effect, Talbot said goodbye. "Whatever happens," he wrote, "you must realize that I have thought of you and been happy and grateful for you now and to the end. I am in excellent health and spirits. . . . Better wait for my next letter before replying. Then I trust we can have a real resumption of correspondence. . . . Believe me always affectionately and gratefully, Your Talbot."

And to his mother the same day: "I never felt better in my life. This morning we had a church service and sang 'Nearer my God to Thee,' familiar of how we used to sing as kids at Montebello." Then, referring to his recent leave: "Dear little mother, how pitifully little I seem to have seen of you. Too bad – my restless soul. One hesitates to allow emotion to come out – my whole policy is one of suppression and control. . . . We will find a fund of buried affection after the war."

Two days later, the Patricias moved up to ready themselves for the Third Battle of Ypres, "Passchendaele." Adamson wrote Mabel that "the shelling on both sides is most intense. . . . The ground is just one mass of shell holes all full of water." Talbot wrote his mother: "It has been very rainy and wet but we managed to build a little open fire and were jolly and happy." There was nothing left to do but his duty. No more ambivalence or contradictory instincts, just the one thing.



The inscription at the Menin Gate in Ypres. A very tall person could probably touch it.

The first Canadian attack started on October 26, but the Patricias weren't in it. A second attack was scheduled for October 30. On the 27th, Talbot wrote his mother:

Just a hurried line, my last, I'm afraid, for a few days. By the time you receive it I shall be all right, or you will have news to the contrary, so you need have no anxiety. I am enjoying the whole thing enormously so far and have as yet not the least nervousness. . . . Always know that if I do get killed I was completely happy and content to the last minute and that my only regret is due to the sorrow it will cause you. . . . I have a sensible feeling, however, that my chances are good and that I can still write you gallant tales! I have already missed a number of shells today and the auguries are good.

On October 28, the PPCLI moved up to the front line. The next day, a final letter to his mother:

We have been fortunate so far and all things are cheerful. I have even shaved this morning in a little dirty water. . . . There seems so little to say, when if only I knew what was going to happen I might want to say so much. These would be poor letters to have as the last ones but you must know with what a world of love they are written.

Then he quoted Robert Herrick: “‘Always remember I could not love thee so well, or you love me, did I not love honour more.’ You have given me the courage and strength to go very happily and cheerfully into the good fight.”⁵³

Shortly before six the next morning, Talbot and his men went over the top. His final known words, spoken to Major Hugh Niven: “You know, Hughie, this is suicide.” Within three minutes, he was dead.⁵⁴

Whether Passchendaele was the good fight is debatable. Field Marshall Haig, commander of British and Allied Forces, wanted it. Major General Arthur Currie, commander of the Canadian Corps, didn't. For Haig it was a chance to break through the German lines and validate his past and present tactics. For Currie, it meant little but the slaughter of his men. Haig won out.

Three days earlier, Adamson had written Mabel that, in his opinion, “no C.O. in certain shows should be over 29 years old.” He was in his early fifties. On the 31st, he listed the officers lost since the previous morning and concluded: “Less men are left than on the historic 8th of May.” Two days later: “I cannot help wondering if the position gained was worth the awful sacrifice of life.”

Because Talbot's body was never reported found and buried, his name is inscribed at the Menin Gate in Ypres, where many of the missing in Belgium are memorialized.⁵⁵ In fact, however, three weeks after Talbot's death, Charlie Stewart did find his friend's partial remains. On November 16, he wrote Adamson: “My dear Colonel. . . . We found Talbot's body and are having a service and putting up a cross tomorrow.” On the 20th, Adamson wrote Mabel that Talbot, “poor fellow,” “could not have known what hit him.” As with Percy, so with Talbot.^{56,57}

The PPCLI never told Caroline Papineau about Charlie's sad discovery. Perhaps his fellow officers thought it wise to spare her the details. Three weeks into grieving, she could continue to think of her son as simply disappearing, the way so many sons did.

“To a degree that was extraordinary,” Gwyn writes, “Talbot Papineau became for Canadians the symbol not only of Passchendaele, but of all the golden promise cut down by the Great War.” The *Ottawa Citizen* wrote that Talbot had been “destined to fill a high place in public life. Many people who had no personal acquaintance with him regarded him as the one man specially fitted to lead in the task of reconciling the two races.” The British papers joined in, and the *Financial Times* of Montreal wrote: “The only consolation for a loss like this is the hope that by the very nobility of his sacrifice, the late Major Papineau’s memory may in years to come effect more for the unification of his country and the triumph of his principles than his own living effort could ever have accomplished.” Journalistic hyperbole notwithstanding, Talbot’s death sparked sincere and widespread grief, and there was a profound sense of public loss.⁵⁸

Nothing, of course, could equal Caroline’s sorrow. From her reply to Adamson’s letter of condolence:

Dear Colonel Adamson,

Please accept my sincere thanks for your letter, and your sympathy. Every word said about Talbot I read and reread and in the expressions of admiration and esteem in which he was held, I find my only solace.

The courage and readiness with which he faced what I am told was a desperate attack, fills my heart with pride, but also with great bitterness – I’ve nothing. Nothing can console me for the loss of my boy who had been the joy and comfort of my life.

I shall always be deeply interested in the Regiment, and it will ever have my unbounded admiration, and it will be a welcome service to do anything I can for it, for the sake of my beloved boy.

I should be very grateful if you could let me know the whereabouts of any of Talbot’s men who may have been wounded.

Yours very sincerely,

*Caroline R. Papineau*⁵⁹

But Caroline was not alone in her sorrow. On December 4, 1917, a friend of Talbot's named John Archibald wrote Beatrice. John and Talbot had attended McGill and Oxford together, and Talbot often stayed at John's when in London:

Miss Fox,

I have your letter of Nov. 11th. Your name is very familiar to me as Talbot often used to speak to me about you.

. . . Talbot knew, on his last leave, that he was going into a place from which he was likely enough not to return, but I never knew him happier or quieter in mind.

He was glad to be back with the regiment and refused to consider an offer of a staff position in England. After all, the front line was his element and he felt it. His death is a calamity to his mother and almost as much to some others of us – but not to him.

And yet poor Talbot – he loved life so keenly; it was no tired, blunted life he gave up. But he was not one to go in to anything with reservations.

He had been my nearest friend since we were boys so it means a good deal to me.

I never knew anyone like him and never expect to find another.

If we meet someday in the future, as may happen, we shall talk about Talbot, for I think that you too appreciated what he was.

Yours sincerely

John Archibald⁶⁰

Perhaps they did meet. It would be nice to think so. In any case, according to Gwyn, Beatrice led a satisfying post-war life: she married, became a successful sculptor, wrote four books, and lived until her late seventies. Her obituary in *The New York Times*, December 7, 1968, notes that she made relief maps for the armed forces in both world wars.



Beatrice, 1949. Painted more than thirty years after Talbot's death, this portrait by Alice Kent Stoddard is entitled "Beatrice Fox Griffith of Haverford West, Pennsylvania." (With the permission of Alderney Library, Channel Islands, U.K.)

In 1934, she sent Talbot's letters to the Canadian Army Historical Section. The intermediary was Philip Mackenzie.

Caroline Rogers Papineau "lived on and on" until 1951, never recovering from Talbot's death. In 1929, she sold what was left of Montebello to an American developer. "There I was born," Talbot had written Beatrice, "and there my heart is." Today Montebello is a resort hotel and national historical site.⁶¹⁻⁶³

In many ways, the personal and public sides of Talbot's character came together in his passion for Montebello and Canada. His parts combined in an intense attachment to landscape and nation. In this attachment, his drive to achieve – and its opposite, his desire for release – were integrated. An ambitious man who craved

an end to ambition, and a private man who threw himself into political action, he was one in his love of place.

In an early letter to Beatrice, Talbot appended lines from a poem by Octave Crémazie, the nineteenth century Quebec nationalist exiled or self-exiled to France.⁶⁴

The final lines are:

*Canada! quand sur ta rive
Heureux qui peut passer sa vie
Toujours fidèle à te servir,
Et dans tes bras, mère chérie,
Peut rendre son dernier soupir.*

In very rough translation:

*Canada! when on your side
Happy he is who spends his life
Always faithful in your service
And in your arms, dear mother,
Can take his last breath.*

Far from Quebec, Crémazie's poet-exile longs for home. He wants to serve his motherland, faithfully and always, and to die there. To Crémazie's lines, Talbot added: "I wonder if I shall be more fortunate than the unhappy author. He loved his Canada, but he did not love it more than I do."

In 1917, while still on staff at Canadian Corps headquarters, Talbot addressed the Corps School in France. His talk was activist, nationalist, and concerned above all with the "social and political changes which may be expected to occur after the war." As in his open letter to Bourassa, he spoke in the emotional and unironic high style of the time: "There will also be the undercurrent of sad and reverential memory for those whose supreme sacrifice has made such joy possible." And:

[There will] be a realisation that in the trial and pain and bloody sacrifice of war the national life of Canada has taken birth. Such has been the history of every great nation and Canada will now have a history – a history to raise the heads and

thrill the hearts of countless generations to come – a history that will form the firm foundation for a national reconstruction.

In the presence of our victorious armies the nation will feel an uplift of pride and confidence. Canada, for instance, will no longer fear an absorption by America, she will no longer doubt her ability to trade with foreign countries. She will demand a recognition of her national status. She will wish to continue to play a part in the politics of the world.

Briefly, there will result a strong, self-reliant spirit of Canadian Nationality.⁶⁵

He foresaw a change in the constitutional relationship between Canada and the United Kingdom, a new association with Allied or neutral countries, even the development of an independent diplomatic corps and a foreign policy to go with it: “The participation of Canada in the war will have given her a position in the eyes of foreign countries which she should maintain.”

He predicted post-war prosperity and expansion in Canada but warned against a “wanton exploitation of natural wealth.” Advocating controlled immigration and sensible laws of conservation, he said that Canadians must guard their “precious heritage.” Above all: “. . . we may find Canada and America playing leading roles in the establishment of that international police force which so many now believe to be the best guarantee against future wars.”

Laying out his convictions, Talbot referred to a “deep reverent feeling of indebtedness” to those who had fallen and said that those who lived must be dedicated to the purpose for which the others had died: “the establishment of a great, free and happy nation.” As for returning soldiers, they must not demand too much. “We are fighting not for ourselves, not for any particular body of citizens, but for the nation as a whole.” However:

One thing which we will demand above all others is decency and honesty in our public men. That is a thing upon which we will all agree and which, if we are true to ourselves and true to the sacred trust which our dead have left in our hands, we can most assuredly control.

And near the end: “Sacrifice is the keynote of our service here. It should continue to be our guiding principle in our citizen life.”

After Talbot’s death there were the predictable “what ifs,” and, as Gwyn says, they persist. “Even now Papineau remains a vivid and tantalizing presence. The easiest description of the loss Canada experienced by his death is that he was the Pierre Elliott Trudeau who never was.” On November 3, 1917, Mackenzie King, grandson of another 1837 rebel, wrote in his diary: “I saw notice of Talbot Papineau having been killed in action. One of the finest and bravest of men, a great loss to Canada, the British Empire and the world.”⁶⁶

Ralph Hodder-Williams, the former PPCLI officer and author of its post-war history, wrote that Talbot, “through the happy combination of a proud name, clear vision and great personal charm, might well have lived to render further valuable service to the state in time of peace.”⁶⁷

In *The Globe and Mail*, July 18, 2006, Brian McKenna, director of the CBC TV miniseries *The Great War*, said about Pierre Trudeau that “he left behind the folly of his youthful radical views and became, like Papineau, a champion of a bilingual Canada and an enemy of narrow Quebec nationalism.” Another writer, also referring to the series, said that “the similarities between the two men are actually quite extraordinary. Both were born in Quebec, the sons of English-speaking mothers and French-speaking fathers, and both were flawlessly bilingual. Both travelled the country seeking to impart a greater understanding of Quebec, and both battled the narrow nationalism of their home province.”⁶⁸

The author of *McGill University at War* said of Talbot that, “bearing a name famed in Canadian history,” he would be remembered for his vision of a Canada “undivided by the schisms of race and creed,” its identity as a *true Canadian nation* secured by the sacrifice of war.^{69,70}

It was this true Canadian nation that Talbot loved most and was most willing to serve. He faced death for it, and sacrifice was the keynote of his service.

In many ways, Talbot and Percy were opposites. If Percy was mild, temperate, and of a piece, Talbot was wild, intemperate, and of many pieces. If Percy was modest but quietly assured, Talbot was immodest but fundamentally unsure of himself. And if Percy's ambitions, outside sports, were measured, Talbot's were not. The two men complemented each other.

And they did have things in common, including a sense of duty and pride. Both regarded service, including wartime military service, as their obligation, and both returned to their frontline unit when they didn't have to. Then, too, both were capable of fineness, delicacy, and sensitivity. Percy was famous for it, Talbot less so, but as the front first shocked and then wore him down, he changed: *Never shall I shoot duck again or draw a speckled trout to gasp in my basket. . . . There should be no heroism in war. No glorification – no reward. For us it should be the simple execution of an abhorrent duty – a thing almost to be ashamed of.*

And they shared the happier duties: to their regiment, their fellow officers, and their men. They remained true to the code they lived by, and they spared their families whenever they could.

In Talbot's case, there was the additional duty to Beatrice. At times capricious, insincere, even mean, he wanted in the end not to hurt her: *I don't want to cause you any anxiety or sorrow.* It's not hard to conclude from his letters and what we know of the war that he forced a distance in his relationship with a remarkable young woman because he'd lost faith in his survival. And so, at the end of a spirited if sometimes selfish life, he rose to the occasion and did what he could for Beatrice, and for his mother, bar living.

There's no way to know, of course, but it's possible that his final calm – as reported by John Archibald and evidenced in his own letters – was the result of letting go and putting an end to uncertainty, confusion, fear of failure, and tiresome ambition and compromise. In any case, this inconstant and self-contradictory man died with resolve, verve, courage, and concern for others.

Chapter Three

Walter Allward and Vimy, a service in stone



Walter Allward, circa 1913. (Archives of Ontario, F 1075-16-0-0-125.)

“I am trying hard, against many difficulties, to hold on to the ideals of this memorial.”¹

-Allward, 1925

In the middle of the First World War, Walter Allward, a middle-aged sculptor in Toronto, had a dream about the Western Front:

When things were at their blackest in France, I went to sleep one night after dwelling on the muck and misery over there; my spirit was like a thing tormented . . . I dreamed I was in a great battlefield. I saw our men going by in the thousands and being mowed down by the sickles of death . . . Suffering beyond endurance at the sight, I turned my eyes and found myself looking down on an avenue of poplars. Suddenly through the avenue I saw thousands marching to the aid of our armies. They were the dead. They 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.

This vision shaped the rest of his life. Responsibilities, W.B. Yeats wrote, begin in dreams, and this was one of those dreams,² the reality behind it so powerful that the dreamer became the responsibility.³

Walter Seymour Allward was born in Toronto in 1875 or 1876.⁴ Little is known about his youth, except that he attended Dufferin Public School and learned carpentry from his father. There's a plaque in his memory at a house on Amelia Street in Toronto's Cabbagetown neighbourhood.⁵

In the early 1890s he took art classes with William Cruikshank, a distinguished painter and teacher. He also attended evening school at the Toronto Technical School and joined a sketching club, but his principal training was a four-year apprenticeship with the architectural firm of Gibson and Simpson.⁶⁻⁸ Sixty years later, his obituary in Toronto's *Globe and Mail* remarked that as an apprentice, he "found little interest in contracts and specifications. He neglected his blueprints to copy drawings of Michelangelo and 'Greek' sculptors."

After leaving Gibson and Simpson, Allward worked at Toronto's Don Valley Brickworks, where he learned to mold clay and produce the terracotta bas-reliefs then popular in local architectural ornamentation.⁹ While still at the Brickworks, he rented a studio downtown and accepted his first public commission, a figure representing Peace for a public monument commemorating the Northwest Rebellion of 1885.

Jacqueline Hucker and Julian Smith (*Vimy: Canada's Memorial to a Generation*) write that he "soon manifested great technical skill, allied with a love of the classical figure tradition, and an innovative approach to monument design."¹⁰ Aptitude and enthusiasm made up for his relatively limited formal schooling, and his work stood out. Further commissions enabled him to leave the Brickworks, and over the next decade he became one of Canada's most successful sculptors of historical figures. Working on large-scale commemorative monuments, he showed from the start a "meticulous attention to detail," though it "often resulted in his failure to complete commissions within the promised time."¹¹

Despite a reputation for stubborn perfectionism, Allward thrived in the competitive world of monumental sculpture.¹² After Peace came works such as a life-sized figure of Dr. Oronhyatekha (chief ranger of the Independent Order of Foresters), busts of famous men for the Ontario Provincial Museum, and statues of John Graves Simcoe and Sir Oliver Mowat, both in Toronto's Queen's Park. According to *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Allward's "real talent lay in his heroic monuments," such as the South African War Memorial (Toronto, 1907), the Baldwin-Lafontaine Monument (Parliament Hill, Ottawa, 1914), and the Bell Telephone Memorial (Brantford, finished in 1917, five years behind schedule).¹³

Two of his pre-war figures were cast in bronze and stand on each side of the steps to the Supreme Court of Canada in Ottawa. Part of a planned memorial to King Edward VII that was interrupted by the First World War, they went into storage. The Supreme Court of Canada describes them thus: "Made by Toronto artist Walter S. Allward (creator and architect of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France), IVSTITIA (*Justice*) and VERITAS (*Truth*) were forgotten for almost

50 years. In 1969, they were found in their crates buried under a parking lot. They were erected on their present site in 1970.”¹⁴

Allward married in 1898 and travelled to London and France with his wife, Margaret. A friend at Toronto’s Arts and Letters Club wrote that the sculptor’s visit to Paris was both romantic and professional: “they honeymooned in Paris so that Walter could more closely examine the Rodin sculptures.” Hucker and Smith agree that Allward travelled to Paris in part for artistic reasons and say that he retained a life-long admiration for Michelangelo and Rodin. About the latter, Hucker writes that he “created an art of self-expression that was to become a fundamental characteristic of twentieth-century art.”^{15,16}

As Allward’s work matured, he remained rooted in the art of classical Greece and the Renaissance but favoured simplified forms. In a time of emergent modernism, he moved beyond the traditional artistic canon and formal academic styles then typical of Canadian monumental sculpture and worked to develop a more direct, human, and emotional art.¹⁷

Many of his finest achievements reflect this new, more expressive style, including the *Old Soldier* in Victoria Square, Toronto, and the South African War Memorial to the northeast, near the intersection of University Avenue and Queen Street. Both were commissioned in 1903 or 1904 and unveiled several years later. The former, honouring veterans of the War of 1812 and also known as the Army and Veterans Monument, is a fully realized male half-figure atop a granite pedestal. An elderly man with sharp features, he wears his old uniform with pride. He is at once unique – a specific individual – and the universal soldier grown ancient. He wears a medal on his chest; his left sleeve is empty.



The Old Soldier, Toronto. A single medal and an empty sleeve. (Photo by the author.)

This sculpture, praised by Katherine Hale in 1919 as a “neglected shrine of art,” is riveting.¹⁸ It is also something new in the artist’s work. In “Walter Allward: Sculptor and Architect of the Vimy Ridge Memorial,” Lane Borstad writes that as long as Allward’s sculpture commemorated famous men, he was “constrained by tradition and conventions of portraiture.” In the *Old Soldier*, unbound by traditional principles, he could emphasize the elderly man’s individuality.

Something similar is true of the South African monument. Two young soldiers, gazing southeast down University Avenue in the general direction of the Transvaal, are off to serve the British Empire, while their mother, *Canada* (said to be modelled on Allward’s own mother), points the way. Less distinctive and memorable than the *Old Soldier*, these young men are still vivid and *themselves*. And, though the monument’s imperial certainty dates it, it shows how far the artist had come in the first decade of his practice.¹⁸

With his success confirmed, Allward was named an associate of the Royal Canadian Academy in 1908. Ten years later he was made a full academician.¹⁹ By then, however, the world had changed. As a Veterans Affairs publication puts it, the First World War had “disrupted traditions, and many artists who had lived through it experienced a strong sense of rupture in history.”²⁰ In his essay on Allward, Borstad includes several of the artist’s wartime pen and ink drawings, images reflecting disruption and unease:

The drawings have a dark, ominous, and melancholic quality that reflects Allward’s romantic nature and show him to have been a private and introspective individual. They also are marked by a strong spiritual quality that reappears in the form of Christian symbols of sacrifice and resurrection in all of his later monument studies. Here are the private emotional struggles that he wove into his public art.

In the least oppressive drawing, dated 1914, a cellist in a large but empty prison cell looks up at a filmy cloud of figures floating near a high ceiling. In this sketch, Allward, himself a cellist, suggests an earthly imprisonment relieved by something transcendent, a leaden existence mediated by music, art, revelation. In the darkest



Stratford Cenotaph. “The supremacy of right over brute force,” Allward said. (Photo by the author.)



Stratford Cenotaph, detail: Strife in defeat. (Photo by the author.)

of the images, dated 1916 and entitled “The Battlefield,” a Christ figure stands before a mass of corpses. The year of the Somme, 1916 marked the Great War’s pivotal horror, the nightmare that ended any illusion of Western civilization’s sanity.²¹

With the Armistice two years later, every Canadian city and town wanted a cenotaph. Allward accepted commissions for three in Ontario: those at Stratford, Brantford, and Peterborough. The last two remained unfinished when he moved to London in 1922 to begin work on Vimy, but the completed Stratford cenotaph is a stunning work of art, a brilliant melding of human form and allegorical meaning. Two individuals, one standing higher than the other, represent the spiritual man and the figure of strife defeated and disarmed. It is timeless: nothing ties it to a specific conflict, and in its dramatic intensity and emotional directness, it conveyed for post-war survivors “the supremacy of right over brute force.”²²

Borstad:

By avoiding the stock stereotype emblems and attributes so typical of his contemporaries, Allward aligned himself closer to the French romantic tradition of Auguste Rodin than the academic sculpture tradition of Canada. Stratford represented the culmination of a stylistic evolution that can be traced in Allward's career from the traditional biographical representation of Simcoe (Toronto) through the progressively bolder designs of South African Memorial (Toronto), Baldwin and Lafontaine (Ottawa), and Bell Telephone Memorial (Brantford).

Allward's stylistic evolution and debt to Rodin also informed his design for Peterborough, and many of his post-war drawings marked themes, forms, and devices worked out during the war. In turn, these developments anticipated further evolution in the work at Vimy, just as emotions expressed in the wartime sketches carried over first to the cenotaph designs, then the work in London and France.

In June 1922, having won the competition to design and build Canada's principal overseas war memorial, Allward left Canada with his family. After looking for a suitable studio in Belgium and Paris, he rented space in London's Maida Vale district, where he and his family settled. From London, he would travel back and forth to the Vimy site north of Paris to direct the execution of his designs.^{[23,24](#)}



The Vimy Monument, front view. (Photo by the author.)

“A Canadian man dreams the stone that will be assembled and carved to expiate the sorrow of one country on the soil of another.

*-Jane Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers**

After the war, the Imperial War Graves Commission gave Canada eight sites on which to build memorials: five in France, three in Belgium. Canadian soldiers had fought at all eight. Now each would receive a monument based on a single Canadian design.

In 1920, the Canadian Battlefields Memorial Commission (CBMC) solicited designs from artists and architects across Canada, calling first for preliminary submissions. From among the 160 entries received, seventeen were selected by the CBMC’s international jury, which then commissioned a plaster maquette (scale model) of each design. In 1921, the jury judged Allward’s the best, by unanimous decision.

The CBMC’s plans had changed, however. Now Canada was to have a single major overseas memorial, with seven more modest memorials at the other sites. After intense debate over the location of the principal site, Hill 145 at Vimy Ridge was chosen. General Sir Arthur Currie, former commander of the Canadian Corps, had argued for Hill 62 at Passchendaele, which he considered a better example of Canadian valour. As for Vimy: “I would not want to have the impression left that Vimy was our greatest battlefield.” But Mackenzie King, now prime minister, liked the image of Vimy as the altar of sacrifice, and politics won out.

In fairness, the Battle of Vimy Ridge had been the first significant Allied victory in almost two years. It was also the first battle in which all four Canadian divisions fought together, and they captured the ridge after French and British units had failed. Though only part of the much larger Battle of Arras and largely forgotten outside Canada, the Battle of Vimy Ridge was indeed brave and decisive. More

to the point, it lent itself to myth: it didn't hurt that its dates (Sunday, April 9 to Wednesday, April 12, 1917) coincided with Easter and the annual Christian narrative of suffering, death, and spiritual resurrection.

In a 2007 *Globe and Mail* article, Michael Valpy describes how and why Vimy was mythologized. As part of Mackenzie King's nation-building propaganda, it was presented to the public as the moment Canada came into its own and became a nation in its own right. In truth, the Canadian Corps at Vimy had been commanded by a British officer and relied on support from British units, but that was edited out of the popular account. In an act of "opportune amnesia," Vimy became a purely Canadian victory and our nation's defining moment.

Myth, Valpy says, "can so easily trump history, and even culture." He quotes Geoffrey Hayes, co-editor of *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*: "Mythology is a funny thing. We don't need to know what happened, we simply need to know what the myth tells us is significant. Everywhere we look, we can see that Vimy Ridge has become so closely associated with Canada as a nation that in some ways it almost doesn't matter what happened there." Mythology keeps it simple. We remember the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

And the monument helps. As Valpy says:

It was radical, it was beautiful, it was pure mythology – classical Greek married to Christian symbolism – and it was a world apart from the conventional structures of remembrance being built elsewhere: the perfect symbol for a young country yearning for an identity beyond its shores.^{25,26}

Sentimentality and nationalism aside, Allward's achievement – his monument's scale, its power and glory, its gutting sadness and sincere attempt to console the living by reconciling loss and hope – is extraordinary. Radical in form and size (the twin pylons rise thirty metres above the monument's base), it is unique. A.Y. Jackson wrote that it "went beyond and above anything the framers of the competition conceived of. [Allward] ignored the restrictions the other competitors accepted."²⁷

The monument is at the crest of Vimy Ridge in northern France, facing east toward the Douai Plain and the rising sun. Situated in a 117-hectare (290 acre) memorial site, the monument and its surrounding parkland belong in perpetuity to Canada, the land deeded by France to Canada in 1922 after complex negotiations. Fourteen kilometres north of the town of Arras, the Vimy Memorial includes battlefield, forested acreage, escarpment, paths, roads, open areas, restored trenches and preserved tunnels, cemeteries, smaller memorials, and a visitor centre, as well as the monument.²⁸

The memorial has 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 had lost their lives in France and whose bodies were never identified.

Allward selected the ideal spot on the ridge but wasn't content to just stick his monument on it. It couldn't simply sit there. It had to "rise out of the ridge in the manner of a military fortification," which meant reshaping the ridge before laying the foundation. Deep excavations were needed, and a road and paths. The site's chalky soil, ideal for wartime tunnelling, made building difficult.

Allward convinced the CBMC to hire a young Danish engineer named Oscar Faber. Responsible for the monument's base, Faber specified the use of cast-in-place reinforced concrete to which blocks of stone could be bonded. Later, when the stone veneer was fixed to the concrete, Allward insisted that the joints between blocks be as narrow as possible. The base of the monument had to appear long, continuous, and unbreachable.^{29,30}

As for the memorial park, it was to be a kind of rural cemetery in which Allward's monument would mark the site of the battle and "the living might commune with the dead through nature." Art and nature, Hucker writes, would comfort the bereaved, with Vimy standing on what Mackenzie King and many others viewed as sacred ground. The preliminary work, which included clearing the site of

buried explosives, went ahead slowly, and Allward's design, originally intended for Hill 62 at St. Julien, was adapted to the new topography of the ridge.³¹⁻³³

Delays were inevitable. It took two and a half years to clear the land, and almost as long to find a source of stone that met Allward's standards. This became a fixation, as he and his agents searched Britain and the Continent for a stone that was both durable and workable. "I have been eating and sleeping stone for so long it has become an obsession with me," he wrote Ottawa, "and incidentally a nightmare."

At last, in an ancient Roman quarry in Croatia, he found it. A warm, white limestone known as Seget, it resembled marble, was flawless, and could be quarried in blocks large enough to suit the sculptor's designs. Moreover, its "connection to the classical world would reinforce the transcendental values he was seeking for his monument." He wanted Vimy to reflect a "remade classicism" expressing both antiquity and "the modern sensibilities of loss and obligation," and Seget suited that. Sourcing and transporting it entailed supply problems, further delays, and additional costs, but it clad the concrete with the right look, touch, and spirit. The larger blocks, reshaped by expert carvers, became Vimy's sublime allegorical figures.³⁴

From the start, Allward saw himself not only as Vimy's designer and sculptor but its architect as well. In December 1921, he wrote Colonel Henry Osborne, Secretary of the CBMC: "I am going to Flanders to act as Architect (or designer) and sculptor and will have to serve as both from the beginning to the end of this work, because the architecture and sculpture are so closely interwoven." Though not a member of Canada's architectural institute, Allward saw himself as part of the architectural profession and, on his Vimy blueprints, referred to his dual roles as architect and sculptor. It would take someone like him, he believed, to unite the sister arts of architecture and sculpture in the ruins of war.³⁵

The last third of Jane Urquhart's superb novel, *The Stone Carvers*, tells the story of Allward and the monument. Here she describes the first stage of the process by which he crafted clay models for his figures:

*He auditioned models for the figures of defenders, mourners, torchbearers, for the figures of peace and justice, truth and knowledge, often abandoning or substituting these individuals before the plaster models were cast or sometimes later, when he would change his mind throughout the night. He made hundreds of drawings of swords and wreaths, of pylons and of walls, always with the lead of his pencil sharpened like a weapon. In the end it was the imposing front wall of the memorial that obsessed him, the wall that would carry on its surface the names of the eleven thousand no one ever saw again.*³⁶

After drawing the models, Allward sculpted life-size clay figures based on his sketches.^{37,38} Then, because unfired clay soon cracks and breaks, plaster moulds were fashioned and sent to France. There, carvers, using a device called a pantograph, doubled the maquettes' measurements and rendered them in stone.

There were twenty plaster maquettes in all, each a human figure in the classical style. Stored in Canada after the war, they were seen not as works of art in themselves but as objects taking up space, and in the 1960s the Minister of Veterans Affairs ordered the army to blow them up. Saved at the eleventh hour by the Minister of National Defence, they escaped an ironic fate.³⁹ Seventeen of these remarkable figures are on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, the other three at the Military Communications and Electronics Museum, Canadian Forces Base, Kingston.

Allward's art spanned the traditional and modern. In an article on the recent restoration of Vimy, Julian Smith shows how the monument reflects an "emerging modernism" but is not fully modernist. On one hand: "The cladding was still stone, hand-tooled and finished. The sculptural work relied on traditional stone carving techniques." On the other: "Allward did use pantographs to transfer the design," as well as "reinforced concrete, then in its infancy, as the underlying structural system."⁴⁰

Something else argues for Vimy's innovation. If Allward's pre-war designs were only slowly moving away from the traditional and becoming more expressive, Vimy's architecture represented a dramatic shift. Based on strong lines and formal abstraction, its modernism is clearest in its stark, simplified design, and especially its twin pylons. It wasn't engineering and technology alone that made it contemporary; it was its style, experimentation, and composition. This, Borstad writes, was Allward's "brand of modern architecture, expressed in the striking simplicity of his wall surfaces and towering pylons."

At the same time, in his role as sculptor, Allward balanced Vimy's geometric modernism with a more traditionally symbolic and figural art. The contrast between contemporary lines and classical curves is critical.^{41,42}

Borstad stresses the personal and emotional elements in Allward's figures. Despite his interest in modern styles, Borstad says, Allward believed in emotion over intellect. Interviewed in 1939, he said: "Back of all high art, I am convinced there must be – not so much the intellectual – must be truly and loftily the emotional. There is no artist like the heart."⁴³ As both sculptor and architect, Allward's aim was to express through art and architecture what the heart knew.

In his 1921 submission to the CBMC, Allward outlined his planned allegorical figures. Below a drawing of the monument's front, he hand-lettered:

*AT THE BASE OF THE STRONG IMPREGNABLE WALL OF DEFENCE
ARE THE DEFENDERS—ONE GROUP SHOWING THE BREAKING OF
THE SWORD—THE OTHER THE SYMPATHY OF CANADIANS FOR THE
HELPLESS—ABOVE THESE ARE THE MOUTHS OF GUNS COVERED
WITH OLIVE AND LAURELS—ON THE WALL STANDS AN HEROIC
FIGURE OF CANADA BROODING OVER THE GRAVES OF HER VALIANT
DEAD—BELOW IS SUGGESTED A GRAVE WITH A HELMET—LAURELS
ETC—BEHIND HER STANDS TWO PYLONS—SYMBOLIZING THE
TWO FORCES CANADIAN AND FRENCH—BETWEEN AND AT THE
BASE OF THESE IS THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE WHO GIVING HIS ALL*

THROWS THE TORCH TO HIS COMRADE—LOOKING UP THEY SEE THE FIGURES OF PEACE JUSTICE TRUTH KNOWLEDGE ETC FOR WHICH THEY FOUGHT CHANTING THE HYMN OF PEACE . . .

Two other figures are seen only from the other side of the monument: the Grievors (or Mourners), a man and woman who have, it seems, lost a son. They recline, abject, on either side of the platform's southwest steps, separate in their grief.

Of the twenty figures, three tell the basic story of loss and hope: *Canada Bereft*, *The Spirit of Sacrifice*, and *Passing the Torch*. In his 1921 outline, Allward described the first as “an heroic figure of Canada,” but in her finished form she seems more an image of profound maternal sorrow. The most prominent of Allward’s symbolic figures, she stands, shrouded, at the monument’s edge, staring at the ground. What she sees is a soldier’s tomb on the battlefield, and in it her dead son. She may have been heroic several years earlier, sending her boy to France as an earlier mother had



Canada Bereft. (Photo by the author.)



Two figures: The Spirit of Sacrifice and Passing the Torch. (Photo by the author.)

sent hers to South Africa. Now a bouquet of lilies hangs in her hand, forgotten, and she is lost. Beyond brooding, she is desolate.^{44,45}

It was always the sculptor's intention to express the war's "loss, sorrow and futility." In 1921, the CBMG wanted a memorial to "commemorate the gallantry of the Canadian troops." What it got fifteen years later was, in Urquhart words, a "huge urn designed to hold grief." The war may have faded from public memory, but Allward's passion and distress had not. He wanted his monument to do justice to the dead, while fearing it might fail their mourners.^{46,47}

If *Canada Bereft* is linked to the tomb below, she is linked as well to the two figures behind and above, young men representing sacrifice and the passing of the torch. She seems unaware of them, but many visitors, drawn to her solitary mourning, also notice the two young men, the first caught at the moment of death, the second, immediately above, holding a torch as high as he can. Allward must have had John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" in mind and known the Canadian public would be sensitive to the reference. A hundred years later, it is still natural to associate the extended torch with failing hands.

The second figure, *The Spirit of Sacrifice* (perhaps the first figure's soul released at death), raises his eyes to the pylons' highest and remotest figures – the "Chorus," Allward called them, each figure representing a universal ideal – and from them to the sky beyond.

Vimy depicts no soldiers, and no dead. Allegorical figures abstract the scene, the tomb is closed, and there are no emblems of modern warfare other than the two cannon muzzles draped in laurel and olive. As Hucker says, Vimy made "no direct reference to war or victory but alluded rather to the consequences of war and the suffering of those who were left to grieve. Through reference to the cyclical myth of sacrifice and spiritual rebirth, it also offered solace to the living."⁴⁸

Allward acknowledged that Vimy was inspired, in part at least, by the medieval cathedral. The monument's cathedral effect, he wrote, would be emphasized when a "shaft of afternoon sunlight" illuminated the sculptures between the pylons.

And: “The two pylons were an endeavor to create an outline against the sky that would . . . suggest the upper part of a Cross.”⁴⁹

Vimy’s religious imagery is hard to miss. If *Canada Bereft* is the *mater dolorosa*, *The Spirit of Sacrifice*, with his arms outstretched, is her crucified son. Christian resurrection symbolism is central to the monument’s meaning and its desire to console. The ideals and virtues symbolized by Allward’s more secular figures are matched by a religious iconography that few could misread. Symbolic meaning, especially in relation to a transcendent redemption, is intentional and unmistakable, and Vimy is a kind of ecclesiastical stage.⁵⁰ Pylons and platform, Hucker writes, “functioned as a theatrical backdrop for the figurative sculpture, its huge scale endowing the figures with inner strength and vitality. Upon its stage, they took part in a drama that was to be read in a primarily pictorial fashion”

But the figures, though idealized, are also felt. They are personal as well as symbolic. Human loss is final and visceral – even for visitors with a strong religious faith – whatever we say about battlefields being sacred ground, their soil sanctified by ultimate sacrifice. The critical thing about Allward’s figures is that they recognize the mourners’ darkness and respect it.

There are traces of inflated late Victorian language in Allward’s 1921 submission to the CBMC. He referred to *Canada Bereft*, for example, as “an heroic figure of Canada,” then to “her valiant dead,” but very little of this pre-Somme diction, or the outlook it reflected, shows on the finished monument.

In fact, the astonishing thing about Vimy is the total absence of military triumphalism. It makes no reference to the recent clash of arms or victory over Germany, though Allward had once intended otherwise, imagining a foot trampling a German helmet. “Even that symbol,” he said, “I have removed.”⁵¹

Vimy became, in the artist's words, "a sermon against the futility of war," and nothing about it romanticizes militarism.⁵²⁻⁵⁴

His reaction to the suffering caused by war had been a desire for social harmony. In London and France, this took shape in the identity and placement of his figures, many representing the values



Detail of names inscribed at Vimy. (Photo by the author.)

and ideals he believed essential to social and spiritual wellbeing. The figure of *Peace* he placed at the monument's highest point, supreme.

Years later, near the end of the Second World War, Lieutenant Doris Carter, a Canadian army nurse, was in Belgium on her way home. In her service memoir, she writes: "The next day we did not leave for England as expected, but instead went by lorry to visit the Peace Memorial in Vimy." Lieutenant Carter got Vimy's name wrong, but not its spirit.⁵⁵

Inevitable delays and cost overruns at the Vimy site brought pressure from Ottawa for lower standards. In his choice of materials, for example, Allward was instructed to accept lower-quality stones and imperfect finishes. He resisted, sometimes ignoring Ottawa altogether. "To these demands," Hucker writes, "he presented an inflexible front. Allward's courage and determination ensured the extraordinary quality of the resulting monument."⁵⁶

Vimy has three fundamental features: its modernist structure (ramparts, platform, and pylons), its figurative sculptures, and the names of the missing. While some of

Allward's stone carvers worked from his drawings to produce the twenty symbolic figures, others inscribed the name and rank of the 11,285 Canadian soldiers killed in France with no known grave.⁵⁷

The engraving itself is distinctive. First, in contrast to the practice of placing some names far above the visitor, unavoidably making them remote, Allward had each name inscribed around the relatively low walls of the ramparts. All names are accessible to the visitor. Second, he insisted on narrow, tight joints between the wall's stones not only to project a continuous surface but to allow the carvers to inscribe names across the joints both vertically and horizontally. No name is forced into place, there are no gaps, and there is an even, continuous rhythm. Third, he designed a typeface for the names that is both dignified and warm.⁵⁸

As Vimy's sculpture and architecture are in harmony, so the monument and memorial park are in balance, integrating nature, design, and history in the service of respect and reassurance. Visitors reach the monument through a landscape planted with trees native to Canada, and the setting is serene. At the same time, much of the parkland is off-limits to visitors because of unexploded ordnance, and the Great War's bomb craters are still obvious, if grassed over.

Just as Vimy's parkland is both landscaped and natural, Allward left much of the area around his monument untouched. Hucker:

Significantly, he chose not to place his structure within a precinct or garden . . . but directly on the unbounded battlefield, . . . Once the monument had been built, Allward turned the excavated area in front of the structure into a grassed space that he referred to as the amphitheatre. . . . He retained the remnant battle landscape around the sides and back of the monument, thereby creating a direct and powerful emotional connection between the monument and the ridge.

Seen from the amphitheatre:

Allward's monument may be understood as a modern retelling of Greek drama. Rising from a site of so much destruction and loss of life, the monument's mythology

*harnesses the violent and irrational forces released by the war and offers the promise of a return to order and harmony.*⁵⁹

In this drama, staged at the intersection of monument and landscape, the past is recognized, honoured, and accepted. The possibility of life beyond war and loss is acknowledged, and the receptive visitor is renewed. Dramatically at least, the meeting of art and nature makes emotional sense of a tragedy that otherwise makes no sense at all.

As the years passed and most Canadians lost interest in the war, Allward kept on with Vimy, though Urquhart imagines him feeling “like a vessel into which the world’s diminishing sorrow was poured for safe-keeping.”⁶⁰ Then, in 1934, two years before the monument’s inauguration, he and Margaret lost their son, Donald. An architect like his older brother Hugh, Donald had joined his father to help with the work in France. Under a confusing headline (“Sculptor is Killed”), *The Gazette*, a Montreal daily, reported that the younger man had died in Dinard, a seaside town near Saint-Malo, after an accident: “Donald, 27, son of the noted sculptor, Walter Allward, . . . fell from a third-storey window of the Villa Cendrich where he was living. Also a sculptor, he was associated with his father in business.” Hucker and Smith write:

*Walter and Margaret found themselves grieving the loss of their son and assuming responsibility for raising their six-year-old grandson, Peter. . . . The fateful irony of the situation could not have escaped Allward: he and his wife had now joined the legion of mourning Canadian parents.*⁶¹

On July 26, 1936, Vimy was unveiled by King Edward VIII. Speaking about peace, rebuilding, and hope, he used diction that in *our* time sounds sentimental, insincere, and formulaic. He spoke of “our fallen comrades,” “the splendour of their sacrifice,” and the “consecration of our love for them.” Even then, a cynical veteran like Siegfried Sassoon would have found Edward’s platitudes hard to bear,

but standard phrases and sentiments were what the 100,000 people present must have expected.⁶²

Several thousand Canadians had sailed from Montreal for the pilgrimage to Vimy and the opening ceremony. The Canadian media paid little attention – public interest in the overseas memorial had faded – but the British papers gave it extensive coverage.

Mackenzie King wasn't there. Though keen on the idea that Vimy had been built on sacred ground at the ridge's altar of sacrifice, he didn't visit until October. When he did, he wrote that he found the monument "exceedingly fine and impressive" but out of proportion with Canada's contribution to the war. "It is in fact the most pretentious war memorial in the world," he noted in his diary.⁶³

By then, the Spanish Civil War had begun and the Second World War was less than three years away. As renewed global conflict neared, there was a revival of interest in Vimy as people feared for its safety. Allward assured the public that he'd foreseen the possibility of fresh warfare and, as a result, had used stone rather than bronze for his statues. Bronze could be melted down for bullets and shells. Stone was useless.⁶⁴

In the spring of 1940, however, the public's fears seemed justified. As the evacuation from Dunkirk dragged on and the Germans attacked Paris, British and Canadian media reported, incorrectly, that Vimy had been bombed by the Luftwaffe. "Vimy Memorial Smashed by Nazi Bombers," announced the *Montreal Daily Star*, and Canadians were outraged. In response, Hitler left Berlin and went to France for a photo-op. Strutting at Vimy on June 2, he made Allied propagandists, the alleged source of the story, look both dishonest and inept.

But there was more to Hitler's visit than ridicule and bravado. Serge Durflinger, a history professor at the University of Ottawa, writes that Hitler admired Vimy and said so at the time. It's not surprising. He'd served in the same sector in the First World War and may have felt a bond with his brother-enemy. Further, the monument's blend of classicism and modernism was probably to his taste, and,

since he still hoped to negotiate a separate peace with Britain and its former colonies, it may have seemed wise to respect a key Allied symbol. In any event, the Waffen-SS, essentially Hitler's private army, was instructed to protect Vimy from insult or abuse by regular German troops. When the Allies pushed the Germans out of France in 1944, they found the monument, unlike many others, whole and undefiled.⁶⁵

Of the several reasons for Vimy's survival, however, its lack of triumphal architecture, victorious imagery, or anything symbolizing German defeat was probably paramount. As a peace memorial, Vimy did not inflame or offend, and so it withstood the war.

What it could not withstand was time.

By 2001, after more than sixty-five years of rain, snow, wind, and varying temperatures, the monument was falling apart. The pylons were still relatively sound, but the platform and walls had eroded and cracked. As early as the 1980s, stones started to fall away, and by the turn of the century many of the names of the missing were no longer legible. Staining was widespread, and the monument had become an eyesore.

The source of the problem was technological. Allward and Faber had bonded the limestone veneer to a concrete base before concrete's properties were fully known. It turned out that these materials expand and contract at different rates as temperatures rise and fall. As a result, there was widespread cracking at the joints – their narrowness now part of the problem – and a buildup of water behind the veneer. Decay was inevitable. Allward meant Vimy to last a thousand years. It wouldn't last a hundred.⁶⁶

In 2001, under pressure from the public and the media, the Canadian government announced a programme to restore thirteen war memorials in Europe. Vimy received much of the thirty million dollars allocated.

Between 2004 and 2007, a team of restoration specialists renewed the monument in time for its rededication on the ninetieth anniversary of the Battle of

Vimy Ridge. The key was the stone: “For two years, the entire monument was shrouded in a giant, weatherproof cocoon as workers removed every original block of Seget from the sprawling base, cleaning and repairing the stones where possible, replacing them with new stones where necessary.” In the end, most of the stones on the pylons could be kept, but only half of those on the base. Fortunately, the owner of the quarry in Croatia, aware of Seget’s role at Vimy, agreed to quarry fresh stone to replace the unsalvageable.⁶⁷

The renewal was ambitious, systematic, and thorough. In addition to repairing or replacing stone blocks and surfaces, the team restored statues, improved drainage and lighting systems, and, faithfully and fittingly, relettered the names as Allward had instructed: across both vertical and horizontal joints.

The rededication took place on April 9, 2007. The prime ministers of Canada and France were there, and Queen Elizabeth, and a large and enthusiastic audience, including war veterans and students. Prime Minister Harper referred to the Battle of Vimy Ridge as central to Canada’s “creation story,” and the Queen said that the Canada of the time “deserved so much to take its rightful place . . . as a proud sovereign nation, strong and free.” There were fireworks, pageantry, and speeches with a familiar rhetoric. The Queen and both prime ministers noted the previous day’s roadside bombing in Afghanistan, in which six Canadian soldiers had been killed. The Queen referred to Vimy as “sacred soil.” Nothing was said about the soil in Afghanistan.^{68,69}

Allward may or may not have believed that the battlefields of France and Belgium were truly sacred, but he definitely believed in the reality of grief and the need for consolation. Convinced that his art had the power to comfort, he did what he could. Believing, too, in our debt to the dead, he tried to show “what we owed them and will forever owe them.” That was the other half of his service and duty.⁷⁰

In February 1937, now sixty, he returned to Toronto and tried to start again. Urquhart imagines what it must have been like. Vimy was in the past, the ribbons cut, speeches made, tears shed. Everyone, including him, has left:

*Allward returned to a country he hardly recognized. The war had been over for twenty years; few people wanted to discuss the monument. . . . He could not disengage. Designs for further monuments were attempted by him – he wanted to move forward, wanted to reenter his life. But like a long love affair that had ended in sorrow, the Vimy Memorial would not relinquish the large space it had occupied in his heart. He wouldn't let it go, and traces of its brooding presence entered every drawing he made.*⁷¹

For fifteen years he'd worked on nothing but Vimy. He was out of touch with Canada, the Canadian art world, and perhaps contemporary art in general. His return had been anticlimactic, his reception in Toronto a disappointment. For Torontonians, the Great War was long over, the Great Depression was the new reality, and Mae West, the great Hollywood distraction, was in town. *The Globe and Mail* fumed: “the nation apparently has been too preoccupied with other problems . . . to pay tribute to the man who put Canada on the map artistically in Europe.”⁷² On the positive side, the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada made him an honorary fellow, he received honorary doctorates from Queen's University and the University of Toronto, and, in 1938, Mackenzie King rose in the House



Allward of Vimy, 1930. (Archives of Ontario, F 1075-12-0-02.)

of Commons to say that “this House desires particularly to express its appreciation of the services of Mr. Walter S. Allward, who, as the designer and architect of the

memorial at Vimy, has given to the world a work of art of outstanding beauty and character.” Not a word about pretension.

And Allward did find new work: another Queen’s Park statue of a Canadian historical figure, William Lyon Mackenzie. Unveiled in 1940, however, it met with little enthusiasm. According to Dennis Duffy, its symbolism was incoherent: “executed in a mode at once figurative and allegorical,” it “eludes its audience’s search for meaning.” And the timing was wrong: not only was Canada in a new world war, but representational sculpture, especially if it relied on dated symbols and conventions, was out of style. The allegorical tradition, the source of Allward’s strength, was passé, and the Canadian public was uninterested in his artistic language. He lived another fifteen years but received no more commissions. “Modernism,” Duffy says, “had taken its toll.”⁷³

But it must have been more than that. He had given so much for so many years. He’d realized a masterwork and given the world something on the grand scale. He was in his sixties, he’d lost a son, and after all the brilliance, resourcefulness, and passion of the Vimy project, perhaps it was hard to feel much for relatively trivial historical subjects.

As for sculpture with historical themes, Canada was too caught up in the present and near future – the prospect of war, then war itself – to care about the past. Like the civilian and military bureaucracies that might have given him commissions, the people were “too busy preparing for a violent future to wallow in nostalgia for a violent past.”

And inevitably, he did worry about Vimy and its fate under Nazi Germany. He had struggled to make something that would last; under Hitler, it could be debased slowly or destroyed in an instant. In the end, though Vimy did survive, Urquhart believes “the psyche of its creator did not. Allward remained a kind, courteous man who walked slowly through the city streets in a grey coat.” Soon he was pretty much forgotten.⁷⁴

He died in Toronto on April 24, 1955 and was buried at St. John's Anglican Church in the city's north end.⁷⁵ His death brought a fleeting revival of public interest, then renewed obscurity. In 2001, however, the Canadian government named Walter S. Allward a National Historical Person, and *The Canadian Encyclopedia* salutes him, as it might a legendary general, as Allward of Vimy.⁷⁶

Postscript

On May 26, 2013, *The Toronto Star* published an article entitled “Vimy Ridge tour gives hope to Canadian vets of Afghan War suffering from PTSD.” Murray Brewster of *The Canadian Press* reported that several veterans, including Captain Andrew Richardson, had visited the memorial that day, sponsored by Wounded Warriors Canada. The primary focus of Wounded Warriors, a veterans support and advocacy group, is service-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Captain Richardson said that Vimy helped him make sense of what he’d gone through in Afghanistan. It also made him think about the traumatized Great War veterans who resumed their lives at home and contributed so much. “These men came back weaker in some ways, but strengthened and resolved.”

Captain G.W. Johnston, founder of Wounded Warriors, says that trips like this help soldiers “complete the circle” and find a new sense of purpose. “A good argument can be made,” he says, “that a lot of the veterans who helped make our country suffered from PTSD. You can suffer from an operational stress injury and still be a high functioning person.”

Captain Richardson said that Vimy gave him hope. And that was Allward’s dream: to inspire respect for the dead and provide solace and hope for the survivors.⁷⁷

To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.

~Raymond Williams⁷⁸

Chapter Four

Service, duty, and social cohesion, 1914-18

'I, James Ernest Brown, do make Oath, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will as in duty bound honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown and Dignity, against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of all the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.'

-the Canadian military's First World War Oath of Allegiance, signed by J.E. Brown, Calgary, January 1916¹

A hundred years ago, people on the cusp of the Great War saw the world differently. A romantic patriotism and social optimism dominated Western thought, and the lives of men and women conformed to a relatively clear set of approved patterns. No one could foresee the century of disillusionment and reckless individualism waiting just around the corner.

After the Battle of the Somme in 1916, the world came apart and a new era began.² It's still with us, though the cyber revolution promises a cultural change radical enough to displace it.

One way to assess cultural change is to mark the evolution of social and personal values. In this respect, the values of service and duty, critical to the First World War, tell us a lot about the last hundred years and the way we see things now.

A mortal innocence

“They all believed, every one of them believed there would be something romantic about it, some notion of adventure. They all wanted it to be beautiful in some way, noble, I suppose. What they got instead was a living hell with nothing resembling beauty or nobility in it.” . . . No subsequent generation, Allward suddenly knew, would ever achieve such innocence.³

-Walter Allward in Jane Urquhart’s novel *The Stone Carvers*

Most volunteers for active service in the First World War were motivated by notions of service and duty. Acting on shared beliefs about homeland and responsibility, they were both elevated and burdened by the notions they carried to the front. Just as their physical gear sustained them in the trenches but slowed them in combat, so their ideas and idealism both supported and doomed them when adventure turned to nightmare.

The typical First World War soldier went to the Western Front with robust cultural confidence. Whichever side he served – the Allied or Central Powers – he was buoyed by his country’s recent achievements and knew its future was critical to a better world. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with their stunning intellectual and material progress, had confirmed his nation’s importance, and it was up to him to help preserve its strength and advance its interests.

The nineteenth century had been a period of steady socialization in Western Europe. As the historian Modris Eksteins says, social stability was achieved through “the subordination of individual interests and whims to the needs and ends of society.”⁴ Secular schooling boosted literacy, stressed civic responsibility, and promoted national pride. The big thing, however, was “the general breakdown of individual self-sufficiency in a mass industrial society” and the state’s emergent role in people’s lives. Agents of the state (officials or professionals of various kinds) spread bourgeois values, principles, and notions of virtue that reinforced social norms and increased people’s sense of connectedness to their country and each other:

In the ideal moral code of the nineteenth-century middle class, the goal of individual effort was always social harmony, the commonweal, the public good. In the end the interests of the individual, which were to be protected and furthered by the state, were nevertheless subservient to the public good. Personal restraint was the hallmark of respectability. And the idea of service to the public, or duty, became the great achievement of this class.

This was especially true in Britain, where progress was linked to self-sufficiency, pluck, devotion, and hard work in the service of society, social ideals, and one's fellows. "Thank God I have done my duty," Admiral Nelson murmurs as he dies, epitomizing nineteenth century Britain's romantic, nationalistic, idealistic, and supremely self-disciplined code of behaviour.

By the early 1900s, Britain and France were proud but traditional societies, while Germany, also politically conservative but more militarist and expansionist, had become "the challenger to a century of certainty." Since unification in 1871, it had, with energy, determination, and boldness, emerged as a major military and industrial power. "The foremost representative of innovation and renewal," it had become "the very embodiment of vitalism and technical brilliance." Now it wanted greater dominance in world affairs, and war could make that happen.

Eksteins argues that war might also enable Germany to assert its "spiritual freedom." It would be "a war of liberation . . . from the hypocrisy of bourgeois form and convenience" exemplified by Britain and France.⁵ So if for Britain and France the war was, initially at least, a defensive "struggle to preserve social values and civilization," for Germany it was a chance to rebel against those values and express its vigorous modernism, dynamism, and will.

In any case, when war broke out in 1914, millions of men from both sides rushed to enlist. Motivated by religion, nationalism, and notions of service and duty, many were sucked into what became a new kind of war in which many volunteers, especially those commissioned as junior officers, were drawn from middle-class, white collar backgrounds and shared a range of ideals and values taught in the nursery, classroom, and workplace.⁶⁻⁸

But again, it was nineteenth century social progress, optimism, and material prosperity that made this possible. Dick Diver, the protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, tours the Somme after the war and gets it right:

This western front business couldn't be done again, not for a time. . . . This took religion and years of plenty and tremendous sureties and the exact relation that existed between the classes . . . You had to have a whole-souled sentimental equipment going back further than you could remember. You had to remember Christmas, and postcards of the Crown Prince and fiancée, and little cafés in Valence and beer gardens in Unter den Linden and weddings at the mairie, and going to the Derby, and your grandfather's whiskers . . . This kind of battle was invented by Lewis Carroll and Jules Verne and whoever wrote Undine, and country deacons bowling and marraines in Marseilles and girls seduced in the back lanes of Würtemberg and Westphalia. Why, this was a love battle – there was a century of middle-class love spent here . . . All my beautiful lovely safe world blew itself up here with a great gust of high-explosive love.²

A century of surety, social stability, and middle-class love. And then it was gone.

Raw recruits became soldiers, quickly. They were trained: reflexes and behaviours were drilled into them. They accepted martial authority, followed orders, and became part of the unit they were sent to. They put up with a lot, even before the front, but they stuck it out. Training, discipline, and a fear of shame or punishment kept them at it, reinforced by a code of values and beliefs instilled by their society and upbringing before the war: “The war, it seemed, was run on the basis of assumptions, on reflex responses that were engendered by a code of values and ideas, not solely about the war itself but about civilization in general.”¹⁰ Chief among the code's virtues was honour, and the key to honour was loyalty.

Loyalty meant everything. For soldiers on both sides, it had been a core value at school, at home, and among friends. It was associated with personal virtue, sound-

ness of character, and integrity. Without it there was no honour, and without honour there was no respect or acceptance. Social status and material success weren't enough: "the willing adherence to a code of values and compliance with certain forms of behavior were the key to membership in bourgeois society." Now loyalty took men to the front and kept them there.

With loyalty came a sense of duty, and for some soldiers a defining idealism. As we saw in Chapter One, for example, many members of Canada's University Companies viewed the war as a "crusade to save the world from German militarism" and a chance "to construct a better and more just society." Many did not seek commissions as officers – which, because of their education and privilege, was probably a sure thing – but chose instead to enlist as privates: "Some thought it almost profane to use their class position or education to get a leg up on the men with whom they would share the trenches."^{11,12}

The ultimate ideal, of course, was noble self-sacrifice. Margaret W. Westley, author of *Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal*, says of that city's English-speaking volunteers: "All their principles and beliefs required that they defend the Empire, and they had quite simply offered their lives for the principles in which they believed."¹³ Like European soldiers on both sides of the conflict, they believed their duty lay in risking their lives in the service of civilized forces pitted against a debased enemy. Duty and honour were inseparable, and it was an honour to serve.

One way to grasp the era's extraordinary idealism is to read its high-minded public documents, especially those from the first year or so of the war. In language that sometimes seems not simply dated but preposterous, writers and orators praised their soldiers and urged them to achieve great things. Duty, patriotism, and the perfidy of the enemy were described in torrents of sentimentality, exhortatory vigour, and the kind of high diction that betrays the self-righteous ignorance and self-importance that sent millions to their deaths. This was the downside to the era's idealism. Sometimes merely silly or naïve, it could also be deadly.

There was a sober dignity in King George's message to the British Expeditionary Force as it left for France in August 1914: "I have implicit confidence in you, my soldiers. Duty is your watchword, and I know your duty will be nobly done." A month later, however, David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, made this thumping great pitch for war:

We have been living in a sheltered valley for generations. We have been too comfortable, too indulgent, many, perhaps, too selfish. And the stern hand of fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the great everlasting things that matter for a nation; the great peaks of honour we had forgotten – duty and patriotism clad in glittering white: the great pinnacle of sacrifice pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven. We shall descend into the valleys again, but as long as the men and women of this generation last they will carry in their hearts the image of these great mountain peaks, whose foundations are unshaken though Europe rock and sway in the convulsions of a great war.

A great war indeed.

Similarly, as late as 1916, the poet Robert Bridges published his salute to Empire and the British soldier's uncorrupted death:

Britons have ever fought well for their country, and their country's Cause is the high Cause of Freedom and Honour. That fairest earthly fame, the fame of Freedom, is inseparable from the names of Albion, Britain, England; it has gone out to America and the Antipodes, hallowing the names of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; it has found a new home in Africa: and this heritage is our glory and happiness. We can therefore be happy in our sorrows, happy even in the death of our beloved who fall in the fight; for they die nobly, as heroes and saints die, with hearts and hands unstained by hatred or wrong.¹⁴

Like many public figures, Lloyd George (the ambitious wartime politician) and Bridges (the venerable man of letters) used high language to sell the war as a noble and moral undertaking.¹⁵ As the war went on and their rhetoric tired, they were aided by skilled war propagandists, men like Canadian novelist Sir Gilbert Parker,

tasked with selling the war to a reluctant America: “This war,” he wrote, “is a purgatorial passage through which mankind is moving into a new existence.”¹⁶

Canadian nation-builders also liked high language. After Lieutenant-Colonel George Baker, member of the Canadian House of Commons, was killed in action in 1916, J.W. Cunliffe wrote that the spirit of such men was “an inspiration to the world.” Had men like Baker not died, Cunliffe wrote, “they would have given their energies to the upbuilding of the Dominion.” Their death was an incalculable loss “materially,” but “spiritually it is an immeasurable gain.”¹⁷

Religion, too, did its bit. Many favoured a divine interpretation of the war, or a blend of imperial enthusiasm and romantic, soldierly Christianity. Montreal’s famed Canon Scott, an army chaplain on the Western Front, employed “religious terms evoking the Arthurian legend and chivalric codes still present in the cultivated Anglo-Protestant mind.” “Where,” he asked, referring to Canadian soldiers, “could one find a nobler, knightlier body of young men?” Even after his own son was killed in France, Scott kept the faith, providing comfort while supplying a spiritual dimension to the slaughter.^{18,19}

Though shopworn and devalued, high diction survived the war. In a speech at Scotland’s St. Andrews University in 1919, Field Marshall Douglas Haig used what Eksteins calls “the old lofty terms” to justify recent history:

*We were fighting for a world ideal in which God was with us. We were doing battle for a higher form of civilization, in which man’s duty to his neighbour finds a place more important than his duty to himself, against an Empire built up and made great by the sword, efficient indeed, but with an efficiency unredeemed by any sense of chivalry or of moral responsibility towards the weak.*²⁰

About the millions killed, maimed, or grieving, little was said, even after the Armistice. By turns self-serving, unworldly, propagandist, and vacuously political, public language failed to reflect the depth of private suffering. The innocence of 1914-15 was gone, but, for a while at least, few people wanted to hear about it.²¹

The limbo of all sane humanity

The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness . . . so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be . . . gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and meaning is too tragic for any words.

-Henry James in a letter to a friend, the day after Britain entered the war²²

The transition first from civilian life to military training and then to the trenches saw a soldier's world shift from romance to realism and then, abruptly, surrealism.²³ This was especially true in the early stages of the war, before recruits, and eventually conscripts, knew something about the horror awaiting them. Described by the poet-soldier Siegfried Sassoon as "the limbo of all sane humanity and world-improving imagination," the front line on both sides was a place of sustained misery punctuated by bursts of terror.²⁴

It was also a place where, after a few weeks, a soldier's thoughts, emotions, and reactions were suppressed. Men reported that the prolonged awfulness of trench warfare induced a passive, almost anesthetized state in which they acted automatically, their perceptions dulled and normal instincts suspended. Some went into action too drugged by exhaustion and shock to do otherwise. The Austrian musician Fritz Kreisler, who served early in the war, remarked on the soldier's "strange psychological, almost hypnotic, state of mind." Men stood or fell, helpless, beyond resistance. "There were no heroes," a German soldier said, "only victims."²⁵

Isaac Rosenberg, who wrote some of the war's finest poems, described this dullness of mind in letters home: "Sometimes I give way and am appalled at the devastation this life seems to have made in my nature. It seems to have blunted me. I seem to be powerless to compel my will to any direction, and all I do is without energy and interest." An ordinary soldier tasked with menial duties, he described his daily fatigue: "No drug could be more stupefying than our work." His wretchedness

compounded by ill health and pain, he wrote: “We’ve had shells bursting two yards off, bullets whistling all over the show, but all you are aware of is the agony of your heels.”²⁶

Worse still for Rosenberg was the petty nastiness and vicious stupidity of those in authority. It wasn’t the duties themselves, he said; it was the “brutal militaristic bullying meanness of the way they’re served out to us.” The American writer Paul Fussell, who served in the Second World War, called this meanness a “sadism thinly disguised as necessary discipline.”²⁷

Soldiers wore out. Relentless discomfort, fear, and tedium killed their idealism and vitality. Repeated failure by high-ranking officers eroded respect for senior command, and the endless tragedy led to a dark fatalism, cynicism, and bitterness. As the war dragged on and millions were sacrificed for nothing, frontline soldiers focused on a new enemy: the “bureaucrats, politicians, brass hats, journalists, and war profiteers – those on the outside who fed like jackals on the carnage and misery.”²⁸ Disillusioned, many turned from martial idealism to pragmatic concerns and personal attachments. “Traditional authority had abandoned the soldier to his own fate,” and he knew it.²⁹

Stuck between a callous military hierarchy and an uncomprehending home front, many men found solace in their unit and comrades, becoming, as one German soldier put it, “instinctive socialists.” Losing faith in their politicians and generals, they identified with each other, and the focus of their duty shifted from the national to the regimental. In letters and diaries written mid-war, soldiers wrote less about themselves and what they thought, and more about their mates:

*It was real concerns rather than sublime principles that kept men going. In the soldier’s immediate surroundings, his regiment became the focus of duty. An intense sense of comradeship was one of the strongest sentiments generated by the war. . . . The core of this comradeship was a feeling of responsibility toward and utter dependence on one’s fellows. It was an intense sense of belonging.*³⁰

Captain Liddell Hart, a veteran of the Somme, said about the war that it “achieved little except loss,” and by late 1916, with both sides mired on the Western Front, further loss seemed inevitable.³¹ A new pessimism appeared among frontline soldiers, and with it a sense of irony, disillusionment, and alienation from “the existing social order and its values.”^{32,33}

It is possible to chart the war’s course through its poetry, from the British perspective at least. In the first year of the war, Rupert Brooke wrote the romantic “If I should die, think only this of me: / That there’s some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England.” In a similar vein, Laurence Binyon composed “For the Fallen,” still recited at Remembrance Day ceremonies:

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

And John McCrae wrote “In Flanders Fields” (“Take up our quarrel with the foe”). That was in May 1915, around the time Rupert Brooke died at sea of an infected mosquito bite on the way to Gallipoli.

Soon, however, the mood changed, socially and poetically. Writers like Sassoon and Robert Graves, friends and fellow officers in the trenches, no longer saw in war an opportunity for adventure, patriotism, and honour but rather an unheroic slaughter, hopelessness, bureaucratic stupidity, military incompetence, and civilian complicity. While British poets in 1914 and 1915 saw the potential for noble sacrifice, those writing a year or two later saw the reality of empty sacrifice. They saw death imposed en masse by a remote and privileged few. They saw butchery on an impersonal, industrial scale. “The old lie” that it was sweet and right to die for one’s country must, Wilfred Owen wrote in 1917, no longer be told to “children ardent for some desperate glory.” There must be no more rhetoric, platitudes, or high language. “What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?” Owen asked.^{34,35}

For soldiers from many countries, the Battle of the Somme, which lasted from July 1 to mid-November 1916, put an end to the past.³⁶ Its strategic significance is debated, but for those who were there, it was simply hell. The poet and artist David Jones, who served with the Royal Welch Fusiliers (Sassoon and Graves's regiment), "looked on the Somme offensive as the last great action of the old world. Until then, the old customs and attitudes had held. What came after, he called 'The Break': *'The whole of the past, as far as I can make out, is down the drain.'*"³⁷

A.J.P. Taylor wrote:

*Idealism perished on the Somme. The enthusiastic volunteers were enthusiastic no longer. They had lost faith in their cause, in their leaders, in everything except loyalty to their fighting comrades. The war ceased to have a purpose. It went on for its own sake, as a contest in endurance.*³⁸

It seemed that way on both sides of the line. For Ernst Jünger, a German writer and war hero, everything changed at the Somme: "Here chivalry disappeared for always. Like all noble and personal feelings it had to give way to the new tempo of battle and to the rule of the machine. Here the new Europe revealed itself for the first time."

For the West, this was the critical moment, the supreme tipping point. As the rule of the machine took over and the past went down the drain, "the I became all-important," and our restless, uprooted, individualistic age was born. We trace our historical transformation, our sea change, to the Somme and the "permanent reverberations of July 1916."^{39,40}

In 1914, Sassoon, a member of the British fox-hunting set, signed up before war was declared.⁴¹ Though "officer class" by breeding and education, the 27-year-old enlisted as a private in a mounted regiment, hoping his horse could come with him. Injured in training – his arm was broken when he was thrown – he changed

course, accepted a commission with the Royal Welch Fusiliers, and went to France as a second-lieutenant. He was keen to get at it, and his early war poems reflect a patriotism “written under the enchantment of a chivalric ideal.”⁴²

By 1917, the enchantment was gone. His beloved younger brother had died at Gallipoli, and many close friends had been lost, some under his command. Nicknamed “Mad Jack” by his men, he began to show a reckless ambivalence about survival.⁴³⁻⁴⁵

In mid-1916, around the time of the Somme, he was awarded the Military Cross after risking his life to bring back British dead and wounded from a raid. A year later, recovering in England from a wound of his own, and in a rage about the war, he tore the medal ribbon from his tunic and threw it into the River Mersey.

Sassoon’s story describes the arc of disillusionment shared by many soldiers of the Great War. The difference is that he didn’t keep it to himself. Not content with publishing realistic poetry about the war – and damning the politicians, profiteers, and indifferent public that sustained it – he refused to return to France. Risking court martial, disgrace, and imprisonment, he said he no longer believed in Britain’s war aims and was unwilling to support them in any way. To make this as public as possible, he published “A Soldier’s Declaration,” part of which read:

I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this War, on which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest. . . . I have seen and endured the suffering of the troops, and I can no longer be a party to prolong these sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust. I am not protesting against the conduct of the war, but against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed.^{46,47}

The army responded by institutionalizing him for shell shock, effectively silencing his dissent while saving him from a brave but self-destructive moral stand. While

hospitalized in Scotland, he wrote a number of poems, including “Sick Leave,” in which he’s visited by “the homeless ones, the noiseless dead.” They’ve failed to find him in the line and now gather by his bed:

*In bitter safety I awake, unfriended;
And while the dawn begins with slashing rain
I think of the Battalion in the mud.
“When are you going out to them again?
Are they not still your brothers through our blood?”*

Several months later, realizing that further protest was futile, he returned to active service, insisting on a posting to the front. Very simply, he hated the war but not the warriors. Tormented by bitter safety and exile, and by the knowledge that his protest might be misunderstood by those he loved most, he went back to the war. The explanation is in a poem called “Banishment”:

*I am banished from the patient men who fight
They smote my heart to pity, built my pride.
Shoulder to aching shoulder, side by side,
They trudged away from life’s broad wealds of light.
Their wrongs were mine; and ever in my sight
They went arrayed in honour. But they died,—
Not one by one: and mutinous I cried
To those who sent them out into the night.
The darkness tells how vainly I have striven
To free them from the pit where they must dwell
In outcast gloom convulsed and jagged and riven
By grappling guns. Love drove me to rebel.
Love drives me back to grope with them through hell;
And in their tortured eyes I stand forgiven.*

“Only when he was risking his own life,” Jean Moorcroft Wilson writes, “could he feel guilt-free.”

Damned either way – fighting a war he no longer believed in or exiled from his comrades – he chose war. Love drove him back, and there he stayed until wounded again and sent home for good.^{48,49}

We revere the Great War poets, especially those who stuck it out from loyalty, empathy, pity. They acted from the heart, and spoke from it. Sassoon: “The simplicity that I see in some of the men is the one candle in my darkness.” And Owen: “I, too, saw God through mud – The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches smiled.” By extension, we believe that other fine soldiers, literary or not, fought on for similar reasons.^{50,51}

As we have seen, however, there were other reasons. For most it was a matter of discipline and social norms. Reflexes and instincts were prescribed by their society, both civilian and military, and the vast majority toughed it out because that’s what was expected of them. Even as disillusionment grew, and volunteers were joined by conscripts, frontline soldiers did as they were told. “Men still made this war,” Eksteins writes, “not only generals but miserable foot soldiers.” The old order might be disintegrating, but enough men were still willing to fight. “Despite horror, weariness, and even despondency,” relatively few resisted, deserted, or harmed themselves.

Again, a core sense of duty was the key. According to Eksteins, most historians stress the soldier’s increasing disenchantment and fail to appreciate his sense of obligation. They fail, in other words, to recognize that his service was rooted in something volitional and, in many respects, positive.⁵²

As the war entered its second and third years, talk about duty lost its “aggressive and confident overtones.” At the same time, the soldier’s acceptance of duty became even more important. As innocence, adventure, and high language fell to stalemate, attrition, and exhaustion, adherence to duty became the foundation of continued warfare and potential victory. Reluctant compliance and half-hearted allegiance meant defeat.

It had been easier when war aims were still simple, clear, and credible, but once soldiers started to lose faith in the sincerity and wisdom of their political and military leaders, the war “had to be fought on the strength of ‘eternal verities,’ inner resources one had acquired from one’s culture and society.” The soldier might doubt his leaders but not his homeland or his duty to serve it. Now “the assumptions of the civilizations and cultures fighting the war were all-important.”⁵³

Thus the nature of duty changed.^{54,55} As soldiers shed their idealism, they looked for other reasons to carry on. Love of homeland and family worked for some; others found what they needed in loyalty to their unit and comrades. Some officers said that the bond with their men, though constrained by class and custom, kept them going, and many men of all ranks discovered a new respect for those outside their class and station. Wilfred Owen, referring to his soldiers’ steady, unassuming fortitude, wrote that he heard “music in the silentness of duty,” and Edmund Blunden, a former officer writing after the war, wondered if the sort of kindness he’d been shown by a sentry, an enlisted man, “would ever have such power again.”⁵⁶

Sometimes fellowship extended beyond the regiment, beyond even the soldier’s own army. As it dawned on them that they had a mutual enemy – the war and those responsible for it – some frontline soldiers felt an uneasy solidarity with the Fritz or Tommy facing them. They had a lot in common.

As in duty bound: a sense of connectedness

Sociality, the binding together of members of a group, is the first requirement of defense, since without it people will not put the group’s interests ahead of their own or be willing to sacrifice their lives in battle. Lawrence H. Keeley, an anthropologist who has traced aggression among early peoples, writes in his book “War Before Civilization” that “Warfare is ultimately not a denial of the human capacity for cooperation, but merely the most destructive aspect of it.”

-Nicholas Wade, *The New York Times*, December 1, 2009⁵⁷

It's easy to confuse the concepts of duty and service or to think they're synonymous. However, in principle at least, duty is rooted in responsibility and obligation, while service stems from devotion. And while duty may be taught, the source of service is the natural desire to give, even if giving means self-sacrifice. Duty can be imposed, but the urge to serve comes from within. We say "I do my duty" or "I have a strong sense of duty," but simply "I serve."⁵⁸

Through the character of Adam in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare describes the essence of service and the ideal servant. Adam, now elderly, has no use for the man suddenly set above him, the unworthy son and heir of his former master, and wants only to serve the latter's good son. "Let me be your servant," Adam tells the penniless Orlando. "Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty." Moreover, he says, he's saved five hundred crowns for his old age, "When service should in my old limbs lie lame, / And unregarded age in corners thrown." This money he now offers Orlando: "Master, go on; and I will follow thee / To the last gasp, with truth and loyalty."

Orlando laments the passing of true service: "O Good old man, how well in thee appears / The constant service of the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not for meed! / Thou art not for the fashion of these times, . . ." Perhaps the best is always in the past. No matter: Adam is an admirable character, and his relationship with Orlando – in no way reluctant or obligatory – is rooted in devotion.

Though different, service and duty both call for discipline, commitment, a belief in something greater than the self, and a setting aside of self-interest. From the world's perspective, both imply loyalty and, again in principle, are respected and valued. Ideally, in other words, loyalty, as well as other strengths that can't be taught (such as selflessness, patience, and caring), are recognized in the working world and rewarded materially.

In reality, of course, it's not that simple. Many who serve are exploited by their employers, their service amounting to servitude at the low end of the economy. The word service is derived from *servus*, the Latin for slave, and many of the world's most powerless serve of necessity.⁵⁹

It's hard to make a living in the developed world's service industry, harder still in the developing world, where even poorly-paid service jobs can be scarce and their duties set by especially harsh market forces. In a famous *Harper's* article, David Foster Wallace describes his impressions of low-echelon Asian staff on a European-run cruise ship, the sort of setting in which Western rich and Eastern poor come into contact. Though the cruise line's P.R. representative assures him that service staff "really love what they're doing and love serving people," what he sees is "the kind of pinched weariness . . . one associates with low-paid service employees in general, plus fear."⁶⁰ Fear, in their case, of losing the income they and their families depend on. Theirs is an economically-enforced service, the fate of poor people serving the affluent. It's the dark side of service, and it's an old story.

In November 2003, BBC Radio's "In Our Time" featured a discussion of duty.⁶¹ Over the better part of an hour, host Melvyn Bragg and three academic guests reviewed the history of duty in the West, from the ancient world to the present, via Christianity, Kant (for whom duty was "the categorical imperative"), the heroic age of Nelson ("England expects every man to do his duty"), and Nietzsche (who wasn't keen on duty at all). Rooted originally in "the station, office, or position held in a society or organization," duty evolved into a moral notion meant to regulate our actions, thus a "foundational duty ethics." Later, it was rejected by people like Nietzsche, undermined by the Great War, and left in a confused state in the 1920s. It remains with us in Western secularized modernity, but weakened. Still linked to underlying social and moral convictions, it seems a little dated and, more often than not, inconvenient.

It gets more respect in religion. In the West, there's the Christian idea of duty (based on the ethics of thou shalt and thou shalt nots), the Jewish notion of *mitzvot* (commandments or charitable acts), and the Islamic concept of prescribed actions, including *Zakaah* (almsgiving). There are counterparts in the East, of course, such as Hinduism's dharma (when associated with performing virtuous or dutiful acts) and Buddhism's "right action" (ethical conduct).⁶²

During the First World War, however, duty was still a fundamental social expectation, and, again, it was “the idea of ‘duty’, *devoir*, *Pflicht*” that kept the war going:

*For the British and French, duty and devoir remained . . . essentially social concepts revolving around family, comrades, regiment, and country. In the letters and diaries of front soldiers it is in fact surprising how little attention is devoted to the self, to discussions of personal emotions such as courage, fear, hope, or anger. The social content of duty retained significance, . . . For German soldiers . . . Pflicht involved a powerful spiritual component linked usually with a personal sense of honour and will.*⁶³

Social expectations about duty and “the unwritten laws of civilized behavior” ran deeper than rhetoric. In July 1917, the future anarchist-poet, Herbert Read, then a junior officer in France, wrote: “I begin to realize that quite the most important thing in life is to possess the vague qualities of, and be upon every occasion, a ‘gentleman.’”⁶⁴ This social ideal, based on the principle of duty, lay behind so much courage, decency, and self-abnegation.

It was a crucial principle, of course, for Great War gentlemen-officers like Percy Molson and Talbot Papineau. Social expectations and the gentleman’s code, deeply internalized, drove men like them to the front and governed their active service. In Percy’s case, as we’ve seen, the sole expression of anger in his letters home was triggered by a fellow officer’s ungentlemanly behaviour. When this man, dissatisfied with his rank, left the battalion he’d recruited in Canada, Percy was caustic: “I cannot see how he can abandon them.” A gentleman, none more gallant, he’d have agreed with his brother Herbert that character counts above all. Further, as John H.R. Molson’s grandson, he knew that character meant not only a “strong sense of public duty” but “an obligation to more than ordinary service.” Setting an example, and giving one’s all, wasn’t a matter of choice.⁶⁵

Talbot, too, viewed duty and service as requisite. “Sacrifice is the keynote of our service here,” he said in his 1917 lecture at the Canadian Corps School in France. “It should continue to be our guiding principle in our citizen life.” At Passchendaele a few months later he knew his duty and did it, and when he died, his mother,

bereft but patrician, said that it would be a “welcome service” to do anything she could for the regiment. Like her soldier son, she understood the ethos of duty.⁶⁶

It was different for Walter Allward. He was older, married, a father. His service came after the war when he constructed a place of worship at Vimy, Canada’s “primary altar to the fallen of the war.” “We are obligated never to forget their sacrifice,” he said, “and to live by the values for which they died.” Recognizing his obligation, he did his duty to the dead while serving their survivors.^{67,68}

The sense of duty was also strong in enlisted men like James Ernest Brown of Alberta, who held slackers in contempt. In November 1916, he wrote his mother:

But I know you would not want me to shirk my duty for safety’s sake. So far I can clearly say I have shirked nothing and I would detest myself, and would deserve to be detested by all my friends, if I had stayed in England or Canada on a bomb proof job as so many who enlist do. It is much better to die a man than live a conquered coward, and when I go back I want to be able to look any man in the face and say I have done my duty at all times.^{69,70}

Pride depended on doing your bit and not letting the side down. Soldiers stuck it out because their mates needed them, but also, as we have seen, because it was the thing to do.

Then there was the passion for home. Soldiers stood by their country “as they might have stood by a pal whose luck was out.”⁷¹ This connectedness to home as well as comrades made it possible to carry on. Rooted in sociality, the ability to bond with others even at the cost of self-sacrifice, this attachment to country and comrade bound soldiers not only to each other but to the war itself.⁷²

The BBC program tells us that duty provides men and women with meaning, purpose, and, in some cases, a reason to die. It has “duped people into doing terrible things and inspired them to wonderful achievements.” Further: “It can give

your life clarity, focus, and strength in times of trouble. It can also bind a nation.” In fact, it’s difficult to imagine social cohesion (the binding of individuals to each other in a collective body) without a shared sense of duty, and it was precisely that duty – the sense of personal responsibility and obligation – that defined the era immediately before the Somme.⁷³

For Sassoon, as we’ve seen, duty shifted from the patriotic to the pragmatic, from the abstract to the human. For Rosenberg, it was different. Prefiguring a later, unpatriotic, estranged twentieth century sensibility, Rosenberg’s reason for enlisting is jarring: he needed the money. So poor was he, and so desperate were his parents’ circumstances, that he enlisted for the tiny income it would bring them:

I never joined the army from patriotic reasons. Nothing can justify war. I suppose we must all fight to get the trouble over. Anyhow before the war I helped at home when I could and I did other things which helped to keep things going. I thought if I’d join there would be the separation allowance for my mother.⁷⁴

Raised in East End London, Rosenberg tried to work his way out of poverty, unsuccessfully. Though a trained and gifted painter, his paintings seldom sold. Nor did his poetry bring in much money. Increasingly unable to help his parents, he joined up. For this, his mother, who learned of his enlistment only after the fact, received a small, one-time “separation allowance” plus a weekly payment based on sixpence a day. Though conscious of “the immorality of joining with no patriotic convictions” (his words), he saw little alternative.

Rosenberg felt his duty keenly, but his fundamental sense of connection and obligation was to family and friends rather than country. And then there was his art:

I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting; that is, if I am lucky enough to come through all right. I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on.

In “Break of Day in the Trenches,” he watches a rat travel freely between opposing lines: “Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew / Your cosmopolitan sympathies.” Post-nationalist in his own sympathies, Rosenberg prefigured a twentieth century internationalism he wouldn’t live to see. On April 1, 1918, he was killed on night patrol.⁷⁵⁻⁷⁷

Sassoon, Graves, Jones, and Read made it to the end, but Owen was killed in early November. A week later, with Armistice bells pealing, his parents learned of his death, and the war was over.

So the survivors went home: to Skye and Salzburg, Manchester and Munich, Sofia and Sydney. And to Revelstoke, Brandon, Cobalt, Montreal, and Antigonish.

In *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, Jonathan Vance analyzes Canada’s response to the post-war era.⁷⁸ Instead of finding the social unease and innovation typical of 1920s Europe, he discovers a desire to return to pre-war and wartime values, views, and social structures. In fact, as Britain and the Continent swung into a period of release, excess, and cultural daring – characterized by stylish nonconformity, artistic audacity, and intellectual intensity – a sober and sensible Canada set about repairing its socio-cultural fabric, incorporating moderate change and ensuring that tradition and convention won out. While some veterans wanted a radical approach to social progress, Canada’s leaders preferred the status quo and nation-building along conservative lines, and most people agreed, seeing little need to remake their world. As for those whose loved ones had been at the front, they wanted to hear that they’d served well and for a reason.

Thus, Vance says, a “myth of victory” emerged. According to this myth, Canadians had fought bravely and admirably throughout the war, but their true victory lay in courage, nobility, and decency. If they died, they did so with a pure spirit, and willingly: “To lose one’s life was a tragedy; to give one’s life by making the supreme sacrifice was the ultimate in selflessness.”

And the sacrifice was for . . . ? Well, it was for the usual things, plus the dream of a prouder, more autonomous Canada. According to this view, the soldier's willing sacrifice had contributed to a stronger national identity at home and a new credibility and authority in international affairs. In a sense, Vance writes, this story of the war was "an official memory . . . created to secure the rule of the existent leadership by promoting a nationalistic, patriotic culture." In fairness, however, everyone wanted to find meaning in the war:

. . . one might suggest that a vernacular memory of the war as a wasteful and tragic episode that stemmed from the avarice of political and economic elites was driven to the ground by an elite memory of the war as a nation-building experience. . . . Nevertheless, the suggestion that the myth was simply a product of elite manipulation is profoundly unsatisfying. It robs countless Canadians of a sense of agency and prevents us from allowing that they might have embraced the myth, not to mention taken a hand in shaping it, because it spoke to their souls. . . . At the core of the memory were the fallen. They were the foundation upon which the entire edifice was constructed. Any attempt to forge an alternative vision of the war came up against the emotional needs of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who had lost loved ones in those four years. As Adrian Gregory has argued, High Diction and all that it symbolized may have been a fatuous myth that deserved exploding, but to do so left a tragic vacuum for the bereaved.

Similarly, though self-interest fed politicians' sanctimony about the war, citizens mourning their fathers, sons, husbands, brothers, and lovers needed no prompting to venerate the battlefields, cemeteries, and relics of combat and death. Battlefield crosses and debris were brought home by post-war pilgrims and incorporated into Canadian churches, war memorials, and private collections "as artifacts taken from the new Holy Land." Anything to do with the war had a spiritual significance, and the blood of Canada's lost was said to forever consecrate the former front line. This continued, Vance writes, through the 1920s and 1930s, and ended only with a fresh war.

In general, however, Canadians were soon ready to leave 1914-18 behind, or, if they couldn't, to carry on. Either way, they didn't want to hear about the war's devastation and waste. They stuck to sanitized images of what had happened, and to traditional values and ideals. Social connections held, and the nation remained bound by a durable if simplistic story.

Chapter Five

Service and duty in an age unbound

Yossarian had done his best to warn him the night before. "You haven't got a chance, kid," he had told him glumly. "They hate Jews."

"But I'm not Jewish," answered Clevinger.

"It will make no difference," Yossarian promised, and Yossarian was right. "They're after everybody."

-Joseph Heller's [Catch-22](#)

By 1919, millions of soldiers had returned home, some to places like Canada, Newfoundland, the United States, India, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa, but most to countries nearer the battlefields. The more distant the home country, the more insulated it had been from the carnage. Soldiers from places like Canada brought the war home with them, but it was *their* war, foreign to friends and family. Estranged from non-veterans, many suffered alone, unable to relate what they'd seen and done.²

Though fighting ceased with the Armistice on November 11, 1918, peace wasn't official until treaties were signed in and around Paris in June 1919. The main treaty, known as the Treaty of Versailles, set the Allies' terms for peace with Germany. The outcome of a "victors' peace conference" rather than a negotiated settlement with all parties present, the Treaty's terms were in place before the German delegates reached the table. Delivered as an ultimatum, the Treaty of Versailles was, from the German point of view, unjust and insulting, but the defeated nation faced social collapse, saw no way out, and signed.³

From the start, neither side was satisfied. The Treaty's terms seemed too lenient to some, too harsh to others. Germany was burdened with war reparations, and with a responsibility for the war "which she refused morally to accept," while the United States declined to ratify the Treaty or support the nascent League of Nations. Smaller, emergent countries like Canada turned inward, while America "retreated into isolationism and abandoned Europe to her wheelchair."⁴

With the seeds of the Second World War sown at Versailles, Europe entered a dissatisfied, distrustful, and apprehensive interwar period. Resentment and suspicion typified the diplomacy of the time, and little was done to reconcile the once and future enemies. There were people, especially in Britain, who had hoped for accord between nations, but in general the former combatants on both sides were bitter and intransigent.⁵

In the years immediately after 1918, the losers struggled with defeat, the winners with empty victory. What, after all, had they achieved? Financially and emotionally spent, both sides tried to forget the war: "Faced by the horrendous idea that the war might not have been worth the effort, people simply buried the thought for a time. And if one was to bury that thought, one also had to bury the war. So be it. The war was buried."

Western culture had snapped at the Battle of the Somme, revealing civilization's insanity, and things would never be the same. Coinciding with the Spanish influenza of 1918-19 – far deadlier than the war itself – the conflict's aftermath confirmed the death of a discredited age.

Referring to the work of cultural historians Paul Fussell, Samuel Hynes, and Jay Winter, Jacqueline Hucker writes that in their analysis of writers, poets, and painters who lived through the war, they found that "many had experienced an acute sense of a rupture in history, which in their work took the form of images of irony, fragmentation and ruin. Fussell and Hynes demonstrated that, if the war did not actually create modern Western society, it fueled its development and shaped the character of our world."⁶

In Fussell's case: "What he discovered was a deep fissure between the romantic views of the past, which saw warfare as a stage for gallantry and heroism, and the disillusionment bred by the shocking slaughter and grim hopelessness of trench warfare."⁷ Rupture in history; deep fissure. It was the moment, Henry Porter writes, "that humans began to realise the power of total destruction."⁸ Social bonds began to fall away, and it was the end of one era, the start of another.

If the war's end did bring a tense military peace to Europe, it also brought social disillusionment. Betrayed by politicians' promises and their own hopes, veterans became bitter. "Europe slumped into a monumental melancholy," with inflation, unemployment, and deprivation driving the survivors into sullen wariness. The social purpose of the war, "the content of duty and *devoir*," was a thing of the past, and most veterans in the post-war era "withdrew from social activity and commitment into themselves." Their values undermined by the reality of mass, mechanized warfare, many lost faith in society and their connection with others.⁹

It was little better for Europe's civilians. The devastation had been so great and the death toll so high. Too many grieving wives and parents had received a letter about their loved one's splendid courage or "the beauty of duty so nobly done."¹⁰ "How long," Modris Eksteins writes, "would these phrases sustain a generation of widows, orphans, and cripples?"¹¹ As the culture's high diction and claim to authority vanished, disconnection from society and social duty was inevitable. Disillusionment cut to the bone, and if, as Jay Winter says, the Lost Generation in Europe "had died for a new world order, then it was clear soon enough that they had died in vain."¹²

Again, as Jonathan Vance shows in *Death So Noble*, the situation was different in Canada. The dominant political forces favoured a selective and positive memory of the conflict, one that supported the status quo and a set of safe and familiar values, including duty, respect for authority, and patriotism. In the main, it worked. Most Canadians accepted a traditional view of society and the war, and the stories, poetry, popular songs, and commemorative art from the interwar period demonstrate the persistence of a rugged, even stirring, memory of service on behalf of home-

land and Empire. Tradition held; rupture was averted. Social identity remained intact, and duty as “a romantic ideal that could bind the whole human race” still seemed credible.¹³

At the same time, social activism did play a significant role in post-war domestic politics. The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, the rise of social reform movements in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Depression-era marches and demonstrations prove that at least some Canadians questioned the existing socio-economic structure and its institutions. In particular, many veterans, artists, and activists criticized the current social order and refused to sanitize the war or ignore its lessons, opting instead for realism, social change, and a “new faith and set of values.”¹⁴

In his 2012 obituary for Paul Fussell, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt says about *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Fussell’s masterwork, that it was “a monumental study of World War I and how its horrors fostered a disillusioned modernist sensibility.” “World War I’s chief cultural product was irony,” Lehmann-Haupt writes, citing Robert Hughes’s observation that Western society has, since the First World War, been infused with a “sense of absurdity, disjuncture and polarization, the loathing of duly constituted authorities.”^{15,16}

Irony derives from a recognition of the contrary nature of truth. Absurdity arises from a perceived human irrationality or existential meaninglessness, and scepticism springs from a lack of faith in authority. Though far from universal – not everyone sees existence as absurd, for example – irony, absurdity, and scepticism are deeply imprinted in our intellectual and popular cultures.¹⁷

The historical source of irony, absurdity, and scepticism is the First World War. Fussell, summarizing Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, cites its author’s conviction that the Great War was “the ultimate origin of the insane contemporary scene. It is where the irony and absurdity begin.”^{18,19} Irony, the inversion of the

conventional, became epidemic. “The undercurrent represented by irony during the war,” Eksteins writes, “would become a floodtide in the postwar world.”²⁰ And absurdity? We take it for granted, in human affairs at least, and our appetite for the ridiculous, upside down, and bizarre is limitless.

As for scepticism, since 1914 the West has seen the erosion of faith in authority both religious and secular, with a corresponding ascendance of rationalism, agnosticism, atheism, and scientific empiricism. The open expression of doubt, uncertainty, and even nihilism is acceptable, and though religious affiliation is still common, rejection of the transcendent is mainstream. To reach this point, an entire “scale of values and beliefs” had to be sent packing, and the First World War did just that. The twentieth century, as Eksteins says, was “a period of deconstruction, of de-definition,” and the Great War was the “single most significant event in that development.” For modernism in general the war was a “psychological turning point.” For Germany in particular, it was the moment when “the urge to create and the urge to destroy changed places.”

In the defeated nations, social structures and the belief in progress fell apart. By winning the war, the victors saved their own “system of values and ideas and forms and shapes,” but the losers felt the need to start over. It was in countries such as Germany, Austria, and Russia, therefore, that the most radical change occurred, though their reactions to the war did reach other nations. Eksteins notes, in fact, that the Weimar Republic, because of its “creativity, assertion, and vital questioning in the context of confusion,” still influences us.

Just as the war caused the collapse of external, social frameworks, so its horror and absurdity weakened modernity’s belief in social optimism, historical evolution, and the notion of a sensible, reliable creation:

As the war’s meaning began to be enveloped in a fog of existential questioning, the integrity of the ‘real’ world, the visible and ordered world, was undermined. As the war called into question the rational connections of the prewar world . . . the meaning of civilization as tangible achievement was assaulted, as was the nineteenth-century view that all history represented progress. And as the

external world collapsed in ruins, the only redoubt of integrity became the individual personality.^{21,22}

In the West, and especially in Europe, people found themselves freer but increasingly on their own. Social ideals yielded to self-expression, subjectivity, and personal preference, and belonging became more a matter of choice. The traditional hero gave way to “the celebrity, the expression of this self-assertion,” and since self-assertion and self-sacrifice tend to run at cross-purposes, service lost ground to self-service.

Some of those in the vanguard of cultural change were ex-soldiers. The war had driven them within, away from social reality, and revealed a mad and murderous reality apparently meaningless and indifferent to them. They countered this with personal meaning and made internalization the hallmark of the European 1920s.

While still in the trenches, they had expressed:

*. . . their feeling of alienation, marginality, and, at the same time, novelty. That is, the idea that the world was in the throes of destruction . . . but was also in the process of renewal. In this latter process lay a reality of astounding implications: the soldier represented a creative force.*²³

The result was a new aesthetic based on doubt, irony and pity, upheaval, self-promotion, provocation, and social and individual disjointedness. The war’s surreal devastation had, bit by bit, discredited rational explanation and justification. Now the truth became a matter of interpretation, individualism shed its social dimension, and reality seemed to exist not in shared, familiar ideas but one’s imagination. So our modern consciousness was born, ironic, subjective, dynamic, and unbound.²⁴

*The war, despite its destruction or, indeed, owing to its pervasive horror, had become an evocative force, a stimulus not to social creativity but to personal imagination and inwardness, an avenue to a new and vital realm of activity.*²⁵

The future lay in trading the past’s external certainties for a spirited if uncertain inner reality.

Twenty years later – after the Jazz Age, bobbed hair, “The Waste Land,” *The Sun Also Rises*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Art Deco, “Gold Diggers of 1933,” Nanking, and Guernica – another generation went to war. For a while at least, there was little room for ironic distance or cynicism. Films such as “In Which We Serve,” the 1942 story about a British destroyer and her crew, remind us that in hard times there’s nothing absurd about the old conventions of respect, loyalty, service, and duty.

But all things pass away, even world wars. In August 1945, the 21-year-old Fussell, a traumatized veteran of the European Campaign, was in Germany waiting for transfer to the Pacific and the invasion of Japan. Decades later, he described how he and his comrades reacted when they heard that the atom bomb had ended it all and they wouldn’t have to fight any more: “. . . for all the practiced phlegm of our tough façades we broke down and cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow to adulthood after all.”²⁶

There was a brief respite from dread. “The killing was all going to be over,” Fussell thought, “and peace was actually going to be the state of things.” But soon everyone knew about the death camps, and the world was introduced to a new circle of hell. Soon, too, there was the possibility of all-out nuclear warfare, and the fragility of international entente was exposed. There would be no real peace.

Soldiers once again returned to an uneasy post-war world, desperate for security. It took years for satire and irony to make a comeback, just as it did for the film and book industries to forgive the Germans even a little. Then, in 1961, Joseph Heller published *Catch-22*, and there’s a lot to be learned from it.

Joseph Heller and the Cold War

*Paranoia strikes deep,
Into your life it will creep.*

-Buffalo Springfield, "For What's It's Worth," 1966

The funny thing about *Catch-22*, Heller's famous war novel, is that it's not really about war at all. Not World War II anyway. The author *did* base his novel on what he'd experienced as a U.S. Army Air Forces bombardier in Europe, and his narrative *is* set in the Mediterranean, where he served in 1944. Moreover, his protagonist, Yossarian, is also a USAAF bombardier, and the depiction of war's horror and the absurdity of military bureaucracy feels autobiographical and authentic. But this is a story, and Heller used his past to satirize and condemn not the Second World War or the wartime military but what came after the war. Based on things he said much later, he didn't feel remorse about the war or his part in it. As for the military bureaucracy ridiculed in the novel, he said he'd never had a bad officer. Overall, his war was bizarre but valid, even enjoyable at first. He was young, and he was fighting the Nazis.²⁷⁻³⁰

Nevertheless, *Catch-22* is about an airman determined not to die for his country. Yossarian will do whatever it takes to survive the hostility, indifference, and irrationality of a world gone crazy:

Havermeyer was a lead bombardier who never missed. Yossarian was a lead bombardier who had been demoted because he no longer gave a damn whether he missed or not. He had decided to live forever or die in the attempt, and his only mission each time he went up was to come down alive.

The critical moment in his war is the death of a fellow airman:

He felt goose pimples clacking all over him as he gazed down despondently at the grim secret Snowden had spilled all over the messy floor. It was easy to read the message in his entrails. Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret. Drop him out

a window and he'll fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret. Ripeness was all.

Before Snowden's death, Yossarian had been a patriot. "Christ," he says to another officer, "I earned that medal I got, no matter what their reasons for giving it to me. I've flown seventy goddamn combat missions. Don't talk to me about fighting to save my country. Now I'm going to fight a little to save myself. The country's not in danger any more, but I am."

The outcome of the war is clear, but the dying isn't over and Yossarian wants out. The snag is that his squadron commanders keep raising the number of missions men have to fly before they can return to the States. Yossarian understands three things: first, the enemy wants to kill him; second, his own side is indifferent to his survival; and third, his desire to live (a sure sign of sanity) nixes any chance of a psychiatric discharge. That's the real Catch-22: "There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind."³¹

As he grinds over and over against military and bureaucratic irrationality, incompetence, self-interest, and lunacy, his sanity becomes a liability. By the novel's end, he's had enough. He's off to Sweden, chucking it for a separate peace, an honourable discharge of his own design.³²

One of Yossarian's problems is the universe: it's absurd. "And don't tell me God works in mysterious ways. . . . There's nothing mysterious about it, He's not working at all. He's playing. Or else He's forgotten all about us." More importantly, Yossarian's social institutions are absurd, though again this is really about Heller's quarrel with post-war America:

Virtually none of the attitudes in the book – the suspicion and distrust of the officials in the government, the feelings of helplessness and victimization, the realization that most government agencies would lie – coincided with my experiences as a bombardier in World War II. The antiwar and antigovernment feelings in the

*book belong to the period following World War II: the Korean War, the cold war of the Fifties.*³³

There was the bomb – or, more accurately, the arsenal of bombs on both sides – the war in Korea, the McCarthy era, and, under it all, the proliferation of self-interest epitomized by the novel’s Milo Minderbinder. Or so it seemed to Heller, writing in his spare time while working full-time in advertising.

Then, in 1961, after eight years of drafting, redrafting, and editing, the book was done. Simon & Schuster, Heller’s U.S. publisher, threw itself into promoting its big new novel, making the most of early praise from literary figures such as S.J. Perelman. And sales were okay. Some critics loved the book, some hated it, and some were unsure. It sold extremely well in Britain. In the United States, sales were more modest. Then, bit by bit and largely by word of mouth, readership spread across North America, and the paperback edition took off. America had been waiting for *Catch-22*.³⁴

As Christopher Buckley says in his introduction to the novel’s fiftieth anniversary edition:

Joe Heller began work on his World War II novel around the time the Korean War was winding down and published it just as another American war, in Vietnam, was getting under way. . . . Catch-22’s first readers were largely of the generation that went through World War II. For them, it provided a startlingly fresh take, a much-needed, much-delayed laugh at the terror and madness they endured.

But those first readers were still catching up with the past. In the years after *Catch-22*’s publication, there was an accelerating scepticism about America’s current values, principles, and integrity. As the war in Vietnam dug deeper into the national psyche, the U.S. experienced something like Europe’s post-Versailles confusion and cynicism. For the Vietnam generation, as Buckley says, *Catch-22* “amounted to existential comfort and the knowledge that they were not alone.” And as Jonathan Eller writes:

*It was a book that captured the feelings of helplessness and horror generated by the darker side of the American dream at a time when the general reading public still expected fiction to reflect a positive view of contemporary America and its hallowed institutions.*³⁵

Literary fiction in the 1960s became increasingly critical of American society, with *Catch-22* part of a cultural assault on the nation's alleged duplicity and hypocrisy. In what Heller later called the decade's "new spirit of healthy irreverence," his book eventually sold millions of copies at home. *Catch-22* had been waiting for America.^{36,37}

Seen from our twenty-first century, multinational, mega-corporate, and globalized present, *Catch-22*'s Lieutenant Milo Minderbinder is a miracle of literary prophecy. The squadron's mess officer, he's the ideal capitalist-entrepreneur, the man who knows no limits. Dedicated solely to profit, he manages a trading syndicate that thrives on war and includes a wide variety of members, some on the Allied side, some not. Milo isn't vicious, but he has no soul and there's no moral structure to his free market capitalism. At one point, he contracts with the Americans to bomb a bridge – he has planes at his disposal – and with the Germans to defend it with anti-aircraft artillery, also at his disposal. It's too much for Yossarian:

"Milo, a man in my tent was killed on that mission before he could even unpack his bags."

"But I didn't kill him."

"You got a thousand dollars extra for it."

"But I didn't kill him. I wasn't even there, I tell you. . . . Look, I didn't start this war, Yossarian. . . . I'm just trying to put it on a businesslike basis. Is anything wrong with that? You know, a thousand dollars ain't such a bad price for a medium bomber and a crew. If I can persuade the Germans to pay me a thousand dollars for every plane they shoot down, why shouldn't I take it? . . . Sure, we're at war with them. But the Germans are also members in good standing of the syndicate, and it's my job to protect their rights as shareholders."

It's global capitalism, privatization, and contracting out taken to an extreme. It comes with principles of a sort, but there's no end to its hunger.³⁸

Catch-22 feels contemporary. Like prophetic art of any kind, it seems more relevant as it ages, and maybe we understand it better as the world ages with it. It's as though our culture has grown into Heller's vision, his astute but exaggerated view of our cupidity. Then, too, *Catch-22* has a number of now familiar post-modern elements: anxiety, paranoia, irony, scepticism, absence of transcendent truth, anarchism, confusion, and distrust of authority. Served up in a collage-like "disintegrated" form, it seems very now.³⁹⁻⁴¹

The book's elements of anxiety and distrust ensure its continued popularity. Suspicion of authority is never in short supply, and there's a sizeable literature of social disaffection. In fact, Heller points out that "the feelings of helplessness and persecution in *Catch-22*" were also present in novels written by Thomas Pynchon and Kurt Vonnegut at the same time, and the sense of a malign *them* has informed much of our popular and literary culture since the early 1960s. "It is the anonymous 'they,' Heller writes, "the enigmatic 'they,' who are in charge. Who is 'they'? I don't know. Nobody knows. Not even 'they' themselves." Then he explains how his original *catch* grew into a *law*, taking on active agents, a *them*: "I began to expand each application of *Catch-22* to encompass more and more of the social system. *Catch-22* became a law: 'they' can do anything to us we can't stop 'them' from doing."⁴²

So there's us and there's them. They have power, and we have satire, black humour, an edgy vigilance, a subdued rage, worry, cynicism, stoicism, postmodern irony, and measured empathy. "Yossarian Lives!" said an anti-war slogan in the sixties. But the *them* is always there.

Yossarian goes to an army psychiatrist, and the psychiatrist says:

"You've got a bad persecution complex. You think people are trying to harm you."

"People are trying to harm me."

“You see? You have no respect for excessive authority or obsolete traditions. You’re dangerous and depraved, and you ought to be taken outside and shot!”

“Are you serious?”

“You’re an enemy of the people!”

The irony is unsubtle but funny. It’s also chilling. The state decides who’s an enemy of the people, and if the state insists on respect for excessive authority and obsolete traditions, so it goes.⁴³

The American critic John Aldridge said that mid-century writers like Heller, John Barth, William Gaddis, and Thomas Pynchon created a “new kind of fiction that represented an abdication of traditional realism.” This new fiction used “the techniques of black humor, surrealism and grotesque metaphor to dramatize unreality, most often by making it seem even more unreal than it actually was.”⁴⁴ This was a matter of exaggeration, however, of *dramatizing* unreality rather than inventing it. The unreality was real.

Catch-22 includes a long exchange between the young and naïve Lieutenant Nately and an old man who runs a Roman brothel. It’s all about gullibility, mindless nationalism, outdated notions of duty, and the sacrifice of the innocent. It’s droll and deadly serious. “What is a country?” the old man asks, then answers his own question:

“A country is a piece of land surrounded on all sides by boundaries, usually unnatural. Englishmen are dying for England, Americans are dying for America, Germans are dying for Germany, Russians are dying for Russia. There are now fifty or sixty countries fighting in this war. Surely so many countries can’t all be worth dying for.”

“Anything worth living for,” said Nately, “is worth dying for.”

“And anything worth dying for,” answered the sacrilegious old man, “is certainly worth living for.”

A true survivor, he tries to warn Nately:

“They are going to kill you if you don’t watch out, and I can see now that you are not going to watch out. Why don’t you use some sense and try to be more like me? You might live to be a hundred and seven, too.”

“Because it’s better to die on one’s feet than live on one’s knees,” Nately retorted with triumphant and lofty conviction. “I guess you’ve heard that saying before.”

“Yes, I certainly have,” mused the treacherous old man, smiling again. “But I’m afraid you have it backward. It is better to live on one’s feet than die on one’s knees. That is the way the saying goes.”

Nately, a very decent young man, has faith in a world that makes sense. “I don’t believe anything you tell me,” he says. “The only thing I do believe is that America is going to win this war.” Cheerfully reconciled to his loss of faith, the “grubby, iniquitous old man” replies: “You put so much stock in *winning* wars. . . . The real trick lies in losing wars, in knowing which wars can be lost.”

The world has changed since Versailles, even since 1945. The truth is topsy-turvy, we’re suspicious of authority, and our notions of duty and service reflect an increasingly edgy individualism.

Kazuo Ishiguro and the cold world

Two other novels, both by the British writer Kazuo Ishiguro, also mirror the way in which Western society changed in the second half of the twentieth century and notions of service and duty shifted. The first, *The Remains of the Day*, was published in 1989,⁴⁵ the second, *Never Let Me Go*, in 2005.

Remains is narrated by Stevens, the butler at Darlington Hall, a great house in the south of England. It is 1956, but most of the novel focuses on Stevens’s thirty-five years with Lord Darlington, and his memories of Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper at the Hall. The story is structured by Stevens’s road trip to

Cornwall, where Miss Kenton, now Mrs Benn, lives with her husband and daughter. On the road, Stevens recalls episodes from his life and reflects on concepts of the perfect butler and the nature of dignity, his chief concern. He recalls Lord Darlington's fine character but poor judgment, and he thinks about the meaning of duty and personal service. Driving home after seeing Miss Kenton, he stops for two nights in Weymouth, Dorset, and there the book ends.⁴⁶

Stevens visits Miss Kenton to convince her to return to Darlington Hall, now owned by Mr Farraday, a wealthy and likeable American. The Hall needs her, Stevens argues, and thus, as he sees it, his visit is professional rather than personal. In fact, he misses Miss Kenton, though he's unable to fully acknowledge this until the novel's end, and then only to himself.

The road relaxes him. The brief vacation is a rare break from the Hall and his duties. He talks with a series of working people – *his* people despite his posh comportment – and as his memories erode his confidence, he softens. At first, his standards are impossibly high, and his prideful attachment to his service is unwavering. He spends a lot of time outlining the code of the butler and summarizing its history. According to this code, dignity, self-restraint, and loyalty trump everything, and that's the key to the novel.

Stevens believes that his generation of butlers was uniquely idealistic. For them, their employer's morality had been crucial. It was essential "to serve gentlemen who were, so to speak, furthering the progress of humanity." In order to make their contribution to a better world, eminent butlers must "serve the great gentlemen of our times in whose hands civilization had been entrusted." A great butler must be "one who can point to his years of service and say that he has applied his talents to serving a great gentleman – and through the latter, to serving humanity."

Lord Darlington seems such a man. Aristocratic, unselfish, and honourable, he is a veteran of the Western Front and a keen participant in post-war international affairs. He is also, it turns out, foolish, credulous, and unworldly. In the same way that Stevens serves his employer with uncritical dedication, so Darlington gives his naïve support to Germany between the wars. In 1923, he says that he'd fought

to preserve justice in the world. “As far as I understood, I wasn’t taking part in a vendetta against the German race.” Stevens remarks that his employer felt that “fair play had not been done at Versailles.”^{47,48}

In the First World War, men’s most idealistic and selfless qualities left them vulnerable to exploitation by civilian and military authorities. Now Darlington’s sympathetic nature and good will make him useful to the wrong people, and similarly vulnerable. In time, his principled support of Germany plays into the hands of the Nazis, and he becomes their asset in Britain. His godson, young Mr Cardinal, isn’t fooled by the Germans who visit the Hall in the 1930s. Lord Darlington, he tells Stevens, is a gentleman, “a true old English gentleman,” but that’s been his undoing: “The way they’ve used it, manipulated it, turned something fine and noble into something else – something they can use for their own foul ends? You must have seen it, Stevens.”

Years earlier, an American named Lewis had mocked Darlington’s political innocence. There’s no longer a role, he’d said, for the amateur in international affairs: “All you decent, well-meaning gentlemen, have you any idea what sort of place the world is becoming all around you? The days when you could act out of your noble instincts are over.” Shortly before the Second World War, Mr Cardinal echoes Lewis’s sentiments: “It’s a fact of life. Today’s world is too foul a place for fine and noble instincts.”

Attached to his role and convictions, Darlington will not wake up. He rejects Lewis’s insistence that international affairs should be left to professionals:

“I believe I have a good idea of what you mean by ‘professionalism’. It appears to mean getting one’s way by cheating and manipulating. It means ordering one’s priorities according to greed and advantage rather than the desire to see goodness and justice prevail in the world.”^{49,50}

Many years later, Stevens, equally attached to his role and beliefs, tells Mr Cardinal that he has absolute faith in Lord Darlington’s judgment. By then, German soldiers have entered the Rhineland, and, as Cardinal says, no one with good judgment could trust anything Hitler said.

It ends badly, of course. War is declared, and Darlington's apparent collaboration becomes public knowledge. Disgraced, he dies in the early 1950s, and the Hall is sold to Farraday.

As Stevens drives west, he reviews his former employer's actions and is troubled by one event in particular. In 1932, Darlington, influenced by a female member of Oswald Mosley's "blackshirts," is guilty of anti-Semitism. "There's the safety and well-being of my guests to consider," he says, as he instructs Stevens to dismiss two Jewish maids. Stevens does so, countering Miss Kenton's furious objections with: "we must not allow sentiment to creep into our judgement. . . . The fact is, the world of today is a very complicated and treacherous place. There are many things you and I are simply not in a position to understand concerning, say, the nature of Jewry. Whereas his lordship, I might venture, is somewhat better placed to judge what is for the best." It is a shameful episode. A year later Darlington realizes this, regrets what he did, and seeks to compensate the two young women.

But the harm is done. Darlington has behaved badly, Stevens has carried out his orders without protest, and Miss Kenton, after threatening to resign, has not. It's the beginning of the end of Darlington Hall.⁵¹

The farther Stevens travels, the more the truth surfaces and the less sure he is about the value of his service. At first he is defensive. About the sacking of the maids: "my every instinct opposed the idea of their dismissal. Nevertheless, my duty in this instance was quite clear, and as I saw it, there was nothing to be gained at all in irresponsibly displaying such personal doubts. It was a difficult task, but as such, one that demanded to be carried out with dignity."

His duty was straightforward. As he says, "a butler's duty is to provide good service," and he did what was necessary. This was not, he believes even now, an instance of mindless loyalty. It's simply that:

. . . if a butler is to be of any worth to anything or anybody in life, there must surely come a time when he ceases his searching; a time when he must say to himself: 'This employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will therefore devote myself to serving him.'

By this stage of the journey, Stevens is shaken enough to admit that he'd served a man of poor judgment, but not enough to recognize the tragedy of his own uncritical devotion:

How can one possibly be held to blame in any sense that Lord Darlington's efforts were misguided, even foolish? Throughout the years I served him, it was he and he alone who weighed up evidence and judged it best to proceed in the way he did, while I simply confined myself, quite properly, to affairs within my own professional realm. . . . It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste – and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account.⁵²

Later, however, Stevens recalls something Mr Cardinal had said to him, and his reply. Cardinal had asked whether he wasn't curious about Darlington's activities on behalf of the Reich, and he had replied rather stiffly that it wasn't his place "to display curiosity about such matters." "Ah," Cardinal had said, "I suppose you believe that to be loyalty."

That same evening in the mid-1930s – as Darlington hosts a meeting with the German Ambassador – two events occur. The first is Miss Kenton's desperate attempt to provoke Stevens into declaring his feelings for her by announcing that she plans to marry and move to the West Country. Stevens appears unmoved and offers his warmest congratulations. The other event, which closes the second-to-last chapter, is Stevens's realization that he has made it through a particularly difficult evening while maintaining his dignity throughout. Even his harsh and judgmental father, also a butler in his time, would have been proud of him. So removed is he from his feelings for Miss Kenton, and from her pain, that he can see the evening as the high point of his career and a summary of all he has achieved: "within the very room where I had just executed my duties, the most powerful gentlemen of Europe were conferring over the fate of our continent. Who would doubt at that moment that I had indeed come as close to the great hub of things as any butler could wish?"

This juxtaposition of Stevens's personal exaltation and Miss Kenton's tears – the victory of pride and emotional repression over love – is the spiritual low point of the novel. It takes place in the past, however, twenty years before Stevens sets out on his heart's journey to Cornwall.

Meeting Miss Kenton for tea, Stevens asks her to come back to Darlington Hall. She declines. Her place is with her husband, she says, though privately she wishes to return. In fact, she misses Stevens as much he does her, but, like him, won't make this clear. Instead, she says: "there's no turning back the clock now. One can't be forever dwelling on what might have been. One should realize one has as good as most, perhaps better, and be grateful." Stevens is silent at first:

I do not think I responded immediately, for it took me a moment or two to fully digest these words of Miss Kenton. Moreover, as you might appreciate, their implications were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me. Indeed – why should I not admit it? – at that moment, my heart was breaking. Before long, however, I turned to her and said with a smile: "You're very correct, Mrs Benn. As you say, it is too late to turn back the clock. . . ."

He leaves ("It was a great pleasure to see you again, Mrs Benn"), and the story ends with a long scene on the pier at Weymouth the next day. As the crowds wait for the pier's lights to come on at dusk, Stevens shares a bench with a retired butler and confesses to this stranger that he's starting to make mistakes in his work. They're small mistakes, he says, but he'd never have made them in the past. Then he breaks down: "Goodness knows, I've tried and tried, but it's no use. I've given what I had to give. I gave it all to Lord Darlington." And he weeps.

Darlington wasn't a bad man, Stevens tells the retired butler:

"He wasn't a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he had made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I trusted. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served

*him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?*⁵³

The retired butler counsels Stevens not to look back so much, and though the sudden admission of his servility and failure is overwhelming, the result is release, acceptance, and the possibility of a very different pride:

Perhaps, then, there is something to his advice that I should cease looking back so much, that I should adopt a more positive outlook and try to make the best of what remains of my day. . . . Surely it is enough that the likes of you and I at least try to make our small contribution count for something true and worthy. And if some of us are prepared to sacrifice much in life in order to pursue such aspirations, surely that is in itself, whatever the outcome, cause for pride and contentment.

The pier's lights are switched on, and Stevens realizes that for the people around him this simple event reflects their pleasure in the final hours of the day. He observes a group of six or seven behind him, strangers until moments ago but now laughing together. "It is curious how people can build such warmth among themselves so swiftly." He believes it has to do with their ability to banter, to relax in each other's company by joshing, and he decides to improve his skills in this area. "Perhaps it is indeed time I began to look at the whole matter of bantering more enthusiastically. After all, when one thinks about it, it is not such a foolish thing to indulge in – particularly if it is the case that in bantering lies the key to human warmth."

The key to human warmth. This is not the same man who set out for Cornwall several days earlier. And to add to his anticipation of connecting with others, he senses that "bantering is hardly an unreasonable duty for an employer to expect a professional to perform." Thus there's a second reason to dedicate himself to its skillful use. Perhaps, he muses in the book's final lines, by the time Mr Farraday returns from his current trip to America, "I shall be in a position to pleasantly surprise him."⁵⁴

There's a cautious joy in Stevens as he's drawn back to serving a man he has every reason to respect, and to the possibility of human warmth. There's much to do. He has his duty (obligation), service (devotion), and something new: pleasure. It's a comic ending. Stevens is still a bit of a fool, but he's a kinder, wiser, and happier fool. This is a happy story, and a smart one.

Never Let Me Go, published sixteen years after *The Remains of the Day*, is every bit as smart, but there's nothing happy about it.⁵⁵ Set in an alternative late 1990s England, it is narrated by a young woman named Kathy. She and her friends Ruth and Tommy grow up at a special boarding school at which there's little serious study or contact with the outside world. Instead, students are encouraged by their teachers, known as guardians, to interact, play sports, produce art, and be healthy.⁵⁶

Never Let Me Go is tenderly sinister. Its depiction of the young is exquisite, and Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are lovingly drawn. As children, they and their friends are, within normal bounds, innocent and secure. As adults, they are sensitive and considerate. The novel's sinister quality lies not in them but those who made them.

According to *Never's* alternative or parallel history, post-1945 England made dramatic advances in medical science and genetic engineering. Unrestrained by moral debate or restrictive laws, medicine learned to defeat disease by sourcing fresh organs from healthy young clones supplied by government institutions. Since then, like soldiers in a war, clones have been sacrificed by a distant authority. Piece by piece, they make their "donations." When they are used up after two, three, or four donations, they "complete." They die.

Kathy and her friends learn the truth in stages. By their late teens, they know they have been sterilized and are destined to be donors. They don't question the justice of this, or the validity of the donor program. Their fate as organ sources isn't an issue. On the other hand, they're curious about the men and women they were

cloned from – each student is unique – and at least some have questions about Hailsham, their school.

During their time at Hailsham, Miss Emily (the headmistress) and her staff stress the creation of visual art. Students are encouraged to produce piece after piece, year after year, and every once in a while a strange woman (“Madame”) appears from the outside, collects their work, and drives off with it. The students have no idea why, though they fantasize about the reasons.

Many years later, Kathy and Tommy learn the truth. By then, Ruth has completed, and Tommy has begun his donations. Kathy is his “carer” (a future donor assigned to support current donors), and she and Tommy find the now retired Miss Emily and her companion, Madame. Hailsham, Miss Emily explains, had been one of three schools in a progressive movement that favoured raising clones humanely. Hence the art: “We took away your art,” Miss Emily says, “because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we *did it to prove you had souls at all.*”

“ . . . we demonstrated to the world that if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being. Before that, all clones – or students, as we preferred to call you – existed only to supply medical science. In the early days after the war, that’s largely all you were to most people.”

Miss Emily’s movement did make a difference, for a while. After the late 1970s, however, there was a decline in financial support for the schools, the public lost interest in their work, and the movement stalled, then died. Hailsham and the other two programs shut down, and that was that:

“All around the country, at this very moment, there are students being reared in deplorable conditions, conditions you Hailsham students could hardly imagine. And now we’re no more, things will only get worse.”

There will be no more humane experiments, Miss Emily explains, and donations will carry on as before.⁵⁷

Years earlier, watching a very young Kathy dance by herself, Madame had had a vision of the future: “I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world.” In Kathy she saw a little girl “holding to her breast the old kind world,” and it broke her heart.⁵⁸ All that remains of Hailsham at the story’s end is the children’s art that Madame and Miss Emily have stored in their home. The harsh, cruel world has come.

Like Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, the adult Kathy reviews the past and comes to terms with it, but it’s her life with Ruth and Tommy that matters most: their affections, romances, jealousies, betrayals, and ultimate solidarity.

The three friends are very different. As a child and youth, Tommy has rages, but they flame out and seem merely part of his nature. Ruth, on the other hand, is mercurial and prickly and comes closest to challenging the system. “We all know it,” she says at one point. “We’re modelled from trash.” Later, when their friend Chrissie dies after only her second donation: “I think it happens much more than they ever tell us.”

There is anger in Ruth, and potential resistance, but even she stops short of rebelling. “I was pretty much ready when I became a donor,” she tells Kathy and Tommy, near the end. “It felt right. After all, it’s what we’re supposed to be doing, isn’t it?” Is she sarcastic or bitter? Kathy isn’t sure: “it was the sort of thing you hear donors say to each other all the time.”

As for Kathy, she accepts life as it is. She’s strong and kind, not passive or timid, but she takes things as they come. Responding to Ruth’s remark about Chrissie’s early death, she says: “There’s no big conspiracy about it, . . . Sometimes it happens. It was really sad about Chrissie. But that’s not common. They’re really careful these days.” And about Rodney, Chrissie’s ex-boyfriend: “I’ve seen a lot of people in Rodney’s position, . . . They do come to terms with it.”

In any case, no one rises up or runs away. Towards the end, Tommy and Kathy do hope for a short-term “deferral” of donations based on their love for each other, but when they learn that deferrals are a myth, they simply accept what that

means. It's not that their love is superficial. It's that compliance is a given. There is "a distressing dedication to the donor ethic," as one reviewer says, and the habit of resignation.

Tommy has one final rage, one last howling protest, and this time it's clearly against his destiny. Perhaps, Kathy suggests, he'd understood their fate from the start, better than the rest. Perhaps, he replies, but leaves it at that. Earlier, he'd said: "I wasn't much good as a carer. . . . I think that's why the notice for my first came so early. I know it's not supposed to work that way, but I reckon that's what it was. Didn't mind really. I'm a pretty good donor, but I was a lousy carer." After his outburst, he's quiet again.

Kathy is caring and disciplined to the end. In the novel's last lines, she imagines Tommy approaching across a field. Perhaps he'll wave, she thinks, or call out, though she knows he's dead:

The fantasy never got beyond that – I didn't let it – and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.

She will make her first donation by the end of the year, but she won't forget her friends: "The memories I value most, I don't see them ever fading. I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them." She will discharge her duty as a donor, but she will never give up her fundamental service: a devotion to her friends. She will never let them go, or forget the old kind world that shaped them.

There are different ways to interpret *Never*, and readers have labelled it many things: science fiction, speculative fiction, alternate history, thriller, horror story, coming of age narrative, dystopian or futuristic parable, and cautionary tale about cloning.⁵⁹ Regardless of category or genre, it's about humanness, and it's a love story.

As Roger Ebert said, *Never* is about empathy and the ability to love.⁶⁰ Like *Remains*, it's about human connection, making it and keeping it, and what it means to be emotionally whole. The students have no surnames or families but are raised by adults who care for them, and their intimacy, sensitivity, and awareness of personal mortality make them especially human. It isn't their art that validates them.

However, like *Remains* and *Catch-22*, *Never* is also about the willingness of authoritarian cultures to sacrifice others. In *Remains*, there's the dismissal of the Jewish maids and the Fascist/Nazi manipulation of Lord Darlington. In *Catch-22*, it's Cold War America's suspension of civil liberties to advance its own interests. And in *Never*, it's the piecemeal disposal of the disenfranchised on behalf of the entitled. With echoes of Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, these books describe an unacceptable sacrifice washed down with macabre euphemism, lies, deceit, duplicity, and repression. In a sense, pre-1939 fascism, Cold War reactionary conservatism, and futuristic genetic elitism tell the same story.

Finally, these books remind us that service and duty can, if abused, underpin victimization. If in the First World War it was soldiers walking into machinegun fire, in *Remains* it's Stevens calmly dismissing the maids and betraying his love and integrity, and in *Never* it's Kathy preparing to die one organ at a time. As for Yossarian, it's true that he deserts, but he's our post-modern hero/anti-hero, and for him the world's existential absurdity is boundless. His duty is to life, starting with his own, and his service is to himself and a saner reality. Sometimes, he might say, we serve best by facing the music, other times by demanding a new tune.

Conclusion

Lost and found

Part one: disconnection¹

A second *New Yorker* cartoon, kin to the one described in the Introduction, shows a pinch-mouthed guy with opaque sunglasses and a tee-shirt that reads:

I'M

WITH

ME.

As a slice of socially-estranged individualism, you can't beat it. A single image and three words summon up a few of the least admirable qualities in contemporary Western culture: resentment, self-concern, vapidness, narcissism, and spiritual vulgarity.

Such a cartoon would have been unthinkable in 1914. There was no shortage of self-importance on the cusp of the war, but its expression was restrained by manners and the fear of social disapproval. If you were full of yourself, it was best not to advertise it.

But that was then. The First World War, with its “extraordinary convulsions” and systematic undermining of the social framework, set the Western world on a new path and forced the rejection of earlier views. To get where we are today, an entire set of values and beliefs had to go, but the butchery took care of that.²

A century of self

After 1918, individualism shed its social dimension. Men and women turned from their role in society to their unique and absorbing selves. The truth was no longer to be found “in a social reality but the individual imagination, in Dionysian energy and will.” The collapse of the old framework, with its traditional values and institutions, left nothing but self-assertion, and old-fashioned notions of virtue and modesty gave way to the thrill of personal experience and self-expression. It was liberating, but it came at a price. In the modern West, Eksteins writes, the individual was suddenly alone, “in permanent flight, . . . devoid even of the sentimental reassurance of a kitten. . . . Freedom had become a personal matter, a responsibility above all to oneself.”³

In the West, polar political ideologies took the form of social authoritarianism and conservative individualism. At its most extreme, the first manifested as fascism and communism. In time, of course, fascism was defeated and communism rejected, and since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, most Western countries have trumpeted an individualist ethic and free market, neo-liberal economy.

Meanwhile, on a more personal level, the last century saw a shift from belief and certainty to unease, confusion, disillusionment, even nihilism. A naïve confidence was replaced by anxiety and suspicion, and there was a loss of faith in inevitable social progress and meliorism, the belief that we can always make things better. A corresponding loss of trust in authority (in governments, corporations, democratic institutions, and religious and military hierarchies) fed cynicism and social disengagement.

The recent past has made things worse. Tired of what they see as their leaders’ arrogance, insincerity, and adversarial boorishness, many people have lost faith in traditional institutions. Revelations of greed, stupidity, and corruption haven’t helped, and millions have reacted by turning away from the public forum altogether.⁴

Not that the public itself is blameless, as Walt Kelly, creator of the long-running cartoon strip “Pogo,” pointed out. A famous 1970 Earth Day poster featured one

of his cartoons. In the first of two frames, he depicted his animal characters Pogo and Porkypine treading carefully in “the forest primeval.” In the second, Pogo and Porkypine sit dejected, looking at the forest floor piled high in trash: “We have met the enemy,” Pogo says, “and he is us.”⁵

Artists like Walt Kelly remind us that the enemy may well be us. It’s not enough to blame others – the Allies at Versailles in 1919, the Islamic world in 2001, our politicians in the present – and we must take responsibility for the part we play in whatever mess we find ourselves in.

Self-criticism thrived in the 1960s and 1970s, fuelled partly by the Vietnam War and the West’s perpetuation of the extended tragedy in Southeast Asia. It seemed for a while that we might take a hard look at ourselves and act on what we learned. By the 1980s, however, our confidence had returned, and self-criticism was no match for self-regard or for what David Foster Wallace called our “natural, hard-wired default setting which is to be deeply and literally self-centered and to see and interpret everything through the lens of self.”⁶

David Brooks recalls a U.S. radio show that aired on V-J Day in August 1945, the day World War II ended:

. . . the most striking feature of the show was its tone of self-effacement and humility. . . . there was no chest-beating. Nobody was erecting triumphal arches. . . . the individual ego seemed petty in comparison. . . . fascism had stood for grandiosity, pomposity, boasting and zeal. . . . There was a mass hunger for a public style that was understated, self-abnegating, modest and spare.

That was a different epoch, Brooks says. It wasn’t long before a rehabilitated self-assertion beat out humility, and “self-exposure and self-love became ways to win shares in the competition for attention. . . . Today, immodesty is as ubiquitous as advertising, and for the same reasons.”⁷

“Somehow in today’s America,” another writer says, “we think we are supposed to blow our own horns – the louder the better.”⁸ Self-promotion is at the heart of the new century’s electronic media, and assertive self-branding is how you pitch

yourself in the marketplace. Meanwhile, commerce dominates our energies, and the economy, once the means to a social end, steadily displaces society, becoming an end in itself. In what Susan Cain says is a shift from a culture of character and morals to one of personality and magnetism, we're moving from a social to a personal and economic ethic, trading the body politic for the body economic.²

Runaway self-promotion is not, needless to say, a North American story. It's all over the place, transplanted or surfacing on its own, part of a cluster of social trends that includes a garish egotism and escalating sensationalism. Integral to a global mashup of styles and themes based on the urge to self-display, to make quick money, and to feed an appetite for the shocking and shameless, this cluster of trends is unbound by taste, restraint, or geography.

So perhaps the tee-shirt guy knows what he's doing. Maybe by advertising his self-love he's a little ahead of the game.

Economic inequality and disconnection

Social disconnection has many root causes. Economic inequality is the most fundamental.

In December 2013, Michael Valpy published a series of articles on social cohesion in Canada. Several focus on the role of economics in inclusion and wellbeing. Acting on Ursula Franklin's advice to seek the key to social cohesion in the workplace, Valpy studied employment in Canada from various points of view. His conclusions, though based solely on Canadian data, would relate to any affluent Western nation with a weakened social contract.^{10,11}

Valpy concluded that, through no fault of their own, many Canadians fail to find satisfactory work. The reality is a high degree of workplace insecurity, youth unemployment, low-wage temporary employment, minimum-wage part-time work (often in the so-called service sector), downward mobility, anxiety, resentment, and pessimism about the future. The implications are clear: "barriers to

economic participation in society contribute far more to social fragmentation and social exclusion than differing values and personal attitudes.” In turn, fragmentation and exclusion lead to social unrest, crime, hopelessness, and marginalization. The rich get richer, the poor struggle on. It’s not so much a matter of inequality as unchecked and *rising* inequality. More and more people belong to the “precariat”: the mass of poorly-paid workers whose employment is precarious.^{12,13} There are no bonuses and few if any benefits for these workers. They are plentiful, inexpensive, and disposable – the euphemism is *flexible* – and until they wake to their shared marginality and act on it, the economy will run all over them.

That awakening may have started. There’s a sense, in North America at least, that with the impact of free trade, the erosion of unions, and the disappearance of comparatively well-paid manufacturing jobs, many traditional workers have been relegated to the precariat. No more blue collar solidarity and self-reliance, just membership in an underclass that exists to serve money and influence. The result: fear, frustration, resentment, anger, and an inclination to authoritarianism.

The transition from stable participation in the economy to precarious employment reflects corporate priorities and a growing “devotion to self-interest and capitalism and the free market.”¹⁴ It’s about the ascendance of a competitive approach to social mobility, and the increasing isolation of the working poor and unemployed. It’s the result, Valpy says, of:

a winter storm of globalization-and-technology assaults that Canadians’ governing elites haven’t stood up to. It’s the continuing fallout of a cruel neo-liberal hoax. It’s a massive decades-old shift from a collectivist to a more individualist society aggravated by a withdrawal of the state from Canadians’ lives.

The outcome is a socio-economic mix in which class and political structures serve the privileged. Recent federal governments have, on the whole, favoured corporations and the wealthy, resulting in social injustice and, for those left behind, greater disconnection. Ours may be a brave new world technologically, but it’s one in which individual wealth still outguns shared wealth and social wellbeing. It’s not enough to have a national business plan or to see governance in commercial terms alone.

Without a social blueprint based on a determined public sector commitment to economic justice, there is every reason to expect a further decline in equality and social cohesion and a corresponding increase in tension and disconnection.

Digital disconnection

The most revolutionary change in the West since the introduction of global warfare is digital technology.¹⁵ From search engines and stylish games to social networking and biomedical research, digitalization has changed our lives. In the first years of the new century – and in both hemispheres at the same time – we reached and then passed the tipping point between analog and digital. This is *our* century's Battle of the Somme, *our* crack in history. In a single decade, it has thrust us into a vast sphere of scientific and technological possibilities.

On an interpersonal level, however, there are reasons to worry about its impact on social cohesion and engagement. Despite euphoria at the advent of the digital age, and notwithstanding the Internet's "heroic narrative" – the story it tells about itself – we need to beware the techno-utopians and "digital evangelists who confuse technological advance with human progress." We need to look not just at the revolution's promises but its consequences.¹⁶

This is certainly true of politically-sanctioned digital surveillance. It may or may not be wrong to blame innovators for the applications to which their work is put (in this case electronic stealth by or on behalf of governments), but it's important to note this example of a value-neutral technology turned to questionable ends. Like instances of private venom in a comments thread, or vicious remarks on Facebook, mass surveillance sends a chill through all of us, encouraging withdrawal from candid social interaction.¹⁷

It's clear from media reports based on Edward Snowden's revelations that cyber-surveillance is far-reaching and largely autonomous. It's clear, too, that we have entered an age of digital materialism in which a new commodity of choice is constructed of bits and bytes. Data are the stuff of money and power, almost a currency

in themselves. And while human surveillance predates digital technology by millennia, new spy tools supercharge the accumulation of personal data in both the private and public spheres.

Jaron Lanier, “digital visionary,” “father of virtual reality,” and “mega-wizard in futurist circles,” now believes that one of digital technology’s main roles is spying on citizens. And since “technology will get to everybody eventually,” we can look forward, he says, to blanket surveillance.¹⁸⁻²⁰

For most of us, government monitoring of what we say and do is scary. We distrust secret or ambiguous bureaucracies and no longer count on innocence to spare us. Surveillance breeds anxiety, period. Thomas Drake, an ex-U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) executive, describes his nation as a security state in which “everybody is suspect” and “there is no presumed innocence.” And if Canadians think it’s different in this country, Drake and writers like Tony Burman say otherwise. Drake points out that Canada’s CSEC (Communications Security Establishment Canada) is part of the Five Eyes community: the signals and intelligence services of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. “It’s a very close partnership,” he says, and complete cooperation is assumed.²¹

Similarly, Jeremy Kinsman, Canada’s former Ambassador to the European Union, writes:

Our copycat surveillance programs have zero Parliamentary oversight, although they maul the rights of citizens. . . . Secrecy at the top is the way Canadians are ruled. The default executive position is anti-transparency and anti-public. Parliament which is meant to safeguard our democracy has been rendered useless. Downgrading citizens’ prerogatives and rights this way is serious stuff. . . . Even sleep-walking Canadians shouldn’t just ‘get over it.’²²

Sleep-walking sums it up. But while the public in Canada and elsewhere accepts the new order, security agencies (sometimes known as services or communities) reach deeper into our lives. In this they are aided by their wobbly partner, private enterprise. Tony Burman says this about Edward Snowden’s disclosures:

They confirmed that the U.S. government routinely collects the phone logs of millions of Americans who have no ties to terrorism, without seeking any court warrants. They confirmed that the NSA has access to Internet companies such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft, enabling it to collect online data about millions of Americans for perpetuity. And they confirmed that American authorities, in their testimony to the U.S. Congress, have lied about their practices.^{23,24}

In fact, Burman says, a secret surveillance state is emerging in which governments rely not only on traditional security agencies (their own and others) but the resources of the global private sector as well: the technology giants, other corporations routinely harvesting client data, and private organizations specializing in marketing personal information. This is the world of universal monitoring, meta-data collection, and the storage of records amassed by the globe's most powerful forces. This is the new "they," in Joseph Heller's terms, and sometimes it seems "they can do anything to us we can't stop 'them' from doing."

The danger, of course, is that these forces will continue to thrive and converge, and that the public, silenced by bread and circuses, will find it ever easier to comply with integrated private and public sector priorities. It comes down, finally, to rights, civil liberties, and privacy, all of which will be redefined in the digital age. Even now, Sherry Turkle writes, many young people are largely indifferent to privacy or, if they still care about it, see it as a lost cause.

At the end of a 2013 interview with Thomas Drake, the CBC's Michael Enright sighs: "So we're all living under a bubble, and everyone's watching and listening. Is that what you're saying?" "Yes," Drake replies, "and that has a corrosive effect on who we are." Corrosive, fragmenting, distancing. This, too, disconnects us, shaping at best a shared anxiety, emotional vertigo, and sense of social distrust.

Lanier, Turkle, and a number of other early digital advocates have lost some of their enthusiasm for the Internet and social media. Lanier is particularly critical of what he describes as digital orthodoxy and the rise of a collectivist “hive mind” that strips the Internet of human individuality, warmth, and originality. He argues that “greed and a bizarre ideology” have distorted the Web’s original humanism, and he fears that a dominant but mediocre technology will impoverish us, noting that people have “an uncanny ability to reduce themselves to meet the expectations of a computer program.” Turkle, meanwhile, worries about our “incipient robotism,” the possibility, as Rafael Behr puts it, that we’ll put our faith in technology “as the antidote to human frailty.” Lanier and Turkle are afraid, in other words, that we’ll lose the human plot.²⁵⁻³⁰

Our darkest fears and prophecies are probably unfounded. New tools do reshape us, but humanity toughs it out.³¹ We find ways to adjust, express ourselves, get what we need. Still, it’s hard not to worry in the face of radical change, and our constant connectivity is both radical and seductive. In this Age of Digital Distraction, it’s hard to resist what Camille Paglia calls the “volatile excitement of virtual reality.” At its best, it’s inspiring, stimulating, brilliant. At its most kinetic but still relatively harmless, it’s a mere funland: “dazzlingly designed forms of cognitive waste.”^{32,33} At its very worst, it is crass and hateful. But it’s always there.

And there’s a not unreasonable fear that we will lose more than we gain in adapting to digital technology. Research suggests that prolonged Internet use rewires our neural circuitry in such a way that some brain functions are sharpened, others dulled. “We’re optimizing our brains for distracted, piecemeal, very rapid-paced information processing,” one writer says, while others claim that we’re reducing our ability to focus and memorize, or to engage in sustained, profound thought and to truly relate to each other.³⁴

The issue is neuroplasticity, the strengthening or weakening of neural pathways, and there’s scientific support for caution when it comes to intense, long-term immersion in digital simulations. Researchers concerned about this side of digital culture see in long-term immersion not a harmless diversion but the possibility of

an unhealthy withdrawal into playtime or proxy lives. Taken far enough, they say, online existence can seem more rewarding, supportive, and inviting than unmediated reality.^{35,36} In Michael Valpy's series on social cohesion, he quotes a recent university graduate about Facebook:

*You build this entire life . . . You pick exactly what you want to show people . . . and the problem is that people start identifying with that self. . . . They get their virtual self mixed up with their real life and they stop the introspection of working on themselves, because their pictures are looking good.*³⁷

The danger is a wholesale drift toward digital disconnection from society and other individuals. Real people can be bewildering and frightening, and they are seriously unpredictable: no programmer has coded them, and no keyboard sequence silences them. It takes real-time, face-to-face experience to learn how they work, how to interpret their signals, and how to form real relationships with them.

The other thing at risk is our innerness. Our sense of what is within cannot exist without stillness and reflection, and relentless connectivity precludes both. In turn, without reflection and self-awareness it may be difficult to learn about the feelings of others, and hence to sympathize with them.³⁸

In short, digital media can give us a remarkably sophisticated but artificial and limiting online existence, and we must mark the very real possibility of an illusory, corporate-inspired, post-humanist collectivity built on millions of depersonalized, formulaic, and homogenized avatars masquerading as awesome selves.³⁹

Studies conducted over the last thirty years show a rise in narcissism among young adults in the United States, and it's probably similar elsewhere.^{40,41} Defined as a tendency to self-absorption, grandiosity, a craving for attention, and seeing others "as a problem to be managed or a resource to be exploited," narcissism has risen most sharply, some writers say, since the explosion of digital technology. "The net encourages narcissism," Behr writes. "Western civilisation was probably on a trajectory of atomisation, loneliness and narcissism before the invention of the Internet. But that does not invalidate the diagnosis." Stephen Marche says some-

thing along the same lines and is particularly critical of Facebook's invitation to self-exhibition:

Self-presentation on Facebook is continuous, intensely mediated, and possessed of a phony nonchalance that eliminates even the potential for spontaneity. . . . Curating the exhibition of the self has become a 24/7 occupation. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Australian study 'Who Uses Facebook?' found a significant correlation between Facebook use and narcissism.

Marche quotes the study's authors: "it could be argued that Facebook specifically gratifies the narcissistic individual's need to engage in self-promoting and superficial behavior." Social networks, the authors say, let people "lionize their own lives" and create "a buffer between individuals, which makes it easier to ignore others' pain, or even at times, inflict pain upon others."⁴²

Narcissism fits with the boom in self-marketing and personal branding and our recent tendency to see ourselves as consumers rather than members of society. "Rising narcissism isn't so much a trend as the trend behind all other trends," writes Marche. It's a retreat from other people, part of our social disintegration into economic units, and, though its roots are virtual, it's showing up in real-world behaviour. Elias Aboujaoude, a Stanford University psychiatrist, writes that the Internet "is creating major shifts in our personalities and our psychological health."⁴³

Just as troubling, social scientists claim that the rise in narcissism (self-concern) corresponds to a decline in empathy (concern for others).^{44,45} As a sympathetic response to other people's emotions, empathy lets us see things from their point of view. Interestingly, the young adults surveyed in a recent study on narcissism and empathy were described as "self-concerned, competitive, confident, and individualistic," traits better suited to a Darwinian struggle for survival than concern for others.^{46,47}

Some experts blame the apparent decline in empathy on the Internet or the ubiquity of electronic devices. Others pin it on what they see as a spiralling depravity in popular culture, or a generational sense of entitlement, resentment, and mistrust.

But if today's young are in fact less empathetic than the young used to be, it's probably because of a set of things, including economic insecurity, a plague of political shabbiness, and a fear that shrinking resources both economic and environmental mean that only the strong will survive.

Whatever the reason, our relationship with digital interfaces does seem to reduce our talent for empathy. Devices ask so little and deliver so much, and we adjust to mediated interactions so easily. On the other hand, these interactions lead to no deep connection or bond. For that you need a human in real time.^{48,49}

Social disconnection

Social disconnection has various sources. Technological change and economic disparity are part of the story, but social cohesion (the binding of individuals to each other and perhaps to something larger) depends on many things and can be undermined by a variety of factors. Frank Graves of EKOS Research says that the key to social cohesion is “trust, empathy, mutual respect, fairness, inclusion and participation,” and any number of trends threaten those values.⁵⁰

So, just as Ursula Franklin emphasizes the danger posed by unsatisfactory employment, other writers focus on issues such as a growing disengagement from politics and public service. Indeed, the loss of respect for politicians and the political system does seem to erode social cohesion, as more and more people abandon a system they no longer trust, admire, or consider vital and relevant.^{51,52}

This is especially true among the young, far more likely than the middle-aged to be unemployed or underemployed, and far less likely to vote.^{53,54} Their involvement in the electoral process is crucial, but they are often cynical about the political system and feel estranged from the public realm. Valpy, citing University of Calgary's Yvonne Hébert, says that young people are “the product of Western society's overall shift from the more communal to the more individualistic. Their sense of national identity has diminished as the state has withdrawn from Canadians' lives over their lifetimes.”⁵⁵

Meanwhile, an increasing number of middle-aged Canadians have also lost faith in the system and, like many young people, stay away from the ballot box. The elderly, on the other hand, continue to vote. The result, given our first-past-the-post, winner-takes-all electoral system, is that older voters, who tend to favour the political right, often determine who governs, and the views of younger people are not represented. The danger is a conservative gerontocracy and further social disengagement.

The long-term result of these social, economic, technological, and political trends is social entropy, a metaphor in this case for society's running out of constructive energy and slipping into inertia and decline. Uncorrected, it means a continued loss of social cohesion and a polarization of the young and old, privileged and poor, hopeful and apathetic. The corollary, of course, is increased social distress and tension.⁵⁶

According to Valpy, this antisocial process is accelerating. As the state fades from our lives, we move closer to an asocial individualism or, in some cases, identification with a subculture or special interest group.⁵⁷ Corporate interests, sensing a spiritual vacuum, step in with a full range of stylish lifestyle substitutes, and we shift ever further from the social to the economic.

As for service, duty, and empathy outside the family and personal community, it's hard to be hopeful. Without social cohesion, it's difficult to imagine a lively sense of duty to the extended community, and with weakened social bonds and increased social tension, it's equally difficult to picture a strong sense of empathy. With a diminished sense of duty and empathy, however, what happens to service and caring?^{58,59}

Part two: reconnection

Ray had joined up for the war as soon as he was eighteen. He chose the Air Force, which promised, as was said, the most adventure and the quickest death. . . He came home with a vague idea that he had to do something meaningful with the life that had so inexplicably been left to him, but he didn't know what.

-from Alice Munro's "Leaving Maverley"

Recalling history and a broken world

A hundred years after the assassination in Serbia of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, we look back at a century in which, step by step, we left behind an unthinking trust in our leaders and a reassuring certainty in our social convictions, traditions, and belief in unlimited progress. But where are we now? The West's political and economic dominance is shaken, and the world seems more unstable than ever.⁶⁰ Sensing that things are coming apart bit by bit, we're aware of the other great threat: a wild card scenario in which a flu pandemic, environmental crisis, or nuclear tragedy redefines our situation altogether.

On July 1, 1916, the first day of the Somme, trust, pride, and obedience killed tens of thousands in a battle that shouldn't have happened in a war that shouldn't have happened. Thirty years later, Adolf Eichmann, defending his conduct in another war, argued that he had done his duty, just that, and to the best of his abilities. Linking his conduct to Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, he justified his actions during the Holocaust by claiming that duty was the unconditional moral obligation, and his duty, his obligation once he had sworn allegiance to Hitler, was to obey the Führer's orders, always and without question.⁶¹

The negative side of duty is its potential for uncritical loyalty. Unthinking duty relieves us of the responsibility to consider our actions, and it feeds our tendency to passivity, compliance, and conformism. It lets us off the hook, as it does Stevens and, in a sense, Kathy and her friends. Yossarian, no.

In our economy-driven culture, unnecessary consumption is often promoted as a gratifying and almost righteous obligation: you owe it to yourself, you deserve it, you've earned it. Moreover, it's your duty to others, for while self-restraint might be good for the environment, it does nothing for the market. In reality, however, the architecture of our system depends on unstable factors such as consumer confidence and rejection of thrift, and this should and sometimes does inspire in us a sense of the system's instability. To reassure us, armies of economists and journalists steady a rickety global enterprise and sustain our faith in the future. Reassured, we step up and do our bit.

Something similar is true in politics. Subterfuge and trickery are traditional, and policy has regularly taken a back seat to strategy, but something's new. Perhaps it's merely the routine insincerity and slick, coached quality of contemporary political behaviour, plus our fear that no one, especially the sincere, can be elected and stay in office without serious professional help. In any case, just as marketing specialists have guided consumer preferences, political consultants and image experts have engineered public support. And, at the heart of it, building on a convergence of media, popular culture, and public life, there's the push to promote not just this candidate or that but a convincing facsimile of democracy.

However, while political specialists get shrewder all the time, so do a lot of voters. Many are cannier than they used to be and better at seeing through rhetoric and image-fabrication. Increasingly disinclined to settle for whatever's on offer or, in AL Kennedy's words, to forget past betrayals and "embrace amnesia,"⁶² they're less easily fooled.

Which is just as well, since change is up to us. We enable whatever *is*. Our political culture is what we permit it to be, and until we demand something better – a new tune – this is what we get.

The key lies in recalling history and transcending our desire for easy reassurance. Our complacency must go, and with it our passivity and unearned trust. The rejection of unthinking compliance began at the Somme, but it's not over yet.

The future is an experiment: we don't know how it will turn out. What we do know is that the last century, though painful, brought social justice and improved living conditions to a lot of people. The world is still a mess, but it's not hard to discern positive change in the areas of racial equality, social tolerance, public health, nutrition, and the rights of women, children, the disabled, LGBTQ people, and other historically vulnerable individuals. It's at least possible that twenty-first century science, technology, and social evolution will build on recent achievements.⁶³

Globalization brings problems, but it's a process. Resentment, distrust, and xenophobia are everywhere, and rapid social change is hard, but as the planet shrinks we see that others aren't so very other and that our world includes them. They are real and we are kin. It doesn't take a lot of thought to realize that there, but for the grace of God, we too are refugees or, perhaps just as desperate, economic migrants. Recognizing that, even in fits and starts, is progress, and the continued evolution of a global perspective could turn out to be the hallmark of the twenty-first century.

In December 2013, after another boat carrying asylum seekers sank in the Mediterranean and hundreds of men, women, and children drowned, Pope Francis said: "In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others." But we have *always* been used to the suffering of others, as long as it didn't get too close or threaten us directly. Now, in part because of world-wide media coverage, suffering is crowding in on us, and we are stressed, confused, and afraid.

The upside to our age of fear, doubt, and radical change is its very uncertainty. Stability and confidence lead easily enough to pride and complacency, and unease may be our safest bet in the future. More likely to encourage respect and humility, it may advance a wiser relationship with the world around us.^{64,65}

The other happy thing about our era of fundamental change is its potential for vitality, innovation, and surprise. In the dawn of the digital age, cyber pioneers are exploring a frontier with no known limits. Young people will master new tools and map a new world. Some of the fizz will go flat, but the best and most inspired will benefit us all.

It's still a bit raw in cyberspace, but social norms and digital practices will evolve, and humans will, as always, "find ways to push meaning through the pipes."^{66,67} Some digital innovators will carry social concerns into their work, marrying science, technology, personal vision, and a sense of mission. Social exploration will reflect their digital imprint, and empathy will express itself in ways we can't foresee. Sharing the field with advocates, educators, artists, and environmentalists, the most progressive will shape the future through a creative and sympathetic relationship with the planet and its inhabitants.

That said, new technologies are certain to be both prosocial and antisocial, to work simultaneously for and against what we consider positive social values. We must embrace this paradox, P.J. Manney writes in "Is Technology Destroying Empathy?" (*Live Science*, June 30, 2015). New technologies will "destroy and create empathy," she writes, but we can stress the latter through, for example, finding fresh ways to tell other people's stories. In this connection, she writes, virtual reality "is a technology uniquely primed to be the ultimate form of immersive empathy. There is no frame or wall to contain or edit an image. You are simply there wherever your eyes look, experiencing what the protagonist could be experiencing."

It's about making the most of neuroplasticity, with its potential to "reshape our neural circuitry" in perception and interaction (Christopher Bergland, "The Neuroscience of Empathy," *Psychology Today*, October 10, 2013). "Our brain's neural circuitry is malleable," Bergland writes. It can be rewired to reinforce compassion and "the neurobiological roots of empathy." If we want this, Bergland says, we can make it happen.

Religious organizations have the potential to play a complementary role in social innovation. In North America, many faith-based organizations – Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and others – already sponsor a range of social justice initiatives and work for change locally and internationally.

In this respect, it's interesting to note the current pope's views. James Carroll, writing in *The New Yorker* in December 2013, says that as archbishop of Buenos Aires, Francis was "strident in his denunciations of neoliberal economic policies

that condemned many to abject poverty.” In November 2013, Francis expanded his critique of the world economy: “In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule.” The pope wants radical change, a New Deal for the world’s poor wherever they live.⁶⁸

In January 2014, Rick Salutin published a piece in *The Toronto Star* on, among other things, Muslim community action in inner-city Chicago. “There’s something,” he writes, “about the social-justice impulse that fits religion.” That something, shared by social activists and the devout, is the devotion to something greater than the self. At its best, faith-based social action is an intersection of the sacred and secular in which the principles of service, empathy, inclusion, and self-transcendence define the action.⁶⁹⁻⁷¹

In the end, however, social action and social progress depend on governance. If the world is administered collaboratively and with a view to universal wellbeing, things will get better. If, however, it is dominated by a particular sector and serves the interests of a few, things will get worse. Some predict a future based on shared governance in which science, the public sector, business, labour, environmental groups, and non-governmental organizations learn to make common cause and the lion lies down with the lamb. Others foresee a corporate-driven dystopia, a world of increased privatization, income disparity, and austerity politics in which private power eclipses public authority and the social contract is eroded even further. As always, it’s easy to fear the worst, important to imagine the best.

Service and duty: a more thoughtful ethos

When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people.

-Abraham Joshua Heschel, scholar, theologian, social activist⁷²

As we've seen, service derives from devotion, duty from a sense of responsibility, debt, and obligation.⁷³ Not surprisingly, both have taken a hit in the modern West. Duty in particular is out of favour, weakened by abuse, hypocrisy, and a shift from responsibility to rights, from the collective to the individual, and from social roles to individual ambitions. We are, as Annabel Brett says, aspirational, people in pursuit of happiness and a good life. We believe we have the right to put ourselves first, with the result that duty feels like an "external imposition, something that isn't part of ourselves and our own lives but is imposed upon us."⁷⁴ The sense that other people have a claim on us used to be "at the heart of civilised society." Now it's a drag.

In some cases, we still respect, even revere, the men and women who exemplify duty: Nelson Mandela,⁷⁵ the teacher in a rough school, the doctor or nurse in an epidemic. We haven't lost the desire to believe in duty, or to be dutiful, just the habit of taking it seriously. It is up to us, therefore, to recognize how important it is and, as Brett says, to "reconnect duties with our selves, our pursuits, and our concrete lives and aspirations."

Some strands of contemporary Judaism interpret the phrase *tikkun olam* as the duty to engage in social action and to fix "what is broken in our society."⁷⁶ Those who see such a duty in their religion, any religion, do not lack a sense of human debt or obligation, and for them thoughtful action means repairing the world in a union of the spiritual and social. The key word, however, is thoughtful.

As for service, a lot depends on economic status. For the affluent, it's a matter of choice, for the poor a necessity. The former elect to serve somebody or something, while the latter serve in order to support themselves and their families. But perhaps that's simplistic. Some poorly-paid service jobs do call for at least one aspect of true service: caring for the needs of others. The element of necessity changes things, but the virtues of responsibility, selflessness, and goodness may be there regardless.

Like the concept of duty, the notion of goodness makes us uneasy, and few contemporary writers treat it without irony or ambivalence. Roger Ebert, the film critic and memoirist, was an exception:

*What kinds of movies do I like the best? If I had to make a generalization, I would say that many of my favourite movies are about Good People. It doesn't matter if the ending is happy or sad. It doesn't matter if the characters win or lose. . . . The best movies aren't about what happens to the characters. They're about the example that they set.*⁷⁷

Another contemporary writer comfortable with the theme of goodness is the Scottish author Ali Smith. In her recent novel, *There but for the*, one of her principal and most likeable characters says that it's easy to go to the bad. "I'm always more interested in things going to the good," he says. There's more mystery in goodness than badness, even if badness, in popular culture at least, sells more briskly.

It's easier to find references to selflessness and goodness in religious texts or literature from the past. In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, for example, the author describes her heroine's humility and the contribution made to the world by the quietly good:

*But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.*⁷⁸

And in the following, Joshua Wolf Shenk quotes his grandfather, a former rabbi in Texas:

*"Young people," the rabbi says, "need to be taught how to become unimportant to the world and how to be important in the quality of their lives. The world needs more unimportant people of quality. The true religious life is not in bigness, it is not in size. God is most often found by those who seek him in the simple quiet place where men do not observe or take note. The success which really matters lies in the quality of life, just as the faith that matters is in the still, small voice."*⁷⁹

Shenk's grandfather might have had Dorothea, *Middlemarch's* heroine, in mind.

There is in all but the most damaged among us an urge to kindness, "a natural willingness to help," and a readiness to put the interests of others ahead of our own. Recent science points to an "empathy-induced altruism" and evidence that we are

born with “an innate desire to help others.”⁸⁰ Acting on that desire, the especially empathetic may devote their lives to service. If so, they, like the devout, dedicate themselves to a higher good, though their service may be to an issue, cause, or field of action more worldly than spiritual. In any case, there’s a kind of letting go, an opening up to something beyond the self.⁸¹

“Keep cool but care,” Thomas Pynchon said fifty years ago in *V.*: sensible advice if we seek a smarter, more discriminating ethos of service and duty. Perhaps, in this respect, the last century reflects a thematic dialectic, its thesis the innocence that made 1914 possible. If so, its antithesis was the experience of the war and much of the twentieth century, and its synthesis the first steps in our own time toward a new social faith and global orientation. Perhaps, too, we’ve discarded the fatal innocence of Keith Douglas’s brave friends but retained something of what Herbert Molson would have termed their character. So much has been left behind, some of it sublime, some stupid. We should curb our nostalgia for the past but study its finest works and salvage what is best.

And the past, so awful in so many ways, did bring out the best in some people: Percy Molson, for example, and Talbot Papineau and Walter Allward. Styles change, but there will always be exemplary figures, moral navigators, pathfinders, instructors, reminders of excellence.

A couple of years ago, Michael Enright’s weekly CBC Radio program “Sunday Edition” featured a panel discussion of Canadians’ responsibilities and obligations to the future. The panelists were Naheed Nenshi (Calgary’s mayor), Cindy Blackstock (First Nations children’s rights advocate), and David MacDonald (Anglican minister and former politician). As the moderator, Enright cited historian Robert Heilbruner’s reference to “our empathetic capacities,” and Blackstock stated that each of us has “a responsibility to be a good ancestor.” Nenshi, for his part, warned that we are guilty of complacency when we don’t think about the future. About poverty in Canada, he said, “We think that the status quo is the way things are always going to be. . . . Poverty is not a fact of life [but] a failure of our collective imagination.”⁸²

In a 2014 *Globe and Mail* article, Louise Arbour, former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, called for a “political empathy that enables us to see the world from the point of view of others.” “Fear is always a bad adviser,” she says. “Social cohesion comes from a generous and welcoming spirit.” Also, she might have added, from a renewed trust in others, a trust rooted more in social evolution and cooperation than competition and authority.⁸³

Since we are indebted not only to the past but the present and future, we should reflect not just on history but on the world as it is now and on a world that does not yet exist. Something in us wants to take its place in the story of generations. To this end, we should study the past while thinking as hard as we can about service, duty, the needs of others, and what we long to give, here and now, honouring those who came before by serving the living and unborn.

Notes

Sources and supplementary text

Introduction

1. This cartoon was featured on *The New Yorker's* desk calendar for March 22, 2013. » [Back to text](#)
2. Norman Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself* was published by G.P. Putnam's Sons in 1959. » [Back to text](#)
3. "Aristocrats" was written by Keith Douglas (1920-44). A British tank officer and poet known also for his non-fiction account of the North African campaign (*Alamein to Zem Zem*), Douglas survived the desert war but was killed in France shortly after D-Day. His poems are among the era's finest. » [Back to text](#)
4. The phrase "the narcissism line" is from David Brooks's "High-Five Nation," an op-ed piece published in *The New York Times*, September 15, 2009. » [Back to text](#)
5. The focus here and throughout the book is on the developed and affluent West, with the limitations that implies. » [Back to text](#)

Chapter One: Percy Molson

1. This photo of Percy Molson was taken by the photographers Wm. Notman & Son, Montreal, probably in 1915 before Percy went overseas the first time. (Source: The McCord Museum in Montreal, accession number: II-226375.0.) » [Back to text](#)

2. The story of the McGill-Queen's game points to the code of conduct Percy shared with George Richardson. The source of the quote from Tees is Shirley E. Woods, Jr.'s *The Molson Saga* (1983), p. 236. Woods says that the quoted passage was drawn from an article about Percy published in the *McGill News* in 1944. » [Back to text](#)

3. There is a brief summary of George Richardson's life and death at the Canadian Hockey Hall of Fame website: <http://www.legendsofhockey.net/LegendsOfHockey/jsp/LegendsMember.jsp?mem=P195007>

After the war, his family funded the building of the George Richardson Memorial Stadium at Queen's University in his memory. (Source: *Queen's Encyclopedia*.) » [Back to text](#)

4. The source of Percy's birth information is Karen Molson's exceptional family biography, *The Molsons: Their Lives & Times, 1780-2000* (Firefly Books Ltd, 2001). Karen's book introduced me to Percy and was the genesis of this book. She is the author of several other works, including the superb *Hartland de Montarville Molson: Man of Honour* (Firefly, 2006), and the novel *The Company of Crows* (Linda Leith Publishing, 2016). » [Back to text](#)

5. Montreal's Anglo-Scottish elite is detailed in at least two absorbing books: *The Square Mile: Merchant Princes of Montreal* (Donald MacKay, published by Douglas & McIntyre, 1987) and Margaret W. Westley's *Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal, 1900-1950*, published by Libre Expression in 1990. Westley writes: "The Molsons owned Molson Brewing Company; but early in their history they had become involved in banking, shipbuilding, and shipping; indeed, for two hundred years they had interests in almost every aspect of Montreal business life." (p. 18) » [Back to text](#)

6. On the subject of higher education and the girls in Percy's family, Karen Molson notes that Naomi, John Thomas's "gifted second daughter," was not allowed to attend post-secondary courses. (*The Molsons*, p. 287.) She points out, however,

that Evelyn, the youngest daughter, was later allowed to enroll, John Thomas eventually reconciled to the issue of girls and university. » [Back to text](#)

7. Information about Percy's brief involvement with the Montreal Victorias is drawn from various sources, including the McGill alumni online site, <http://www.mcgill.ca/aoc/greatest-mcgillians/percival-molson>. » [Back to text](#)
8. Percy's athletic record as an undergraduate is covered in *The Molsons* and elsewhere. See especially Woods, p. 236. As noted, my source for stating that Percy was president of his senior year is Bernard Sandwell's *The Molson Family*, 1933. » [Back to text](#)
9. About Percy's fraternity membership, see <http://www.mcgill.ca/aoc/percival-molson>. Note that while McGill's AOC (Alumni Online Community) may be correct about Percy's leaving a house to his fraternity, there's no mention of it in his 1915 will or the 1917 codicil to that will. » [Back to text](#)
10. The AOC is one of my sources for Percy's role with McGill's Board of Governors. » [Back to text](#)
11. *The Molsons*, as well as Scotiabank's webpage about the National Trust Company, provided the information about Percy and the National Trust. See <http://www.scotiabank.com/ca/en/0,,3039,00.html>. » [Back to text](#)
12. For Percy's record as an athlete, see especially Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, the Canadian Football Hall of Fame, McGill University websites, and *The Molsons*. The last also details Percy's many directorships, some sports-related, others not, and notes that he was never penalized in a game. As for the inauguration of Percival Molson Memorial Stadium and Herbert's remarks, see Woods, p. 236. See Percy's sports résumé in the Articles section of this site for a summary of his athletic achievements and involvements: <http://social-ethos.com/sports-resume-percy-percival-molson-1880-1917/> » [Back to text](#)

13. Louis-Joseph Papineau and John Molson helped found the Montreal Mechanics Institute. For further information about the early history of the Institute, now known as the Atwater Library and Computing Centre, see:
<http://www.atwaterlibrary.ca/news/history-of-the-mechanics-institute-of-montreal>. » Back to text
14. *The Molsons* was my source about the properties at Métis Beach and Ivry. See especially p. 304 and pp. 314-15. » Back to text
15. The passage from John H.R. Molson's deathbed message is found in Donald MacKay's *The Square Mile*, pp. 160-61. » Back to text
16. See Margaret Westley (especially p. 289 and pp. 294-95) about the Molson family and its continued vitality. » Back to text
17. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives two definitions of ethos. The first relates mostly to ancient Greek rhetoric and art, the second to "the characteristic spirit of a people, community, culture, or era" or "the moral or practical code by which a person lives." The second definition fits the spirit of service and duty in Percy's family and culture, as well as the code of behaviour he personified. The sense of ethos as both spirit and code is intended throughout this book. » Back to text
18. *The Molsons* covers Percy's joining the COTC at McGill and helping to raise a "university company" to reinforce the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (p. 317). Other relevant sources are: Jeffery Williams (*Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry*, 1972), David J. Bercuson (*The Patricias: The Proud History of a Fighting Regiment*, 2001), R.C. Fetherstonhaugh (*McGill University at War: 1914-1918, 1939-1945*, published in 1947), and Woods. The last is the source of the statement that Sam Hughes saw the PPCLI as elitist (p. 216). The Hodder-Williams quote is from *The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 1914-1919*, his history of the PPCLI in the First World War, published in 1923. » Back to text

19. Bercuson was my principal source about the brigading of Percy's PPCLI and Herbert's 42nd Battalion. The other two battalions making up the four-battalion brigade were the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) and the 49th Battalion (the Loyal Edmonton Regiment). The Brigade was commanded by Brigadier-General A.C. Macdonnell. See *Soldier for his times*, note 31, for more on the bold, magnificent, eccentric, and larger-than-life Macdonnell, later commander of Canada's 1st Division. » [Back to text](#)
20. In 1918, Percy's younger brother Walter served with the 42nd, but by then Percy was dead and Herbert had left the brigade, very much against his will, to serve as a senior staff officer. » [Back to text](#)
21. About Percy's part in the Battle of Mount Sorrel, see especially Hodder-Williams, pp. 116-17. On p. 221 of *The Molson Saga*, Woods quotes the division commander's report on the battle. Herbert is praised "for efficient services and capable direction of operations," as is Percy, who, "although wounded in the head," "refused to leave the line, and remained with his company throughout the action." » [Back to text](#)
22. As for Percy's facial wound, I have quoted Colonel Agar Adamson (Percy's commanding officer) in a letter to his wife, June 4, 1916. I have also relied on *The Molsons*, Woods, and various personal letters to summarize the seriousness of this wound, and the same materials for Herbert's conduct on June 2 and his own wound. The source of the quote from Royal Ewing is a letter he wrote his brother a week after the battle. It was saved by the Molson family and kept with the letters Percy and Herbert sent home. » [Back to text](#)
23. Woods writes that when Percy returned to Montreal, he was interviewed by a reporter from *The Gazette*. The reporter's prose – Woods quotes part of the interview – is trite, gushy, and almost certainly embarrassing for Percy: "Capt. Molson, with characteristic modesty, recounted the experiences of his battalion, . . . paying tribute to his superior officers, and the bravery of the man

in the ranks, but never once telling of his own experiences. . . . He in every instance gave the credit to someone else, and getting away from the tragic side of the war, told of many humorous happenings in the firing line.” (See Woods, pp. 221-22.) » [Back to text](#)

24. The August 27, 1916 letter from Little Métis Beach is quoted in *The Molsons*. Percy’s remarks about his M.C. are in two June 1917 letters to his mother. Walter’s comments are in a letter to their mother dated July 13, a week after his brother’s death. » [Back to text](#)

25. In Jeffery Williams’s *First in the Field: Gault of the Patricia’s*, the author states that Percy and Talbot welcomed Hamilton Gault back to the PPCLI in June 1917, and that Major Charlie Stewart – a great character and future PPCLI commanding officer – was also there. » [Back to text](#)

26. Talbot’s letter to Walter, July 5, 1917, is cited in *The Molsons*. » [Back to text](#)

27. In a letter to his mother, written July 10, Herbert said that “B” Co.’s Topp, a loyal and true friend, “felt dreadfully at this blow.” A lieutenant-colonel by the end of the war, C. Beresford Topp wrote a history of the 42nd. Sandwell is my other source re Colonel Topp. » [Back to text](#)

28. The letter in which Gault regrets urging Percy to return to the PPCLI is cited in *The Molsons*. » [Back to text](#)

29. In *Vimy: Canada’s Memorial to a Generation*, Jacqueline Hucker and Julian Smith note that the Imperial War Graves Commission (later renamed the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) was established in 1917 by Britain and her allies:

. . . to ensure that every serviceman was given a proper burial. The Commission interpreted its role broadly and adopted a policy guaranteeing that individuals would be treated equally in death, with each honoured as a hero in a collectivity of heroism. Servicemen would be buried where they fell and with their comrades;

their graves would be marked with identical, permanent headstones; and, importantly, no distinction would be made on account of rank or title. (p. 69)

In an excellent article on Vimy, Michael Valpy writes that the First World War introduced war memorials, as distinct from victory monuments. Again, the dead, whether officers or enlisted men, received the same treatment and were buried together in France or Belgium, “thus breaking the tradition of the British upper classes who previously had brought the bodies of their officer sons and husbands home to be buried in family plots.” Valpy writes that Canada pushed hard for this approach and cites Jacqueline Hucker’s pragmatic explanation: “It was a practical problem for Canada. It could not bring all those dead soldiers back.” (*The Globe and Mail*, April 7, 2007.) » [Back to text](#)

30. *The Molsons* describes Percy’s wooden cross, as does Woods. » [Back to text](#)

31. The source of Adamson’s letters is the 1997 volume *Letters of Agar Adamson, 1914-1919* (CEF Books, Nepean, Ontario), pp. 293-94. » [Back to text](#)

32. See *McGill University at War* about Percy’s return to the regiment and the relevant passage in the Princess Patricia’s written history. The source of Gault’s statement that Percy was “the coming man in the Regiment” is Woods, p. 224. » [Back to text](#)

33. Brigadier-General de Lalanne’s remarks are also cited in Woods. » [Back to text](#)

34. The same is true of the enlisted man’s reaction to Percy’s death. » [Back to text](#)

35. The source of the excerpts from Talbot’s letter to Walter, and from Gault’s to Herbert, is *The Molsons*. The same is true of the excerpts from letters Philip and Nell wrote the family. » [Back to text](#)

36. In his letter of August 19, 1917, Herbert wrote his mother: “. . . I haven’t written to dear little Mabel yet but will do so, shortly. How she misses Percy!

More probably than any of us as he was her favourite brother and they were so fond of each other.” To Mabel later that month: “I realize very fully that the sad blow has hit you harder than the rest of us.” Percy, Herbert acknowledges, had been her “best beloved brother.” (*The Molsons*, pp. 331-32.) Karen Molson writes that Mabel changed after Percy’s death: “It was as though a shadow had passed over her countenance and stayed there.” (*The Molsons*, p. 332.)
» [Back to text](#)

37. See p. 333 of *The Molsons* about Percival Molson Mackenzie. See, too, Jeffery Williams’s *First in the Field* for an appealing account of 18-year-old Percy Mackenzie visiting Gault and his second wife at their estate in England over the 1935 Christmas holidays.

For additional information on Percy Ritchie (née Mackenzie) and her art, the following is helpful:

http://pmritchie.com/kelowna2002_2.php. » [Back to text](#)

38. About Molson Stadium, then and now, see Sandwell, Woods, McGill University’s Alumni Online site (<http://aoc.mcgill.ca/greatest-mcgillians/percival-molson>), and the site for Canada’s Sports Hall of Fame:

<http://www.sportshall.ca/stories.html?proID=368&catID=all>

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39. The Sports Hall of Fame is also the source of the phrase “symbol of his age.”

» [Back to text](#)

40. George McDonald is quoted in *The Molsons*, p. 378. » [Back to text](#)

41. About Percy’s legacy, Karen Molson writes in both *The Molsons* and *Hartland de Montarville Molson* that the young Hartland inherited his Uncle Percy’s bloodstone ring. He wore it the rest of his life, but since it contained traces of Flanders mud he never had it cleaned. For Hartland, who became a Second World War fighter pilot and later a long-serving member of the Canadian

Senate, duty was critical in everything he did. Karen Molson writes that he “cherished his memories of Percy, who had been, according to Percy’s sister Evelyn, ‘too sweet for words with children.’” (See especially *The Molsons*, p. 374, and *Hartland*, pp. 65-66.) » [Back to text](#)

42. In his July 29, 1917 letter to Kenneth, Philip wrote about the family’s coming to terms with Percy’s death: “The rest of the family are following along those lines laid down by the House of Molson – they are showing tremendous pluck and fortitude.” » [Back to text](#)

Chapter Two: Talbot Papineau

1. See Sandra Gwyn’s *Tapestry of War: A Private View of Canadians in the Great War* (HarperCollins Publishers Limited, 1992) and Heather Robertson’s *A Terrible Beauty* (James Lorimer and Company, Ltd., 1977). Robertson has also written a novel drawn in part from Talbot’s life: *Willie, A Romance* (James Lorimer and Company, Ltd. 1983). Gwyn writes that in *Willie* “Papineau appeared in semi-fictional form as a romantic hero, the great love of the book’s fictional heroine, the delightful Lily Coolican, herself a kind of metaphor for Canada.” (*Tapestry of War*, pp. 508-9.)

Gwyn’s book is the source of much of the information in this chapter, and several excerpts from Talbot’s letters were found in *A Terrible Beauty*. » [Back to text](#)

2. The *beau idéal* quote is from a 2006 *Winnipeg Realtors* article on a four-hour CBC television series based on Gwyn’s book. *The Great War*, which aired in 2007, portrayed Talbot Papineau, played by Justin Trudeau, as the story’s hero. While Trudeau agreed that there were strong similarities between his father (Pierre Elliott Trudeau) and Talbot Papineau, he said: “. . . I chose to play him, not because he was similar to my father, but because he was similar to me.”

Trudeau stressed the importance of “remembering the noble values and noble ideas that we were defending in a war that did not even directly affect us,” and said he was “particularly struck by Talbot Papineau’s courage and overarching sense of duty.” (*Ottawa Citizen*, CanWest News Service, April 6, 2007.) On October 19, 2015, Justin Trudeau led the Liberal Party of Canada to victory in a federal election and became Canada’s twenty-third prime minister. The son of the fifteenth prime minister, Justin represented the Montreal riding of Papineau, named after Joseph Papineau, a renowned Quebec cultural figure and Talbot Papineau’s great-great-grandfather. Minutes after Trudeau’s election, his mother remarked that Pierre, Canada’s prime minister from 1968 to 1979 and again from 1980 to 1984, had “raised his sons to serve; that was it. We had been given so much, and we had to give back.” (Margaret Trudeau in a CTV interview with Craig Oliver.) » [Back to text](#)

3. About Talbot’s early life, see the chapter in Gwyn entitled “The Unlikely Lieutenant.” » [Back to text](#)
4. The source of the references to the Quebec landscape and the Papineau family’s *seigneurie* of Petite-Nation between Montreal and Ottawa, is *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online (DOCBO)* and its entry on Talbot. » [Back to text](#)
5. As we saw in Chapter One, George McDonald, Percy and Talbot’s friend, spoke publically about the latter in March 1920. His remarks introduced a reading of the address Talbot had given at the Canadian Corps School in France three years earlier. » [Back to text](#)
6. The *DOCBO* is the source of the statement that Talbot described himself as French Canadian while at McGill. On pp. 93-94 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn describes Talbot’s prank while editor of the student paper. » [Back to text](#)
7. My source with respect to the Canadian Club is Karen Molson’s *The Molsons*, p. 304. » [Back to text](#)

8. For more on the Mechanics Institute of Montreal, see:
<http://www.atwaterlibrary.ca/news/history-of-the-mechanics-institute-of-montreal> » Back to text
9. On p. 230 of *The Molson Saga*, Shirley E. Woods, Jr. writes that “the association between the Molson and Papineau families went back a long way . . . ”
» Back to text
10. My main sources for Talbot’s time at Oxford are Gwyn and the *DOCBO*.
» Back to text
11. The same is true for Talbot’s life from 1909 until his joining up in 1914. See especially Gwynn, pp. 95-98. The Canadian Club involvement is noted on p. 96 of *Tapestry*. The story about Talbot, the canoe, and the puppy is recounted on the previous page. » Back to text
12. Again, the *DOCBO* mentions Talbot’s attachment to the Quebec landscape and his cultivation of an interest in Quebec’s distinctive culture. » Back to text
13. See Jeffery Williams, *First in the Field* (p. 64) about the PPCLI and its commissioning of several men with little or no experience. See also David J. Bercuson’s *The Patricias: The Proud History of a Fighting Regiment* (2001, pp. 24-26).
» Back to text
14. Talbot’s late August 1914 letter to his mother is quoted in *A Terrible Beauty*.
» Back to text
15. The quotations about Talbot’s moustache are from *First in the Field*.
» Back to text
16. Charlie Stewart is mentioned in the previous chapter. Charles Ritchie, Canada’s legendary diplomat and diarist, was Charlie’s nephew. On p. 31 of *My Grandfather’s House*, Ritchie reminisces about his adored uncle and his visit to the Ritchie home in Nova Scotia while on leave:

He came to us straight from the trenches, and our settled home life must have seemed strange to him. His reality was elsewhere, and of that elsewhere he could tell us little. He did not talk of martial exploits, he had no words of hatred for the Hun, and what he did say sounded a wrong note in our ears. His stories of muddle and confusion in the High Command, his contempt for the red-tabbed staff officers, were like tales told out of school. Above all, it was his jokes which shocked ("Ha ha, that's when George got his head knocked off"), jokes that made broad comedy out of violent death, desperate jokes of fighting men that sounded meaninglessly callous to us. » [Back to text](#)

17. The tent fire is noted in Ralph Hodder-Williams's regimental history, *The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 1914-1919*, p. 16. Gwyn quotes Talbot's remark that Charlie was the most pronounced character he'd ever met, a comment made in a letter to Beatrice Fox. » [Back to text](#)

18. On p. 117, Gwyn writes that "the burns to Papineau's face and right hand were extremely painful, and for a few days Stewart's life was actually feared for." » [Back to text](#)

19. The sources about the trench raid at St. Eloi are Hodder-Williams (pp. 33-35), Bercuson (pp. 47-48), and Jeffery Williams, *First in the Field* (p. 82). » [Back to text](#)

20. Talbot's Military Cross citation reads: "For conspicuous gallantry at St. Eloi on February 28th, 1915 when in charge of Bomb Throwers during attack on Enemy trenches. He shot two of the enemy himself and then ran along the German Sap throwing bombs therein." Talbot was also mentioned in dispatches two months after his M.C. was gazetted. » [Back to text](#)

21. George McDonald's description of Talbot's strengths is quoted in Brooke Claxton's *La Petite Nation and the Papineaus* (Ottawa, 1957). Thanks to Karen Molson for referring me to this work. » [Back to text](#)

22. Talbot's March 3, 1915 letter to his mother is quoted in *A Terrible Beauty*. » [Back to text](#)
23. About Colonel Farquhar's death, see especially Bercuson (pp. 48-50). Talbot wrote Lady Evelyn Farquhar the day after her husband was buried: "... There is not a man in the Regiment who does not feel a great and personal loss. No other man in so short a time could have won so much respect and affection. As a Canadian I feel a national debt of gratitude to him. . . ." An experienced English officer, Farquhar could have commanded a regular British unit but, in Talbot's words, "accepted the task of creating, as well as commanding, a new and untried Canadian regiment . . ." » [Back to text](#)
24. The Battles of Frezenberg and Bellewaerde Ridge and Talbot's role in them are outlined in Gwyn (pp. 154-55, 205) and Hodder-Williams (pp. 68-69). » [Back to text](#)
25. When Hodder-Williams wrote that Percy Molson and George McDonald ("the men who organized the University plan of reinforcements") saved the Princess Patricias from extinction, he meant the PPCLI just after Frezenberg and Bellewaerde Ridge, when its "Originals" were essentially wiped out. » [Back to text](#)
26. Gwyn covers the last half of May 1915 on pp. 205-6, and the month of June on pp. 207-8. » [Back to text](#)
27. See Gwyn's remarks on Caroline Rogers Papineau and Talbot (p. 207): "However much the intensity of their relationship jars our post-Freudian sensibility, we begin to see Caroline as Talbot must have, a hard-pressed single mother, undignified by widowhood, bringing up a quartet of young sons after being abandoned by a profligate husband, dependent upon a monthly allowance from her father-in-law. . . . A less determined woman would have gone home to Philadelphia, where Caroline's family, though not particularly wealthy, had plenty of social position. Instead, she stayed on at Montebello . . . for the sake

of her beloved Talbot who loved the woods and the hills and the river as much as life itself.” » [Back to text](#)

28. Lady Donoughmore’s recommendation of Beatrice Fox is described in *Tapestry*, p. 210. » [Back to text](#)
29. Gwyn quotes Talbot’s first letter to Beatrice – the one in which he writes that he’s the only original PPCLI officer not yet killed, wounded, or sent off sick – on p. 209 of *Tapestry*. » [Back to text](#)
30. Re Talbot’s destruction of Beatrice’s letters: “My baggage is limited to 35 lbs; what I have I have to carry on my back, so there is little room for accumulation. I try to memorize your letters but I am sure I must forget a lot.” See Gwyn, pp. 231-32. » [Back to text](#)
31. Talbot often sent his sketches to Beatrice. Hence their survival. » [Back to text](#)
32. See Gwyn about “this murderous business” (pp. 214-15). » [Back to text](#)
33. The reflections on “abhorrent duty” are quoted by both Gwyn and Robertson. The “Prussian” quote is from Gwyn. The excerpt re “the best correspondent I have ever had” is also from Gwyn, p. 217, and the information about Beatrice’s miniature is on p. 343. » [Back to text](#)
34. For Talbot’s views regarding the PPCLI – whether it should stay with the British Army or go to a Canadian division – see Gwyn p. 230 and Williams, *First in the Field*, p. 95. » [Back to text](#)
35. *Tapestry’s* Chapter 13 (“The City of Earthly Delights”) describes London during the war and is the source of the long letter in which Talbot details his loathing. It is also the source of Lady Diana Cooper’s description of London at the time. Lady Diana, “the reigning belle of the era,” later wrote: “The young were dancing a tarantella frenziedly to combat any pause that would let death conquer their morale.” See p. 219 of *Tapestry*. » [Back to text](#)

36. The same source, pp. 332-36, provides a thorough description of Talbot's inconstancy. The really puzzling passages are on pp. 334-35. » [Back to text](#)

37. On p. 334 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn quotes Beatrice's "*When I say I really love you, there isn't any comeback.*" It's not clear how this declaration of brave love has been preserved. Did Talbot save the letter in which Beatrice wrote this, or did he, in a reply, repeat what she had written?" » [Back to text](#)

38. Pets were not uncommon at the front, and Bobs was probably named after the famous Lord Roberts of Kandahar, known as Bobs. His friend, Rudyard Kipling, wrote a longish poem about him, entitled "Bobs," which includes:

*Oh, 'e's little but he's wise,
'E's a terror for 'is size,
An' – 'e – does – not – advertise –
Do yer, Bobs?*

At the start of the First World War, Kipling used his friendship with Lord Roberts to get his severely near-sighted 17-year-old son John a commission in the Irish Guards. After John was killed at Loos in 1915, Kipling wrote: "If any question why we died / Tell them, because our fathers lied." (Source: *Epitaphs of the War*, "Common Form.")

If Kipling writes proudly that his friend Lord Roberts "does – not – advertise," there's Adamson's bitter claim that many commanding officers were "only too anxious to advertise themselves." The literature of the last century contrasts the modest and immodest, the self-effacing and self-promoting, the selfless and self-serving. A fine example: in his introduction to *The Siren Years*, Charles Ritchie describes his colleagues at Canada's fledgling Department of External Affairs in the 1930s: "They worked together without feeling for respective rank, without pomposity, with humour, despising pretence, intolerant of silliness, and scathing in their contempt for self-advertisement." » [Back to text](#)

39. The source of information about Bobs – and about Talbot’s being “more hurt in mind than in body” – is Gwyn, p. 233. The post-Second Ypres quote is also from Gwyn, p. 149. Note: the loss of the penknife is recounted twice in *Tapestry*. It shows up the second time after Talbot has returned to the regiment in June 1917, so the timing of its loss may be uncertain. » [Back to text](#)
40. See Gwyn, pp. 313-14 and 336-37 for more on Max Aitken, Talbot’s staff appointment, and the latter’s conflicting emotions about being away from a line regiment. *McGill University at War* (p. 39) states that Talbot was mentioned in despatches while serving as a staff officer, but the only record I can find of an MID dates from June 1915, the year before, while he was still with the regiment.
- See the note re “Talbot’s Military Cross citation” above.
- The source of the remark about his “credentials to reach for the top” is Gwyn, p. 314. » [Back to text](#)
41. On the subject of Talbot’s sometimes bewildering messages to Beatrice, see notes 36 and 37 above. » [Back to text](#)
42. Again, Gwyn is my main source with respect to Talbot’s exchange of open letters with Henri Bourassa, though that exchange is covered in many other publications. » [Back to text](#)
43. Bercuson, p. 26, is the source of the quote about Canada’s “great national opportunity” and its “strong, self-reliant spirit.” » [Back to text](#)
44. Details about the cancelled speaking tour are drawn from Gwyn, pp. 338-40. » [Back to text](#)
45. See Gwyn, p. 338, for the long excerpt from Adamson’s letter to his wife, and for Talbot’s “more friends have gone” remark. » [Back to text](#)

46. About Talbot's role at Vimy, see Hodder-Williams, p. 215. A brief excerpt from his Vimy report, quoted in the same source, gives a sense of Talbot's official writing style. » [Back to text](#)
47. Talbot's frustration at and after the Battle of Vimy Ridge is described in Gwyn, p. 344. » [Back to text](#)
48. The quote about Talbot's flip side is on p. 381 of *Tapestry*, while the long Adamson quote is on pp. 380-81. The same pages summarize Talbot's reasons for returning to the regiment. » [Back to text](#)
49. On pp. 381-83, Gwyn covers Talbot's quick readjustment to life at the front. » [Back to text](#)
50. George McDonald's statement that Talbot had gained the love and respect of his comrades is quoted in Brooke Claxton's *La Petite Nation and the Papineaus*, cited above. » [Back to text](#)
51. Percy's death is mentioned on p. 382 of *Tapestry*. Talbot's description of a man dying by concussion is quoted on p. 215. » [Back to text](#)
52. Re Talbot's letters to his mother in which he refers to Percy, I'd like to thank Mr. Conrad Tittley for his research on my behalf at Library and Archives Canada (LAC), and especially for locating these particular references. » [Back to text](#)
53. On pp. 383-86, Gwyn addresses Talbot's waning interest in Beatrice and his sudden romance with Sarah Shaughnessy. The source of the excerpts from Talbot's final letters to Beatrice and Caroline is Gwyn, pp. 396-99, though Robertson includes Talbot's October 27, 1917 letter to his mother in full. » [Back to text](#)
54. Gwyn describes Talbot's death and the discovery of his remains on pp. 399-40 and p. 496. See also Williams, *Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry*, p. 24, and Bercuson, p. 107. » [Back to text](#)

55. It's not hard to find Talbot's name at the Menin Gate, and, as the caption says, a very tall person could probably touch it. Sadly, most names are inscribed far above Talbot's, and many are hard to spot. The Menin Gate, a key stop on the Great War battlefields tour, means different things to different people. Siegfried Sassoon, a veteran of Ypres and the enemy of senior military and civilian authorities who fought the war from their offices and clubs in London, saw in it a sentimental glorification of dying for one's country and hated it: "Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime / Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime." ("On Passing the New Menin Gate," 1928.) » [Back to text](#)

56. Again, Adamson's letters are excerpted from *Letters of Agar Adamson, 1914-1919*. Charlie Stewart's letter about Talbot's remains is included in that work, p. 313, while Adamson's November 20 letter to his wife Mabel, which describes Charlie's grim discovery, is on pp. 314-15. Stewart succeeded Adamson as the PPCLI's commanding officer but was killed in September 1918 at the Battle of Canal du Nord. Again, see Charles Ritchie's *My Grandfather's House* for more about Ritchie's spectacular Uncle Charlie. » [Back to text](#)

57. Talbot and at least one of his officers, Captain Rider Lancelot Haggard, died together, as Percy had died with his subaltern Lieutenant Donald MacLean. Bearing (and doubtless burdened with) a name intended to recall both the chivalric Arthurian knight and H. Rider Haggard, the hugely popular novelist-adventurer, the young Haggard enlisted as a private in Ottawa in August 1914. Commissioned from the ranks in 1915, he was promoted to captain in 1916 and died at the age of 24. Source:

<http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/searches/soldierDetail.asp?Id=27084>

On p. 258 of his PPCLI history, Hodder-Williams writes that neither Papineau nor Haggard got through the German artillery barrage. He notes that Haggard had been one of the first to enlist in the Patricias, saw a great deal of service, and commanded an infantry company at the Battles of Courcellette and Vimy Ridge. » [Back to text](#)

58. On pp. 400-3 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn summarizes the public response to Talbot's death. » [Back to text](#)
59. Caroline Papineau's letter to Adamson, dated November 25, 1917, is in *Letters of Agar Adamson*, p. 319. On p. 403 of *Tapestry*, Gwyn writes that Adamson's letter of condolence is not among Caroline's papers, though her reply is in his. *Letters* transcribes the first words in the second paragraph as "The courage and regiment . . . ," but Gwyn probably got it right with "The courage and readiness . . ." » [Back to text](#)
60. John Archibald's letter to Beatrice is at LAC. Gwyn cites it and explains the connection between Talbot and Archibald. » [Back to text](#)
61. See *Tapestry*, pp. 403-7, for more about the post-war lives of Caroline Rogers Papineau and Beatrice Fox. It is Gwyn who writes that the former's life went "on and on." » [Back to text](#)
62. In *The Molsons*, p. 304, the author says that Talbot was a sometime beau of Mabel Molson's. If Percy's death killed the brightness in her – "At the age of thirty-nine, she became devout, stern, and seemed to have lost all her joy" – Talbot's death must have further saddened her. See *The Molsons*, p. 332. » [Back to text](#)
63. Gwyn, p. 405, is the source of Talbot's "there I was born and there my heart is." » [Back to text](#)
64. The quote from Octave Crémazie is on p. 407 of *Tapestry*. The translation is mine. » [Back to text](#)
65. Talbot's address to the Canadian Corps School in February 1917 was reprinted in the *McGill News* (the "Official Organ of the Graduates' Society of McGill University") in March 1920. Quotes are from that reprint. As noted earlier, Talbot's address was read to members of the Canadian Club in Montreal prefaced by George McDonald's comments. McDonald, who had been Percy

and Talbot's friend at home and overseas, became a well-known accountant in Montreal. He and his cousin, George Currie, formed McDonald Currie, a PricewaterhouseCoopers legacy firm. McDonald and Currie, both former PPCLI officers, finished the war as major and lieutenant-colonel respectively. See <http://www.pwc.com/ca/en/about-us/our-history/currie-mcdonald.jhtml>.

Re the address itself: Talbot's statement that the Canadian dead had sacrificed their lives to advance the creation of a "great, free and happy nation" was at best misleading. Canadian soldiers risked their lives for various reasons, including the defence of their motherlands Britain and France from German militarism. Like soldiers from many countries, they fought to save something as vague but earnest as "a way of life." Talbot, in his romantic, oratorical, and nationalist zeal, overlooked this. » [Back to text](#)

66. Gwyn's remarks about the "what ifs" – and the quote from Mackenzie King, Canada's future prime minister – are on p. 401 of *Tapestry*. » [Back to text](#)

67. Hodder-Williams's observations are on p. 16 of his book. » [Back to text](#)

68. McKenna's comments are in a short piece entitled "Trudeau and Papineau." The second quote is from the Winnipeg Realtors site, a couple of years ago. See the note re "beau idéal" above. » [Back to text](#)

69. The quote about Talbot from *McGill University at War* is on p. 39 of that work. » [Back to text](#)

70. On p. 26 of *The Patricias*, Bercuson notes that Papineau turned out to be correct about the way in which the war led to a stronger, more self-reliant Canada and a broadened national outlook. On the subject of a closer relationship between English- and French-speaking Canada, however, he would have been disappointed. In part because of the Conscription Crisis of 1917, and the increasing tension between English and French Canada, the war pushed the two cultures, each reflecting a distinct nationalism, farther apart. And it

was Bourassa's views that later spoke for Quebec, not Papineau's. In Quebec, Jonathan F. Vance writes, Papineau was "consigned to the roll of interesting but slightly misguided souls." (Source: *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, p. 260.) » [Back to text](#)

Chapter Three: Walter Allward

1. This epigraph is cited on p. 49 of Jacqueline Hucker and Julian Smith's *Vimy: Canada's Memorial to a Generation*, published by Sanderling Press in 2012. Balancing clear text and first-rate photos, *Vimy* is an excellent introduction to the monument and the memorial park that surrounds it.

The full name of the Vimy Memorial is the Canadian National Vimy Memorial. Some writers refer to the monument (the sculpture, that is) as the memorial or the Vimy Memorial; others use the term memorial only when referring to the sculpture and its 117-hectare site. I like the latter and distinguish between monument and memorial along these lines. » [Back to text](#)

2. *In dreams begin responsibilities* is one of the epigraphs to Yeats's 1914 volume, *Responsibilities and Other Poems*, though Yeats pluralizes begin. » [Back to text](#)
3. Allward recounted his dream in an interview with Anne Anderson Perry, "Walter Allward: Canada's Sculptor," *Studio*, 75 (April 1922). This interview and the quotation itself are cited in Lane Borstad's "Walter Allward: Sculptor and Architect of the Vimy Ridge Memorial," an essay in the *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, Vol. 33, Number 1, 2008. This issue of *JSSAC*, dedicated entirely to Allward, is a rich source of information about the man and his work. » [Back to text](#)
4. There's some confusion about Allward's birthdate. It's often said to be November 18, 1876, but his gravestone at St. John's York Mills Anglican Church gives his birth year as 1875. Borstad writes that Allward was born on November 18,

1875, “the second son and one of eight children of John Allward and Emma Pittman,” originally from Newfoundland. » [Back to text](#)

5. The memorial plaque is mentioned in “Cabbagetown People: The Social History of an Inner City Neighbourhood.” It’s located at 43 Amelia Street, west of Sackville Street. » [Back to text](#)
6. The 1891 federal census gives Allward’s occupation as architecture student. » [Back to text](#)
7. About Allward’s early life, see Borstad. » [Back to text](#)
8. About Allward’s evening classes, see *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and Laura Brandon (“History as Monument: The Sculptures on the Vimy Memorial” at warmuseum.ca). Borstad writes that Allward attended Central Technical School, Brandon that he studied at the New Technical School. I’ve substituted Toronto Technical School: Central Tech wasn’t founded until 1915, while its predecessor, the Toronto Technical School, opened in the early 1890s. Borstad notes that the “sketching club” was the Toronto Art Students League, and that Allward’s evening classes included modelling. » [Back to text](#)
9. In her novel *The Stone Carvers* (2001), Jane Urquhart writes that after finishing his apprenticeship, Allward “had been employed to design and model the terracotta bas-reliefs that decorated the outside walls of the homes of the wealthy. . . .” This passage is on p. 265 of the McClelland & Stewart paperback edition, referred to throughout. » [Back to text](#)
10. The Hucker and Smith quote about Allward’s skill and emerging style is on p. 28 of *Vimy*. » [Back to text](#)
11. See Borstad re Allward’s early success notwithstanding “a meticulous attention to detail” and a problem with deadlines. (pp. 24-25) Brandon also mentions Allward’s first studio, opened in 1894, and the figure of *Peace*. » [Back to text](#)

12. In a brief article on Allward, Lawrence Hayward writes: “. . . it is no wonder very little cooperation existed. One competition after another just to make a living. The whole setup . . . has all the built-in disaster anyone would want.” (Source: The Lawrence Hayward Collection.) » [Back to text](#)
13. The following sources shed light on Allward’s early successes: Borstad, Brandon, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, and the City of Toronto Archives (“Honouring Heroes”). » [Back to text](#)
14. The source about the bronze figures of *Justice* and *Truth* is: <http://www.scc-csc.ca/>. » [Back to text](#)
15. Allward’s time in England and France is mentioned in Hucker and Smith (p. 28) and, as noted, in Hucker’s “After the Agony in Stony Places,” an essay in *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*, edited by Hayes, Iarocci, and Bechthold, 2007. It is also discussed in Dennis Duffy’s “Complexity and Contradiction in Canadian Public Sculpture: The Case of Walter Allward,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Summer 2008). Duffy’s article is the source of the honeymoon quote. » [Back to text](#)
16. Allward was a founding member of Toronto’s Arts and Letters Club. (Source: Jacqueline Hucker in *JSSAC*, Vol. 33, Number 1, 2008, p. 48.) » [Back to text](#)
17. Allward’s pre-war style is discussed by a number of writers, including Hucker in “After the Agony.” The traditional canon, Borstad writes, “sought to represent incidents, achievements and heroes; not the human and personal experience of those incidents and achievements.” » [Back to text](#)
18. Katherine Hale’s remark is cited in Borstad, p. 25; its source is a piece published in *Canadian Magazine*, January 1919. Borstad’s own comments on the *Old Soldier* and the South African War Memorial – including the fact that the figure of *Canada* was modelled on Allward’s mother – are on pp. 25-26 of his essay. The City of Toronto publication noted above says of the South African monument

that it showed the artist's "inclination toward allegorical representation and his talent for recreating the human form." » [Back to text](#)

19. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* refers to Allward and the Royal Canadian Academy. » [Back to text](#)

20. The source of the quote about the "rupture in history" is a piece about Allward in "Story Galleries – A Brief History of Vimy," Veterans Affairs Canada. See: http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/memorials/france/vimy_sg/04_monument/02_allward

The phrase also appears in Hucker's "Vimy: A Monument for the Modern World" (p. 45 in the *JSSAC* number cited above). Many writers and artists, Hucker says, "had experienced an acute sense of a rupture in history, which in their work took the form of images of irony, fragmentation and ruin." » [Back to text](#)

21. Borstad is my main source about Allward's work from 1913 until the Vimy competition, including his pen and ink drawings from 1913-16. Borstad's opinions on these drawings are expressed on p. 28 of his essay: "Here are the private emotional struggles that he wove into his public art. The folly inherent in the pursuit of earthly pleasure, the passage of time, inevitability of death, personal sacrifice, a sense of entrapment, all form themes throughout the balance of his career." » [Back to text](#)

22. The description of the Stratford monument ("the supremacy of right over brute force") is Allward's and is cited by Borstad, p. 26. The remarks about emblems and Rodin are Borstad's, pp. 26-27. » [Back to text](#)

23. The same essay, p. 34, states that Allward spent several months looking for studio space in Paris and Belgium before choosing London. Urquhart describes, though fictionally of course, Allward's decision to rent the studio in Maida Vale. See *The Stone Carvers*, p. 269. » [Back to text](#)

24. Sources with respect to the memorial competition include Michael Valpy in *The Globe and Mail* (“Vimy Ridge: the making of a myth,” April 7, 2007), Jonathan F. Vance in *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (1997), Pierre De La Ruffinière Du Prey in “Allward’s Figures, Lutyens’s Flags and Wreaths” (*JSSAC*), and Brandon’s “History as Monument.” General Currie’s remark and Prime Minister King’s view of Vimy are noted in Valpy’s article. » [Back to text](#)

25. See Valpy, same source. Some veterans objected to the mythologizing of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. They were, they said, perfectly aware of their Canadian identity before April 1917.

Geoffrey Hayes is cited in note 15 above. » [Back to text](#)

26. James Ernest Brown witnessed the subsequent Battle of Arleux (*Soldier for his times*, note 12). This engagement impressed him, perhaps more than Vimy. “You will doubtless know all about it after the war . . . one of the hardest fought battles and best victories yet fought by this brigade.” Few recall it. » [Back to text](#)

27. A.Y. Jackson is quoted in Borstad, pp. 32-33. See also canada.com (“Vimy, 90 years later”) about the monument, as well as Hucker in relation to Allward’s indifference to the CBMC’s guidelines (*JSSAC*, pp. 42-43). » [Back to text](#)

28. This general description of the Vimy parcel is based in part on details provided by a Government of Canada website. See “Vimy Ridge National Historic Site of Canada” at Canada’s Historic Places. » [Back to text](#)

29. The source of the quote about the Vimy Memorial’s three purposes is Hucker’s “After the Agony,” p. 284. The importance of narrow joints is noted on p. 286 of that article. » [Back to text](#)

30. The quote about the monument rising out of the ridge is from p. 36 of *Vimy*, and Oscar Faber is mentioned on pp. 38 and 112 of that book. » [Back to text](#)

31. For more on Vimy's location, see Hucker and Smith, pp. 34-39, as well as Hucker's article in *JSSAC*, pp. 43-46. The latter is the source of the remarks about a rural cemetery and "communing with the dead through nature." On p. 46: "To a greater or lesser extent, the First World War cemeteries and the war memorials are all evidence of an effort to return harmony and beauty to a world shattered by a calamitous event. The Vimy Monument makes this explicit."

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32. Du Prey (p. 60) writes that Allward's design had been drawn up for the entirely different site of Hill 62, St. Julien, in Belgian Flanders. » [Back to text](#)

33. The Vimy soil and the hiring of Oscar Faber are described by Hucker (*JSSAC*, pp. 43-44), and the same source notes Faber's use of reinforced concrete and Allward's insistence on fine joints. Veterans Affairs Canada states that the monument "rests on a bed of 11,000 tonnes of concrete, reinforced with hundreds of tonnes of steel." » [Back to text](#)

34. Sources with respect to Allward's choice of stone include Borstad (p. 34), Hucker and Smith (pp. 49-50), Hucker (*JSSAC*, p. 44), and Brandon. A U.S. Government website clarifies the difference between limestone and marble:

<http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/acidrain/4.html>

See Duffy about the sculptural achievement of Paul Albert Bartholmé in Paris. Duffy writes that "Bartholmé supplied him [Allward] with proof that white stone could be a medium for a consoling story about death."

The remarks about "transcendental values," "remade classicism," and "loss and obligation" are Hucker's (*JSSAC*, p. 45). Information about clearing the site of explosives is drawn from Brandon, while the "nightmare" quote serves as the epigraph to *The Stone Carvers* and is repeated on p. 270 of that book. » [Back to text](#)

35. Borstad (pp. 57 and 60-61) addresses Allward's use of the title architect. » [Back to text](#)

36. See *The Stone Carvers*, pp. 269 and 241-42. Urquhart's main characters eventually work at the monument: "some Jesus huge Canadian war memorial that's going to be built at Vimy, where I lost my leg in France," one character says. "It's been in the works for years. The sculptor, Allward – the man who got the commission – is such a fanatic that it took him forever to find the right stone, apparently. Then they had to build a road, clear the site, . . . That would have been a real treat . . . like clearing a charnel house." » [Back to text](#)
37. Duffy writes that the model for *Canada Bereft*, the monument's central figure, was a "dancer turned artist's model, Edna Moynihan." *Canada Bereft* is sometimes known as *The Spirit of Canada*, *A Nation Bereft*, *Canada Mourning Her Fallen Sons*, or, gratingly, *Mother Canada*. » [Back to text](#)
38. Allward's clay modelling is discussed on p. 50 in Hucker and Smith. Urquhart describes the technique on pp. 348-51 of her novel, and in an article entitled "History as Monument," Brandon summarizes the procedure by which Allward's plaster maquettes were converted to Vimy's stone: *French stonecarvers at the Vimy site copied the plaster figures employing a technique that enabled them to double the dimensions as they carved. Using a pantographic, or copying, device the stonecarvers measured the relative depths of different parts of the plaster figures with a measuring rod. By drilling into the stone blocks placed beside the plaster carvings to depths determined by another connected measuring rod, they were able to reproduce the plaster dimensions at twice the scale.* » [Back to text](#)
39. Brandon describes the timely rescue of the maquettes. » [Back to text](#)
40. See Julian Smith's "Restoring Vimy: The Challenges of Confronting Emerging Modernism," published in *JSSAC*.
- The issue of Vimy and modernism is touched on by Hucker (*JSSAC*, pp. 41, 43, and 45), *Canada's Historic Places*, and Borstad (pp. 35-36). On p. 45 in *JSSAC*, Hucker writes that Allward had "the same modern preoccupations that Fussell, Hynes, and Lacquer had identified in the work of artists who had lived through the war." » [Back to text](#)

41. Also on p. 45 in *JSSAC*, Hucker refers to the dominant post-war classicism in cemeteries and monuments: “theirs was a remade classicism, expressing the modern sensibilities of loss and obligation, which demanded that somehow the past be kept present.” » [Back to text](#)
42. On p. 48 in *JSSAC*, Hucker refers to Vimy’s “close resemblance” to the stage sets of E. Gordon Craig. “Allward was not the only post First World War monument designer to have been influenced by modern theatre design.” » [Back to text](#)
43. See pp. 29-31 of Borstad’s essay in *JSSAC*. Allward’s opinion about emotion over intellect is quoted on p. 30. » [Back to text](#)
44. The three plaster figures at the military museum near Kingston, Ontario are *Canada Bereft* and two *Grievors*, the latter appearing to represent a father and mother. Both *Grievors*, also known as *Mourners*, are shown reclining. At Vimy, they are positioned on either side of the platform’s southwest steps at the back of the monument.

The other seventeen maquettes are displayed alone or in groups in Regeneration Hall at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. The female figures are *Truth*, *Hope*, *Charity*, *Honour*, *Faith*, *Peace*, and one of the four figures in *Sympathy of the Canadians for the Helpless*.

The male figures are *The Spirit of Sacrifice*, *Passing the Torch*, *Justice*, *Knowledge*, three of the four figures in *Sympathy of the Canadians*, and the three figures in *Breaking the Sword*.

These two groups (*Sympathy of the Canadians* and *Breaking the Sword*) are known collectively as *The Defenders*. At Vimy, they stand beside the stairs at the front, at opposite ends of the Wall of Defence. Above each group, the carved cannon muzzles draped in laurel and olive branches symbolize Victory and Peace.

At Vimy, *Sacrifice* (the figure arching backwards with arms outstretched and foot pinning a sword) and *The Spirit of Sacrifice* stand between the pylons.

Note: Hucker and Smith refer to these figures as *The Spirit of Sacrifice* and *Passing the Torch* respectively.

The same authors write that Allward's "Chorus" (the allegorical figures of *Truth, Faith, Justice, Charity, Knowledge, and Peace*) are in niches sculpted out of the pylons. The sculptor imagined them chanting what he called the Hymn of Peace (*Vimy*, pp. 26 and 42-43). » [Back to text](#)

45. About Allward's use of the lily in his design for *Canada Bereft*, Duffy writes: "The lily is associated with funereal and wedding bouquets alike. The dessication of this bouquet ties its meaning more closely with the former." » [Back to text](#)

46. See Duffy re Allward's hope that his work "was worthy of the men who gave their lives." The CBMG's desire for a memorial that paid tribute to the soldiers' gallantry is noted on p. 47 of Hucker's essay in *JSSAC*. The quote about "loss, sorrow and futility" is from Borstad (p. 30), who notes that Allward's design for the European monument demonstrated a "tendency to emotion over intellect," noted above: "Confronted with the magnitude of World War I, he sought to express loss, sorrow and futility. By 1920, the stark reality of the cost in human lives overwhelmed the feelings of patriotism expressed in his South African Memorial." » [Back to text](#)

47. Allward made surprisingly few changes to his design over the fifteen years in London and France. » [Back to text](#)

48. The quote about the cyclical myth of sacrifice is from Hucker's essay in *JSSAC*, p. 43. From the same essay, p. 46: "If the secret of tragedy lies in its ability to transmute pain into exaltation, so the beauty of the monument is enhanced by its retelling of the ancient myth of sacrifice and spiritual rebirth in which the pain of loss is overlaid with the hope of a new life." » [Back to text](#)

49. See Valpy, Hucker, and Du Prey about Vimy's cathedral effect and the upper part of the Cross. Allward's statement about the latter is cited in Du Prey, p. 64. » [Back to text](#)

50. For the religious features of the Vimy Monument, see Hucker (pp. 283 and 287 in “After the Agony”), Brandon, Duffy, Hucker and Smith (pp. 25 and 29-30), and Valpy. The extended quote about the theatrical backdrop is from Hucker, *JSSAC*, p. 43. On pp. 29-30 of *Vimy*, Hucker and Smith write that Allward:

. . . sought to create, using a modern architectural vocabulary, a structure that could convey the spiritual qualities embodied in a church or a temple. . . . In sum, Allward’s monument is envisaged as a church or temple-like sanctuary dedicated to the memory of those whose lives have been sacrificed to war, and to the belief that by their heroic sacrifice they have gained spiritual rebirth.

Re religious iconography: in the November 2013 issue of “The Torch,” published by Friends of the Canadian War Museum, Brandon writes:

The Spirit of Sacrifice holds a burning torch aloft. He was clearly inspired by John McCrae’s celebrated poem “In Flanders Fields,” in particular the lines “To you from failing hands we throw / The Torch; be yours to hold it high.” Next to the Spirit of Sacrifice, Sacrifice leans back against an altar-like structure. He is emblematic of Isaac, Abraham’s intended sacrifice to God. The Sacrifice of Isaac prefigures the Crucifixion, the two events together being central to post-First World War justificatory sentiments that centered on the redemptive possibilities of the enormous loss of life. » [Back to text](#)

51. For references to Allward’s non-triumphalism, see [canada.com](#) (“Vimy, 90 years later”), as well as Hucker in “After the Agony” (p. 283) and *JSSAC* (p. 43), and Canadian Historical Places. » [Back to text](#)

52. Borstad, p. 36, refers to Allward’s “personal disillusionment with and reaction to the horror of war.” » [Back to text](#)

53. The helmet on the tomb and the various swords (tip down, broken, or lying on the tomb) are less martial than symbols of death and the end of strife. » [Back to text](#)

54. The source of Allward's statement about the German helmet and his sermon on the futility of war is Hucker and Smith, p. 108. *Their* source is "Canada's Wonderful Memorial to Her Missing," *Our Empire*, 1933. » [Back to text](#)
55. Published in 1999, Doris V. Carter's memoir of wartime service in North Africa and Europe is entitled *Never Leave Your Head Uncovered: A Canadian Nursing Sister in World War Two*. » [Back to text](#)
56. About Allward's stubborn refusal to compromise, see Hucker's "After the Agony," p. 286. » [Back to text](#)
57. As for the inscriptions, see Hucker ("After the Agony," p. 286). » [Back to text](#)
58. For a critical view of the inscriptions and why they were added, see Duffy. In discussing these inscriptions, he notes that Allward, at first reluctant to include them, came to see them as "his monument's principal feature." Agreeing, Duffy writes that: "The vast numbers of the Missing . . . form a tragic and potent feature of the Great War, a fact that moves us still, long after any idea of Defending the Right has lost interest." These names "provide a meaning for viewers to the Memorial at a time when allegorical representation exists only as a satiric device in editorial cartoons."
- Duffy contrasts Vimy and Thiepval (the British Memorial to the Missing of the Somme). About the latter, he writes: "The final listing-place for those whose bodies had been reduced to inscriptions, the structure conveys nothing consoling or comforting, nothing beyond a shudder." » [Back to text](#)
59. The quoted passages about the landscape, amphitheatre, and memorial park are from Hucker (*JSSAC*, pp. 46-47). » [Back to text](#)
60. See *The Stone Carvers*, p. 351, for the passage about Allward and the world's diminishing sorrow: "Allward began to feel like a vessel into which the world's diminishing sorrow was poured for safe-keeping, and the weight of it was heavy on his bones." » [Back to text](#)

61. The sources about Donald Allward are those already mentioned: Hucker and Smith (pp. 50, 65, and 112) and *The Gazette*, May 21, 1934. Hucker and Smith thank Scott Allward, Donald's grandson, for information he shared with the authors. » [Back to text](#)

62. These excerpts from King Edward's speech are reported in Canada.com's "Vimy, 90 years later." Other sources about the monument's unveiling are Valpy and Borstad ("extensive coverage," p. 34). » [Back to text](#)

63. About Mackenzie King and Vimy, see Valpy, as well as Borstad, pp. 34-35. » [Back to text](#)

64. Allward's 1921 plans had called for "Canada" and "the Sacrifice" to be made of bronze, "making two dominant notes." Canada.com ("Vimy, 90 years later") mentions Allward's decision to use stone only. » [Back to text](#)

65. A number of sources mention the propaganda about the alleged Nazi destruction of Vimy, as well as Hitler's visit to the monument and the reasons it wasn't harmed. See, for example, Valpy, Canada.com ("Vimy, 90 years later" and "The real story of who saved Vimy Ridge"), and *The Toronto Star* ("How Hitler spared Vimy Ridge"). The source of Serge Durlinger's remark about Hitler's admiration for the monument is canada.com ("Vimy, 90 years later").

I'm indebted to my friend James Middleton, knowledgeable on many subjects, for his thoughts first on the origins of the Great War, and second on the reasons why Hitler protected Vimy. In 2012, James asked Jonathan Petropoulos, an authority on the history of Nazi Germany and art, for his opinion on Hitler's rationale. It's a matter of speculation, Professor Petropoulos replied, but his decision to protect Vimy may be traced in part to his close relationship with Edward VIII. Knowing that Edward had been at the monument's unveiling, Hitler may have preferred not to offend him. » [Back to text](#)

66. For more on Vimy's decay and the measures taken to fix it, see Richard Foot ("A monumental labour of love," CanWest News Service, April 9, 2007). See also Hucker (*JSSAC*, p. 47), Du Prey (p. 61), a Veterans Affairs Canada piece entitled "The Canadian National Vimy Memorial," and, above all, Julian Smith's "Restoring Vimy," cited above. » [Back to text](#)
67. Foot is the source re Vimy's restoration under a shroud. » [Back to text](#)
68. Re Vimy's rededication in 2007 and the quoted references to that ceremony, see "Vimy part of Canada's 'creation story': PM," CBC News (online), April 9, 2007. » [Back to text](#)
69. Winston Churchill wrote about Ypres: "A more sacred place for the British race does not exist in the whole world." The author Michael Morpurgo puts it differently: "If Ypres was perhaps the most concentrated killing field in British history, it was a killing field for many other peoples too. If it is sacred, it is sacred for all of them." (*Intelligent Life magazine*, Spring 2011.) Some visitors, of course, see nothing sacred in an abattoir like Flanders. » [Back to text](#)
70. Allward's remarks about our debt to the dead are quoted in many publications, including Hucker and Smith, p. 29. » [Back to text](#)
71. The passages from *The Stone Carvers* about Allward's last years are on pp. 379-81 of that work. » [Back to text](#)
72. About Allward's return to Canada after fourteen years, see Borstad, p. 35. » [Back to text](#)
73. Duffy discusses Allward's final completed work (the William Lyon Mackenzie statue) and the end of his career. » [Back to text](#)
74. The quotations about "a violent future" and "the psyche of its creator" are from *The Stone Carvers*, pp. 379 and 381 respectively. Borstad writes that during and after the Second World War, Allward produced a series of drawings that reveal

“the very personal horror, disillusionment, and bitterness” he felt about war. Allward called them war cartoons. (See the online site for Borstad’s Canadian Art in Public Spaces.) » [Back to text](#)

75. Allward’s gravestone is the first in a row of four identical stones. His wife Margaret’s is to the right, and the third is that of their son Hugh and his wife Jean. (Below Margaret’s name and dates are those of Sarah Kennedy, perhaps a sister.) The fourth stone has one name only: Blyth Allward Mancuso, 1938-77.

Donald’s name doesn’t appear on these stones or in his father’s *Globe and Mail* obituary (April 25, 1955), which ends: “In 1898 he married Margaret Patricia Kennedy, who predeceased him. He leaves one son, Hugh L. Allward, a Toronto architect.” Hugh’s full name was Hugh Lachlan Cruickshank Allward. Perhaps the second middle name was in honour of his father’s art teacher.

See the online site for Architects in Canada for more on Hugh Allward, whose architecture practice was continued by his nephew, Peter Allward. The latter, Donald’s son, donated 101 photographs documenting the design and construction of the Vimy Monument to Library and Archives Canada, as well as fifty-five photographs, five negatives, and a chronology of his grandfather’s life and career.

The Allward gravestones are well cared for, their inscriptions sharp and clear. The typeface on each is uniform, refined, and distinctive, the Ns particularly so. Perhaps Allward, or one of his descendants, designed it.

Fort York Branch 165 of the Royal Canadian Legion has installed a plaque on the path near Allward’s grave. Beneath an image of the Vimy Monument, it reads: “Walter Seymour Allward, CMG, LLD, RCA. Sculptor, Architect and Designer of the Vimy Memorial which honours the legacy of those Canadians who fought and died in the First World War.” » [Back to text](#)

76. The source about Allward’s becoming a National Historic Person is the City of Toronto publication noted above. See the following about “Allward of Vimy”: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/walter-seymour-allward>

A final note on Allward's posthumous recognition: the day after *The Globe and Mail* ran his obituary, an editorial read: “. . . Walter Allward remains secure in his place as the dean of Canadian sculptors by the common consent of fellow artists and the public alike.” » [Back to text](#)

77. For more on Wounded Warriors, see: <http://www.woundedwarriors.ca>.

Its motto is “Honour the fallen, Help the Living,” and Roméo Dallaire is its national patron. » [Back to text](#)

78. I'd like to thank my friend Gary Ockenden for the Raymond Williams quote. Williams was a prominent twentieth century British social critic, cultural historian, novelist, and left-wing educator. During the Second World War he served as a tank captain in France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. In 1951, he refused to serve in Korea but was discharged from all military obligations after explaining his objections to the war. See John Higgins's *Raymond Williams: literature, Marxism and cultural materialism*, 1995, p. 127. » [Back to text](#)

Chapter Four: Service, duty, and social cohesion, 1914-18

1. See *James Ernest Brown: Soldier for his times*, a short biography of a Canadian farmer, First World War veteran, and social democrat. An agrarian activist and social progressive, Ern Brown was a member of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the precursor of Canada's New Democratic Party. *Soldier* is also on this site. » [Back to text](#)
2. At the June 2014 *Ideacity* Conference in Toronto, Wade Davis spoke about the way in which the First World War changed everything: “Everything you know about your life, every sense you have of being modern, every neurotic affliction and affectation, was born in the mud and blood of Flanders.” Davis's presentation, “The First World War: the Fulcrum of Modernity,” is available at: <http://www.ideacityonline.com/speaker/wade-davis> » [Back to text](#)

3. The passage from *The Stone Carvers* is on pp. 339-40 of the McClelland & Stewart paperback edition. » [Back to text](#)
4. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes in the first pages of this chapter are from Modris Eksteins's *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, 1989. Quotes and key concepts from this brilliant work are drawn in particular from pp. 3-4, 227-28, 230, 234, 235, and 244-46, and Eksteins is my principal source for the cultural origins of the war.

The reference to Germany as the challenger to a century of certainty is from a 2012 CBC Radio interview with Eksteins (the “Ideas” program, with Paul Kennedy).

The quote about Germany's assertion of spiritual freedom is from an essay by Eksteins entitled “When Death was Young . . . : Germany, Modernism, and the Great War.” It reads in part:

From the start of the war the Germans regarded it as above all a spiritual conflict, one which did not require precise war aims even and which as a result could readily be regarded by virtually the entire population as essentially a struggle to assert the right to a spiritual freedom. . . . The focus of exploration for Germans was directed inward and toward the future: the war was a ‘spiritual necessity’ . . . The British and the French, in turn, regarded the war as a struggle to preserve social values and civilization, . . . notions of justice, dignity, civility, restraint, and ‘progress’ governed by a respect for law. . . . For them the war was a practical necessity, . . .

“When Death was Young” was published in *Ideas Into Politics: Aspects of European History, 1880-1950*, edited by Roger J. Bullen, Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, and A.B. Polonsky, 1984.

I hope I've done justice to Eksteins's views on the cultural origins of the war. There are competing views and opinions, of course. In this connection, my friend James Middleton, who knows far more than I do about the First World War, recommends David Fromkin's *Europe's Last Summer: Who Started the Great*

War in 1914? On p. 12, Fromkin writes that not only is “the explanation of the war the biggest question in modern history; it is an exemplary question, compelling us to re-examine what we mean by such words as ‘cause.’ There were causes – many of them – for Europe’s Great Powers to be disposed to go to war with one another. There were other causes – immediate ones – for them to have gone to war when and where and how they did.”

As far as the present book is concerned, what matters is the importance of specific values to soldiers on both sides of the conflict. Strategy, diplomacy, and international intrigue were the concern of other men. » [Back to text](#)

5. In the arts, pre-war Germany was indeed more avant-garde than France or Britain. In Britain’s case, this is evident, for example, in its tardy acceptance of early modernist designs by Scottish artist-architect Charles Rennie Macintosh years after they were taken up in Germany, Austria, and Eastern Europe. » [Back to text](#)
6. On p. 244 of *Rites of Spring*, Eksteins writes that the First World War was, above all, “the civil war of the European middle class.” Again, unless noted, quotes in these first pages are from that work. » [Back to text](#)
7. About social class, James Middleton writes that the First World War “was unique in the number of middle class people involved, perhaps in part because the middle class was still fairly new. But this understates how much larger was the contingent of rural and urban working men. Then, too, it was middle class survivors who left the memoirs that form our impressions of the war. It wasn’t until much later that we got the oral histories of working class survivors, such as those collected by Lyn Macdonald.” » [Back to text](#)
8. In an appendix to his 2012 novel *Dominion*, an alternative history of the European mid-twentieth century, C.J. Sansom writes: “European history in the first half of the twentieth century was, apart from Russia, a story of nationalism triumphant. The rivalries between big-nation nationalisms culminated in the

war of 1914 and nationalist spirit kept that war going for four years despite its unprecedented slaughter.” » [Back to text](#)

9. The passage from *Tender is the Night* is on p. 57 of the Scribner paperback edition published in 2003. » [Back to text](#)

10. In reviewing the British television series, “The Village,” George Simmer points out that First World War soldiers are often depicted as vicious bullies or helpless victims, seldom as “men trained to do a difficult job.” On the subject of class, Harry Leslie Smith, a working-class veteran of the Second World War, writes that the earlier war was fought, in the case of the British at least, by working-class men, and he finds his government’s claim that they fought for freedom and democracy “profane”: “Too many of the dead from that horrendous war didn’t know real freedom because they were poor and were never truly represented by their members of parliament.” (“This year, I will wear a poppy for the last time,” *The Guardian*, November 8, 2013.) The quote about the war being run on the basis of assumptions is from *Rites of Spring*, p. 230. The next quote (“the willing adherence to a code of values”) is from p. 245. » [Back to text](#)

11. The source in this case is David J. Bercuson’s *The Patricias: The Proud History of a Fighting Regiment*, 2001. See especially p. 68. » [Back to text](#)

12. On the subject of loyalty, Frederick Hart, sculptor of The Three Soldiers (or The Three Servicemen), a Vietnam War memorial in Washington, D.C., said about his figures: “They wear the uniform and carry the equipment of war; they are young. . . . The contrast between the innocence of their youth and the weapons of war underscores the poignancy of their sacrifice. There is about them the physical contact and sense of unity that bespeaks the bonds of love and sacrifice that is the nature of men at war.” (Source: Hart’s obituary in *The Washington Post*, August 15, 1999.)

See also http://www.dcmemorials.com/index_indiv0001270.htm. The Three Soldiers is a more traditional, figural complement to Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall. » [Back to text](#)

13. See Margaret W. Westley's 1990 volume *Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal, 1900-1950*, p. 127. Westley is first cited in Chapter One. » [Back to text](#)

14. King George is quoted on p. 235 of *Rites of Spring*. The source of Robert Bridges's extended quote is his preface to *The Spirit of Man: An Anthology*, published in 1916. » [Back to text](#)

15. David Lloyd George was soon to be, in quick succession, Britain's Minister of Munitions, Secretary of State for War, and Prime Minister. Robert Bridges, an elderly man with no military experience, played into the era's odious mythologizing while attempting to comfort an anxious and grieving public. » [Back to text](#)

16. Sir Gilbert Parker is quoted in "War and How We Told It," Crawford Kilian, *The Tyee*, November 11, 2008. » [Back to text](#)

17. See J.W. Cunliffe's "A Canadian Soldier," printed for private circulation in 1917 and available at: http://archive.org/stream/canadiansoldierg00bake/canadiansoldierg00bake_djvu.txt

George Baker, known as Harry, was Percy Molson's cousin. Karen Molson sent me this link. » [Back to text](#)

18. See Canon Scott's *The Great War As I Saw It*, Chapter XXXIII, "Preparing for the Final Blow – September, 1918." Scott is also quoted in Westley, p. 123. In *Queen's Quarterly*, Summer 2015, Sandra Martin says about the era's propaganda that: At the time it was considered patriotic. Later it would seem like a betrayal to the thousands of young men who felt duped into fighting and dying for an empty shell of an imperialist ideal." » [Back to text](#)

19. The online “20th Century Poetry and War,” published by the Peace Pledge Union, addresses high language, German as well as British: <http://www.ppu.org.uk/learn/poetry>. » Back to text
20. The source of this quote from Field Marshall Haig, as well as the reference to “old lofty terms,” is *Rites of Spring*, p. 252. Sometimes known as the Butcher of the Somme, Haig is quoted in “20th Century Poetry and War”: “Every position must be held to the last man. There must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one must fight to the end.”
- After the war, Haig dedicated himself to the welfare of ex-servicemen. » Back to text
21. It’s not surprising that the public wasn’t keen to learn how bad it had been at the front. It was too much to bear, and too soon. Westley says about mourners in the war’s aftermath that it “would be many years before people began to tell them that the sacrifice had been pointless. For the immediate future, the point was to cope.” Silence and consolation were the order of the day. » Back to text
22. The Henry James letter is widely if inconsistently quoted. I took this excerpt from Paul Fussell’s influential work on the cultural impact of the war, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 1975, p. 8. » Back to text
23. Eksteins points out that the term *surrealism* was coined by the soldier-poet Guillaume Apollinaire in his program notes for a Diaghilev production in 1917. Wounded at the front in 1916, Apollinaire died of influenza two days before the war’s end. » Back to text
24. This is how Siegfried Sassoon, another veteran, referred to the trenches in his foreword to the 1937 edition of Rosenberg’s work. A later volume, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Paintings and Drawings* (1979), includes Sassoon’s original foreword and examples of Rosenberg’s extraordinary art. » Back to text

25. See *Rites of Spring* (especially pp. 226-29) for more on the soldier's anesthetized state of mind. Kreisler is quoted on p. 228 of that work, while the German soldier ("there were no heroes") is quoted in the article by the Peace Pledge Union, cited above. » [Back to text](#)
26. The source of the passages from Rosenberg's letters is *The Collected Works*. In order, they are from letters to Miss Seaton (his friend and former teacher), John Rodker, Gordon Bottomley, Miss Seaton again, and Edward Marsh. » [Back to text](#)
27. The Paul Fussell quote is from *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, though I found it at goodreads.com. » [Back to text](#)
28. The source of the passage about politicians, profiteers, etc. is *Rites of Spring*, p. 281. As for senior officers, some continued to inspire faith, even devotion, among the men they commanded. General A.C. Macdonnell – referred to in the chapter on Percy – is a good example. See *Soldier for his times*, note 31, for more on this big-hearted man who, by 1917, commanded the 1st Canadian Division. "It is not sentiment, but simple fact, to say that he was loved and honoured," writes Ian McCulloch in "Batty Mac': Portrait of a Brigade Commander in the First World War, 1915-17." (Source: *Canadian Military History*, Autumn 1998.) » [Back to text](#)
29. The passage about soldiers being left to their own fate is on p. 281 of *Rites of Spring*. The German soldier's statement about instinctive socialists is on the same page. » [Back to text](#)
30. The quote about the intense sense of comradeship is from *Rites of Spring*, p. 239. » [Back to text](#)
31. The source of the Liddell Hart quote is "Michael Morpurgo on the Pity of War," referred to in Chapter Three. Morpurgo (Britain's former Children's Laureate, the author of *War Horse*, and a pacifist) visits the In Flanders Fields Museum in

Ypres and thinks of the First World War and all the killing fields since. See also a 2014 piece about Morpurgo at <http://www.marlboroughcollege.org/news/speakers/article/date/2014/12/-4878b5b37a/>.

Visitors to the Menin Gate in Ypres find a plaque bearing Winston Churchill's high language about the former battlefields as a "sacred place for the British race." » [Back to text](#)

32. The quote about "the existing social order and its values" is from *Rites of Spring*, p. 232. » [Back to text](#)

33. One of the characters in C.J. Sansom's *Dominion* believes that the Great War "made mass slaughter ordinary, that was why Stalin and Hitler could commit murder on a scale inconceivable before 1914." » [Back to text](#)

34. The first Owen quote is from "Dulce et Decorum est," the second from "Anthem for Doomed Youth."

Horace's "Dulce et Decorum est Pro Patria Mori" (Owen's "old lie") is inscribed at the Menin Gate, where Talbot Papineau, along with 54,895 others, is memorialized. Again, some visitors respond very positively to the Menin Gate, while others, such as Siegfried Sassoon, do not.

An early draft of "Dulce et Decorum est" was written while Owen and Sassoon were being treated for shell shock at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh. Both were later released and returned to the front.

In a letter written after his return to combat, Owen wrote Sassoon: "I cannot say I suffered anything. . . . My senses are charred." (Source: <http://warpoetry.co.uk/Owena.html>.) » [Back to text](#)

35. Ernest Hemingway wrote from experience about martial rhetoric. At 18, he was wounded on the Italian-Austrian front while serving with the Red Cross and a decade later published *A Farewell to Arms*, based on his service. His fictional protagonist, Frederic Henry, sums up the bankruptcy of high language:

There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. » [Back to text](#)

36. Veterans Affairs Canada says this about the first day of the Somme Offensive:

The Battle of the Somme began early on the morning of July 1, 1916, near the town of Beaumont-Hamel. Thousands of soldiers from Britain and Newfoundland climbed out of their trenches to walk through a hail of machine gun fire toward the German line. In less than half an hour, the fighting was over. 57,470 British soldiers were killed or wounded on what remains the bloodiest day in the history of the British Army. Newfoundlanders suffered especially heavy losses on that day: of the approximately 800 who had gone into battle, only 68 were able to respond at roll call the following morning. » [Back to text](#)

37. The quoted passages from David Jones and, a couple of paragraphs later, Ernst Junger are on pp. 279 and 192 of *Rites of Spring*. » [Back to text](#)

38. The A.J.P. Taylor quote (also cited in *Soldier for his times*) is from *The First World War: An Illustrated History*, 1963, p. 140. » [Back to text](#)

39. The source of the Eksteins quote about the “I” is p. 279 of *Rites of Spring*. » [Back to text](#)

40. The phrase “permanent reverberations” appears in Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*:

Today the Somme is a peaceful but sullen place, unforgetting and unforgiving. . . . To wander now over the fields destined to extrude their rusty metal fragments for centuries is to appreciate in the most intimate way the permanent reverbera-

tions of July, 1916. When the air is damp you can smell rusted iron everywhere, even though you see only wheat and barley. » [Back to text](#)

41. Sassoon was educated at Marlborough College and Cambridge. He did not complete his degree, leaving university for a literary life in London. » [Back to text](#)

42. The source of the quote about Sassoon's early war poems is *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. » [Back to text](#)

43. Some of these biographical details are drawn from the History Learning Site: <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk> » [Back to text](#)

44. Sassoon wrote extended memoirs as well as a trilogy of semi-autobiographical novels entitled *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston*. The latter comprises *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man*, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, and *Sherston's Progress*. » [Back to text](#)

45. See Jean Moorcroft Wilson's *Siegfried Sassoon, The Making of a War Poet, A Biography 1886-1918*, the first volume of her two-volume biography. See also Max Egremont's *Siegfried Sassoon: A Life*. » [Back to text](#)

46. Wilson writes that Sassoon contrasted the individual Fusilier's "vast anonymity of courage and cheerfulness" with the attitude of profiteers and politicians who, he now believed, wanted the war to continue. Prolonging the war, he said, would enable those who benefited from it to carry out their scheme of "crushing Kaiserism and Prussianism." In his view, power, profit, and privilege underscored it all.

Looking back in 1945, he said he no longer believed that the negotiated peace he'd wanted would have held. Nevertheless, as Wilson says, "his willingness to be sacrificed for his ideals, however impractical, remains as impressive today as it was then." » [Back to text](#)

47. Sassoon expressed his disgust with the safe and complacent public in “Blighters”:

*The House is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
And cackle at the Show, while prancing ranks
Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din;
We're sure the Kaiser loves our dear old Tanks!
I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
Lurching to rag-time tunes, or 'Home, sweet Home',
And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls
To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.* » [Back to text](#)

48. Wilson quotes from Sassoon's autobiography: “It was for the fighting men that my appeal was made, for those whose loyalty and unthinkingness would have been betrayed whatever acquisitions the Peace might bring to the British Empire.” (Source: p. 376 in the first volume of Wilson's *Siegfried Sassoon*.) » [Back to text](#)

49. Wilson's statement that Sassoon could be guilt-free only when risking his own life is on p. 428 of the same volume, as is her remark that he feared his fellow officers' reaction when he returned to the regiment. “He did not anticipate rejection – they were too kind and genuine for that – but he did fear their puzzled misunderstanding of his apparent volte-face. How could he possibly explain to those trained largely to repress their emotions that it was love of his men which had driven him back?” » [Back to text](#)

50. Robert Graves wrote to Sassoon in early 1918: “My nerves have been bad recently, and attacks of the horrors . . . But you have them worse than me.” (Source: note, p. 574, in Wilson.) » [Back to text](#)

51. The Sassoon and Owen quotes are from the former's diary, cited on pp. 427-28 in Wilson's biography, and the latter's “Apologia pro Poemate Meo.” » [Back to text](#)

52. See *Rites of Spring*, pp. 453-54: “The emphasis on duty has been badly understated in the subsequent literature on the war, which has been dominated by the ‘disenchantment’ school of thought.” Also, on p. 244: “The literature on the war is lacking in balance. It concentrates for the most part on the negative repercussions of the war, not on the positive instincts that fired it for over four years.” » [Back to text](#)

53. These miscellaneous quotes are from *Rites of Spring*, pp. 232, 237, 243, 244, and 453-54. » [Back to text](#)

54. Eksteins writes that by 1917 “duty and devoir began gradually to disappear from the active vocabulary of front soldiers. Many more of these men were now conscripts. In Britain compulsory service had been introduced in January 1916.” (*Rites of Spring*, p. 240.) Nevertheless, though the war dragged on with no end in sight, there was still “the soldiers’ willingness, despite fatigue and despondency, to ‘carry on,’ to ‘stick it to the end.’” (*Rites of Spring*, p. 241.) There was less talk about duty, but no less dutiful action.

Eksteins notes that Haig distrusted the British conscripts: he felt they couldn’t have “the spirit of devotion and duty of earlier troops.” “What is striking,” Eksteins says, “is how loyally the soldiers, old and new, performed, against all expectations of the high command.” (*Rites of Spring*, p. 241.) » [Back to text](#)

55. About the soldiers’ morale, Eksteins writes that “Only in Russia did the front collapse. . . . Elsewhere, the Russian example did spark murmurs of sympathy in the second half of 1917, but on the whole morale held.” (*Rites of Spring*, p. 233.) Revolutionary change *was* on the way. Outside Russia, however, it came in the form of radical cultural change. » [Back to text](#)

56. The Owen quote is from “Apologia pro Poemate Meo.” The Blunden quote is from “The Watchers,” one of the poems he appended to his memoir *Undertones of War*, published in 1928. » [Back to text](#)

57. The epigraph is from “We May Be Born With an Urge to Help,” *The New York Times*, Nicholas Wade, Dec. 1, 2009. » [Back to text](#)

58. See the *Online Etymology Dictionary* about the origins of service. In practice, of course, service and duty (or devotion and obligation) are integrated when we whole-heartedly embrace a duty to serve someone or something. Sometimes, too, the terms are found together, interchangeably or at least linked. Thus a journalist’s *service* to the truth or public interest may imply a *duty* to check sources and verify facts. (See “The rise of the reader: journalism in the age of the open web,” Katharine Viner, *The Guardian*, October 2013.)

In a July 15, 2014 *Globe and Mail* article on the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, the writer states: “At home and abroad, the Regiment provides each wounded or injured serving soldier, veteran, widow or family member a duty of care. A framework of support has been developed to meet both the needs of its serving members and retired members.” Duty of care seems to marry the concepts of debt and help, or duty and service. » [Back to text](#)

59. Terry O’Reilly, host of CBC Radio’s “Under the Influence,” dedicated a full episode to “Tales of Customer Service” in 2013. Recounting stories of companies that go out of their way to serve customers – and staff who go beyond the call of duty with their employers’ blessing – O’Reilly depicts a startling warmth in the commercial sector. As rare as it is, he says, it always works in the company’s favour. » [Back to text](#)

60. David Foster Wallace’s article was published in *Harper’s* magazine as “Shipping Out.” Renamed, it was the title essay of his *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments*, 1997. » [Back to text](#)

61. The BBC show was first broadcast on November 13, 2003. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0054935>

The source of two of the quotes from this program (“the station, office, or position” and “foundational duty ethics”) is Angie Hobbs, one of Melvyn Bragg’s

radio guests. All excerpts from the BBC broadcast are from my partial transcript, except the quote about “terrible things,” which was drawn from the show’s written introduction. » [Back to text](#)

62. Ram Dass, the American spiritual teacher, says about right action that it is “doing one’s dharma as impeccably as you can, because that is your duty, role . . . the part you play, an offering.” In this case, dharma simply means the appropriate thing to do, the right thing.

On the subject of service, see Ram Dass’s *How Can I Help? Stories and Reflections on Service* (written with Paul Gorman) and *Compassion in Action: Setting Out on the Path of Service* (written with Mirabai Bush). Robert Coles, child psychiatrist and social critic, also writes at length about voluntary service in *The Call of Service* (1993), a work that explores, in his words, “the ‘service’ we offer to others, and, not incidentally, to ourselves.”

Service is not without risk. In serving others – in caring for them or looking after their interests – there’s the danger of developing an unhealthy sense of personal virtue and self-importance, of using service to meet one’s own emotional needs.

And not everyone or everything should be served. Dickens’s smarmy, cold-blooded Mr. Casby, a slumlord in Little Dorrit’s nineteenth-century London, employs Mr. Pancks to collect rent from his penniless tenants. “Squeeze, squeeze, squeeze,” Casby commands Pancks – “you are made to do your duty” – and for a while Pancks does. So while young, selfless Amy Dorrit exemplifies “noble service,” Pancks stands for those who serve unworthy and ignoble masters.

Meanwhile, service and duty are routinely sentimentalized by public figures and corporate interests. There’s nothing like a tale of selfless service or duty bravely (and modestly) done to win our hearts, pump up partisan sympathies, and sell us something.

For more on Ram Dass, dharma, karma yoga, and *seva* (Sanskrit for selfless service), see <http://www.ramdass.org/karma-yoga>. About the origins of *service* and words related to it, see the [Online Etymology Dictionary](#). » [Back to text](#)

63. This passage about duty, *devoir*, and *Pflicht* is from “When Death Was Young.”
» [Back to text](#)
64. The quotes about social expectations and Herbert Read are from *Rites of Spring*, p. 244. » [Back to text](#)
65. The remarks about Percy, gentlemanly behaviour, service, and duty are cited in Chapter One. The details about a dissatisfied Canadian officer abandoning his men is drawn from a letter Percy wrote on December 4, 1915. » [Back to text](#)
66. Talbot’s comments are cited in Chapter Two, as is Caroline’s request for a willing service. » [Back to text](#)
67. The source for the Vimy Monument as the “primary altar to the dead of the war” is Vance’s *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, 1997, p. 70. Jane Urquhart says of Allward’s monument that it was meant to be “a memorial to grief, on the one hand, and a prayer for peace, on the other.” (*The Stone Carvers*, p. 377.) » [Back to text](#)
68. Allward’s remark about the dead and our obligation to them – “never to forget their sacrifice and to live by the values for which they died” – is on p. 29 of Hucker and Smith’s *Vimy*. » [Back to text](#)
69. See *Soldier for his times*, especially pp. 26-28, with respect to soldiers’ solidarity and the impact of frontline service. » [Back to text](#)
70. While still at the front, Brown wrote about duty in relation to the post-war future. One of Canada’s duties, he said, was to do whatever it could for wounded servicemen and their families, not only while the war was on but indefinitely.
» [Back to text](#)
71. The quote about men standing by their country is also in *Soldier*, p. 28. Its source is Denis Winter’s *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War*, 1978, p. 234.
» [Back to text](#)

72. About sociality, see Nicholas Wade, *The New York Times*, December 1, 2009.
» [Back to text](#)
73. On the BBC program cited above, Hobbs says that duty can give us “clarity and focus,” and it is she who notes its potential to bind a nation together and sustain us individually or collectively. It can also, as the program’s introduction points out, dupe us into doing terrible things. Susceptible to abuse and distortion, as well as the expression of courage and discipline, the principle of duty lends itself equally to actions good and bad. From warfare to so-called honour killings, it can be a tool of unthinking and unfeeling compliance, and if it draws on unmerited respect for authority and tradition, its consequences can be vile. » [Back to text](#)
74. The source of the quote that includes “Nothing can justify war” is a letter from Rosenberg to Edward Marsh (December 1915), published in *The Collected Works*. About the portion of Rosenberg’s pay meant for his mother, see the same letter, as well as the subsequent letter to Sydney Schiff, also on p. 227 of *The Collected Works*. The quote about “the immorality of joining with no patriotic convictions” is from a letter to Schiff, October 1915, written before enlistment. And the passage in which Rosenberg writes that his experience at the front “will all refine itself into poetry later on” is from a letter to Laurence Binyon, autumn 1916. » [Back to text](#)
75. In a 1998 article entitled “The Grave of Poet Isaac Rosenberg,” Trevor Tasker quotes Joseph Cohen, author of *Journey to the Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg, 1890-1918*: “Ironically Rosenberg sketched very little of the war he saw and experienced; most of the sketches were portraits of his comrades, which he gave away for them to send home.” » [Back to text](#)
76. Paul Fussell considered “Break of Day in the Trenches” the greatest poem of the war. (Source: *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 250.) » [Back to text](#)

77. In his last letter, addressed to Edward Marsh and postmarked the day after his death, Rosenberg enclosed his final poem, “Through these Pale Cold Days.” The letter begins:

I think I wrote you I was about to go up the line again after our little rest. We are now in the trenches again and though I feel very sleepy, I just have a chance to answer your letter so I will while I may. It's really my being lucky enough to bag an inch of candle that incites me to this pitch of punctual epistolary. . . . We are very busy just now and poetry is right out of our scheme.

It ends:

I've seen no poetry for ages now so you mustn't be too critical – My vocabulary small enough before is impoverished and bare.

Rosenberg's gravestone is in a cemetery near Arras in France. It records his name, rank, serial number, regiment (The King's Own Royal Lancasters), date of death, and age at death (27). There's a Star of David in place of the usual cross, and beneath that the words Artist & Poet. » [Back to text](#)

78. See *Death So Noble*, especially pp. 49-51 and 257-67 about the myth of victory. (The extended quote is from pp. 261-62.) See also pp. 56-70 about the post-war pilgrimage to the Vimy Memorial and the religious aspects of the battlefield and its relics. In his research, Vance uncovered an enormous amount of romantic, sentimental, and patriotic writing about the Great War written by Canadian men and women between the wars.

All quotes in the final paragraphs of this chapter are from *Death So Noble*.

Vance quotes Sir Arthur Currie, former commander of the Canadian army: “who can forget the example of untarnished honour and flaming valour which shone amid the horror and the darkness of strife? Who can forget the deeds of kindness and self-sacrifice which proved that the soul of man still held the divine spark?”

It's high diction, of course, but heartfelt and probably healing. » [Back to text](#)

Chapter Five: Service and duty in an age unbound

1. The epigraph is from the 50th anniversary edition of *Catch-22*, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2011, p. 81. All quotes from *Catch-22* are from this edition. » [Back to text](#)

2. Any number of stories and memoirs describe the fate of soldiers returning from the Great War. See, for example, Ernest Hemingway's "Soldier's Home," a short story published in 1925:

By the time Krebs returned to his home town in Oklahoma the greeting of heroes was over. He came back much too late. . . . At first Krebs, who had been at Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel and in the Argonne did not want to talk about the war at all. Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it.

To learn more about the difficulties facing Canadian veterans of the war in Afghanistan, see the website for Wounded Warriors Canada (<http://www.woundedwarriors.ca>). » [Back to text](#)

3. The source of the phrase "victors' peace conference" is Margaret MacMillan in a televised interview with Ben Wattenberg on PBS, May 2004. » [Back to text](#)

4. See Modris Ekstein's *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* about the Treaty of Versailles. Apart from MacMillan's remark, cited in the previous note, all quotes in this section are from pp. 332-33 of *Rites of Spring*. Unless otherwise noted, passages on modernism, individualism, and art quoted elsewhere in this chapter are also from *Rites of Spring*, and, once again, I'm indebted to Modris Ekstein's outstanding work on nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural change. » [Back to text](#)

5. C.J. Sansom, cited in the notes to Chapter Four, roots his recent novel *Dominion* in a rage against nationalism. In an appendix, he writes:

After the Great War came the Treaty of Versailles, which glorified small-nation nationalism. New states sprang up from the wreckage of the old Empires, most of which promptly began discriminating against the new minorities within their borders, not least the Jews, and ended up as nationalist dictatorships. And in both large and small European countries nationalism gave birth to its monster children; fascism, based on the organized worship of the nation and Nazism, which worshipped not just nationality but race. » [Back to text](#)

6. See Jacqueline Hucker, “Vimy: A Monument for the Modern World,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, Vol. 33, Number 1, 2008, p. 45. » [Back to text](#)
7. The source of the quote about fissure is Christopher Lehmann-Haupt’s obituary for Fussell: “Paul Fussell, Literary Scholar and Critic, Is Dead at 88,” *The New York Times*, May 23, 2012. Echoing the notion of fissure or rupture in history, James Parker refers to the era’s “rupture in consciousness” in an article on G.K. Chesterton in the April 2015 issue of *The Atlantic*. » [Back to text](#)
8. See Henry Porter, *The Guardian*, August 3, 2013, about 2014’s centenary events: “Whether we are being chivvied into recalling the sacrifice for possibly dubious nationalistic reasons, it will be important because the First World War was the moment that humans began to realise the power of total destruction.” » [Back to text](#)
9. Eksteins refers to this period as “a new world dawning” after the old, nineteenth-century world had been “demolished” by war. (*Rites of Spring*, p. 194.)

Again, most quotes in this section are from *Rites of Spring*: for example, those concerning societal melancholy (p. 333) and soldiers’ values (especially pp. 251-52). However, the passages about “the content of duty and devoir” and soldiers withdrawing from social activity are from Eksteins’s article, “When Death was Young,” cited in Chapter Four. » [Back to text](#)

10. Angie Hobbs, the British philosopher, says about duty that it can connect the romantic ideal and the rational ideal of somebody like Kant. If duty is the expression of universal human reason, then allegiance to duty will be both the rational ideal of a philosopher like Kant and a romantic ideal that could bind the whole human race.” As noted in Chapter Four, Professor Hobbs was one of three guests on a 2003 BBC Radio broadcast on the subject of duty, and her remarks are drawn from that broadcast. » [Back to text](#)
11. The quotes about “the beauty of duty so nobly done” and “these phrases” are from p. 252 of *Rites of Spring*. » [Back to text](#)
12. Jay Winter’s “A Taste of Ashes,” an article on November 11, 1918, is the source of this quote. (See *History Today*, November 1998.) One of the article’s strengths is its insight into Adolf Hitler’s post-war bitterness and his desire to avenge the suffering and alleged betrayal of his comrades. Winter quotes Hitler: “The shame of indignation and the disgrace of defeat burned my brow. . . . hatred grew in me, hatred for those responsible for this deed.” Further: “I, for my part, decided to go into politics.” » [Back to text](#)
13. The source here is Jonathan Vance’s *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, also cited in Chapter Four. » [Back to text](#)
14. Again, I’d like to thank James Middleton, in this case for his critical reading of these pages on the post-war era, and for his contribution to the paragraph on social activism in Canada. The quote about “a new faith and set of values” is his. On a related subject, he says that for many Canadians the Vimy Memorial kept the war visible and meaningful. Then, too, the public’s respect for Vimy suggests that while few non-veterans may have dwelt on the war, most didn’t forget it either. » [Back to text](#)
15. The source here is Lehmann-Haupt, cited above. The Robert Hughes quote is from the latter’s *Time* magazine review of *The Great War and Modern Memory*, October 20, 1975. » [Back to text](#)

16. John Lessingham writes that Fussell's book shows us how shocking the soldiers' experience was, "not only in its unheroic misery but also in the amount of dissimulation, stupidity, and sheer incompetence they encountered." He's referring to the First World War, of course, but his words might apply to any example of modern warfare's "industrialized horror and bureaucratic mendaciousness." See John Lessingham, "In Memoriam: Paul Fussell," *n+1 Magazine*, June 7, 2012. » [Back to text](#)
17. Absurdity is the "ridiculously incongruous or unreasonable." Philosophically, it tends to reflect the view that "there is no order or value in human life or in the universe." It is "the condition or state in which humans exist in a meaningless, irrational universe wherein people's lives have no purpose or meaning." (Source: thefreedictionary.com) » [Back to text](#)
18. See Paul Fussell on Thomas Pynchon in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 329. Note Fussell's remark that "Irony is the attendant of hope and the fuel of hope is innocence." » [Back to text](#)
19. John Lessingham on Fussell and irony: "*The Great War's* central insight is that 'every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected.' Its central image is the Virgin of Albert, a steepletop statue damaged by shellfire so that she appeared to be hurling the infant Christ into the desolation below." This image is reproduced on a postcard in *Soldier for his times*, p. 64. » [Back to text](#)
20. The source of this remark about the postwar floodtide of irony is p. 294 of *Rites of Spring*. » [Back to text](#)
21. These quotes from Eksteins have two sources: i) *Rites of Spring*, p. 2 ("scale of values and beliefs"; "single most significant event") and p. 279 ("fog of existential questioning"; "the soldier represented a creative force"), and ii) Eksteins's 2012 CBC Radio interview with Paul Kennedy ("de-definition"; "system of values and ideas").

The phrase “the urge to create and the urge to destroy” is from *Rites of Spring*, p. 427, while the remarks about preserving a system of values and Germany’s Weimar Republic are from the interview. The Weimar Republic, created in 1919, was unable to resolve Germany’s post-war problems and was overthrown by Hitler in 1933. Those unhappy with Weimar tended to see it, as Sansom says in *Dominion*, as an era of post-imperial decadence and disorder. Their answer: order and discipline. » [Back to text](#)

22. For the United States, individualism was nothing new. In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville saw that it was fundamental to American society. As for service losing ground to *self*-service, Bob Dylan says “you’re gonna have to serve somebody. / It may be the devil or it may be the Lord.” The self is not an option, Dylan implies, and a century of culturally-endorsed self-service seems to bear this out. As Jacques Maritain put it, “we do not need a truth to serve us, we need a truth that we can serve.” » [Back to text](#)

23. About the veteran, Eksteins writes: “The soldier became then not just the harbinger but the very agent of the modern aesthetic, the progenitor of destruction but also the embodiment of the future. Any hope for that future resided exclusively in the individual imagination.” (*Rites of Spring*, p. 282.) And about the impact of World War One, there were “its extraordinary convulsions; . . . the doubt, the gradual destruction of a framework, of systems of meaning. Within that context, what is left is life itself, experience itself, perhaps the exhilaration of life itself.” (Source: the Eksteins interview.) » [Back to text](#)

24. John Lessingham refers to “ironic subjectivity” in his piece on Fussell.
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25. The passage about “a new and vital realm of activity” appears on p. 284 of *Rites of Spring*. » [Back to text](#)

26. See Paul Fussell’s *Thank God for the Atom Bomb and Other Essays*, 1988. See also Joseph Heller’s “I Am the Bombardier,” *New York Times Magazine*,

May 7, 1995: “The bomb dropped in August. I had been discharged in June. I remember where I was. I had been taken to the race track by a good friend of mine, and as we were coming out they were handing out newspapers – ‘Atom Bomb, Atom Bomb.’ Nobody knew what it was except it was a very big deal. I thought, *What a wonderful thing!*” » [Back to text](#)

27. Stephen E. Ambrose: “On the fiftieth anniversary of V.E. Day, I was with Joe Heller, a bombardier with the Twelfth Air Force, and the author of *Catch-22*. Heller told me, “I never had a bad officer. . . . Every single officer from when I went into the service to going over to Italy to flying the missions to when I got discharged, every one of them was good.” (*The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s Over Germany, 1944-1945*, p. 151.) » [Back to text](#)

28. “In the book,” Heller writes, “opposition to the war against Hitler was taken for granted.” The source of this remark is a short article by Heller entitled “Reeling in *Catch-22*.” Published in *The Sixties*, edited by Lynda Rosen Obst (1977), it is also appended to the 50th anniversary edition. » [Back to text](#)

29. See Sam Merrill’s 1975 *Playboy* interview with Heller, reprinted in *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, 1993, p. 148. About the war: “. . . I saw it as a war of necessity. Everybody did. Young people today don’t know what it’s like to fight in a war that makes sense to anybody. And neither did the people in my parents’ generation. World War One and the earlier wars in Europe were as nonsensical as Vietnam.”

It may have been a war of necessity, but Heller saw the evil in it and the culpability of men on both sides. In the same interview, he recalls a low-altitude bomb-and-straft mission carried out by members of his squadron: “They couldn’t find any military targets, so they shot up everything that moved: women, children, animals. The men were in good spirits after that mission.” » [Back to text](#)

30. From Heller's "I Am the Bombardier," *New York Times Magazine*, May 7, 1995:

Almost all our bombing missions were bridges. I didn't think about the people on the ground. I would guess very few military personnel or civilians were injured by our bombs. But I would also say that if we had been bombing cities I doubt if it would have bothered me. It would bother me now. I was an ignorant kid. I was a hero in a movie. I did not believe for a second that I could be injured. I did not really believe that anyone was being injured. Until Avignon [his thirty-seventh mission], the war was the most marvelous experience in my life. . . . for me and I think for many people looking back – it was wonderful. I'm telling you, the war was wonderful.

Even after Avignon, and despite the fear he carried with him on every remaining mission, he was still relatively safe and insulated from combat. "Twenty-one years old," he wrote in "I Am the Bombardier." "I had no idea what war was like until I read about the Vietnam War." » [Back to text](#)

31. The *Free Online Dictionary* defines "catch-22" as: "1a. A situation in which a desired outcome or solution is impossible to attain because of a set of inherently illogical rules or conditions; . . . 2. A situation or predicament characterized by absurdity or senselessness. 3. A contradictory or self-defeating course of action. 4. A tricky or disadvantageous condition; a catch." Heller's definition ("There was only one catch . . .") is on p. 46 of the novel. » [Back to text](#)

32. In depicting Yossarian's desertion, Heller makes his hero's escape a brave and responsible act. Not only does Yossarian plan to rescue a young girl in Rome and take her to safety in Sweden, but by deserting he avoids betraying his comrades. His senior officers have given him a choice: an honourable discharge if he supports their raising the required number of missions, or a court martial if he refuses. Yossarian's desertion is proof, John W. Aldridge writes, that he "has managed to remain morally alive and able to take responsibility for his life in a totally irresponsible world." See "The Loony Horror of it All – *Catch-22* Turns 25," reprinted in the 50th anniversary edition, p. 511. » [Back to text](#)

33. The quote about antiwar and antigovernment feelings is from “Reeling in *Catch-22*.” See also the interview with Sam Merrill, p. 160: “As I’ve said, *Catch-22* wasn’t really about World War Two. It was about American society during the Cold War, during the Korean War, and about the possibility of a Vietnam.” » [Back to text](#)

34. In his introduction to the 50th anniversary edition, Christopher Buckley writes that *Catch-22* was an immediate bestseller in England. In the United States, it “never won a literary prize and never made the *New York Times* hardcover bestseller list.” » [Back to text](#)

35. See Jonathan R. Eller’s “The Story of *Catch-22*,” also appended to the 50th anniversary edition, about the novel and the darker side of the American dream. » [Back to text](#)

36. Heller, from “Reeling in *Catch-22*”:

Catch-22 came to the attention of college students at about the same time that the moral corruption of the Vietnam War became evident. The treatment of the military as corrupt, ridiculous and asinine could be applied literally to that war.

And:

There was a change in spirit, a new spirit of healthy irreverence. There was a general feeling that the platitudes of Americanism were horseshit. Number one, they didn’t work. Number two, they weren’t true. Number three, the people giving voice to them didn’t believe them either. » [Back to text](#)

37. In 1986, when *Catch* turned twenty-five, Aldridge wrote:

In fact, many readers must have sensed that beneath the comic surfaces Mr. Heller was saying something outrageous, unforgivably outrageous, not just about the idiocy of war but about our whole way of life and the system of false values on which it is based. The horror he exposed was not confined to the battlefield or the bombing mission but permeated the entire labyrinthine structure of establishment

power. . . . It was undoubtedly this recognition that the book was something far broader in scope than a mere indictment of war . . . that gave it such pertinence to readers who discovered it over the next decade. For with the seemingly eternal and mindless escalation of the war in Vietnam, history had at last caught up with the book and caused it to be more and more widely recognized as a deadly accurate metaphorical portrait of the nightmarish conditions in which the country appeared to be engulfed. » [Back to text](#)

38. The exchange between Milo Minderbinder and Yossarian is in Chapter 24. About Minderbinder and post-war America, see p. 150 in the Merrill interview: “. . . I gave him a mental and moral simplicity that, to my mind, makes him a horrifyingly dangerous person because he lacks evil intent.” His pathology, in other words, is sincere, his reach infinite. » [Back to text](#)

39. Heller: “A general disintegration of belief took place then, and it affected *Catch-22* in that the form of the novel became almost disintegrated. *Catch-22* was a collage; if not in structure, then in the ideology of the novel itself.” (Source: “Reeling in *Catch-22*,” p. 314 in Obst.)

Catch-22, Heller tells Sam Merrill, is more radical in form than content. “The morality is rather orthodox,” Heller says, “almost medieval.” See *Conversations with Joseph Heller*, p. 171. » [Back to text](#)

40. Jonathan Eller: “The postmodern experimental structure was worthy of critical investigation, and the satire engaged students (and professors) who were skeptical of the postwar military establishment.” See the 50th anniversary edition, p. 472. » [Back to text](#)

41. Aldridge writes about *Catch-22* that “the comic fable that ends in horror has become more and more clearly a reflection of the altogether uncomic and horrifying realities of the world in which we live and hope to survive.” » [Back to text](#)

42. The quotation about “feelings of helplessness and persecution in *Catch-22*” is from “Reeling in *Catch-22*,” as are the references to “they” and “them.” » [Back to text](#)
43. The scene with the psychiatrist is in Chapter 27. » [Back to text](#)
44. See Aldridge, the 50th anniversary edition, p. 513. » [Back to text](#)
45. All quotes from *The Remains of the Day* are from the Lester & Orpen Dennys paperback, 1989. » [Back to text](#)
46. The Merchant-Ivory film of *Remains* concludes with a tragically wistful, romantic scene in which Miss Kenton and her bus pull away, leaving Stevens standing in the rain, bereft. Relative to the book’s conclusion, it’s a bit of a letdown. » [Back to text](#)
47. See pp. 73-76 for Lord Darlington’s views on Versailles. » [Back to text](#)
48. In 2012, *The Guardian* published an article by Salman Rushdie entitled “Rereading *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro.” In this piece, Rushdie writes that Lord Darlington “is destroyed by a personal code of ethics. His disapproval of the ungentlemanly harshness towards the Germans of the Treaty of Versailles is what propels him towards his collaborationist doom. Ideals, Ishiguro shows us, can corrupt as thoroughly as cynicism.” » [Back to text](#)
49. The crucial passages about Lord Darlington and Mr. Lewis are on pp. 85-87 and 101-3 of the novel. » [Back to text](#)
50. For a dramatization of the transition from gentlemanly politics to no-nonsense military pragmatism, see the 1943 British film “The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp.” Near the end of the film, the German character Theo, an anti-Nazi veteran of the First World War, argues for a down-and-dirty, no holds barred response to Hitler’s evil: there must be no more playing by gentleman’s rules, and the Nazis must be defeated by any means necessary. Theo is by then a

wholly sympathetic character, and the wartime British audience was meant to find his views persuasive. » [Back to text](#)

51. In the film version of *Remains*, the firing of the Jewish maids differs in at least one key respect. In the novel, there's no reason to think that Ruth and Sarah aren't young British working class women, but their film counterparts, sisters Elsa and Irma, are German, with the implication that if they cannot find work elsewhere in Britain and *together* – they refuse to be separated – they will be sent home to their deaths.

In both the book and the film, Darlington later regrets his actions, very deeply it seems, but the sacking remains an ugly story. See especially pp. 145-51. » [Back to text](#)

52. Stevens's defensive remarks about loyalty and dignity are on pp. 199-201. » [Back to text](#)

53. In an interview with novelist Graham Swift, Ishiguro said: "I tend to be attracted to pre-war and postwar settings because I'm interested in this business of values and ideals being tested, and people having to face up to the notion that their ideals weren't quite what they thought they were before the test came."

In the same interview: "The butler is a good metaphor for the relationship of very ordinary, small people to power. Most of us aren't given governments to run or coup d'états to lead. We have to offer up the little services we have perfected to various people: to causes, to employers, to organizations, and hope for the best – that we approve of the way it gets used."

Also: "Stevens is obsessed with this thing that he calls dignity." As for his eventual distress and self-understanding: "It's the dignity of being human, of being honest. . . . there is something heroic about coming to terms with very painful truths about yourself." (*BOMB Magazine*, Fall 1989.) » [Back to text](#)

54. In his *Guardian* article, Rushdie says about Stevens: “It was his father, also a butler, who epitomised this idea of greatness; yet it was just this notion which stood between father and son, breeding deep resentments and an inarticulacy of the emotions that destroyed their love.” Fair enough, but then: “The real story here is that of a man destroyed by the ideas upon which he built his life.” Further: “His whole life has been a foolish mistake, and his only defence against the horror of this knowledge is the same capacity for self-deception which has been his undoing.” But Stevens *hasn't* been destroyed by his ideas, or by anything else. Self-deception and evasion *have* characterized his life, but they are done with by journey's end.

This, too, seems off the mark: “In this matter Stevens is an unreliable narrator, making excuses for his lordship – ‘Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all’ – but the reader is allowed to see more clearly than the butler, and can't make any such excuse.” Darlington, it is true, has a naïve pliability, and delusion comes easily to him, as it does to Stevens, but he desperately wants to avert another war. That, and his short-lived association with Mosley's follower, make him gullible and incautious and, in the case of the Jewish maids, shamefully wrong. But that's all.

Rushdie also writes that it is Stevens's longing for the sort of professionalism personified by his Victorian father “that has wrecked his one chance of finding romantic love.” But what if Stevens is drawn less to romance than devoted service? In any case, the novel's romantic conclusion, though sad, is far from tragic. Stevens and Miss Kenton learn that someone they love loves them. Stevens, particularly fortunate, recognizes at last the depth of his feelings for Miss Kenton and, above all, his need and capacity for connection.

And he does realize that his life has been a foolish mistake; hence his thoughts and feelings on the pier. Now, as he turns from past to future, he is undeceived and looks to the remains of his day with the will to be and to have something different. Rushdie's review and the Merchant Ivory film don't do justice to the story's final depth and subtlety. » [Back to text](#)

55. All quotes from *Never Let Me Go* are from the Vintage Canada trade paperback edition, 2010. » [Back to text](#)

56. Again, *Never Let Me Go* takes place in an alternative late-twentieth century Britain, but some aspects of that time and place are entirely familiar. Students listen to music cassettes, for example, and Walkmans are on the market. » [Back to text](#)

57. See especially pp. 260-65 for Miss Emily's summary of the movement, now a thing of the past:

The world didn't want to be reminded how the donation programme really worked. They didn't want to think about you students, or about the conditions you were brought up in. In other words, my dears, they wanted you back in the shadows. . . . in the end, as you know, we were obliged to close, and today there's hardly a trace left of the work we did. . . . All you'll find, as ever, are those vast government 'homes,' and even if they're somewhat better than they once were, let me tell you, my dears, you'd not sleep for a week if you saw what still goes on in some of those places. » [Back to text](#)

58. Madame's reaction to Kathy's dancing is described on p. 272. » [Back to text](#)

59. See, for example, "A sinister harvest," Theo Tait's review of *Never Let Me Go*, published in *The Telegraph*, March 13, 2005. Tait sees the novel as "a parable about mortality. The horribly indoctrinated voices of the Hailsham students who tell each other pathetic little stories to ward off the grisly truth about the future – they belong to us." Again, there are many ways to read this book. » [Back to text](#)

60. See Roger Ebert's film review of "Never Let Me Go," September 22, 2010, archived at www.rogerebert.com. » [Back to text](#)

Conclusion: Lost and found

1. As noted in the Introduction, our focus is on the modern, developed Western world, and the analysis throughout is limited to Britain and continental Europe and their former colonies in North America. » [Back to text](#)
2. The source of the quote about “extraordinary convulsions,” cited elsewhere, is Modris Eksteins’s 2012 CBC Radio interview with Paul Kennedy (“Ideas”). The reference to an entire set of “values and beliefs” is from Eksteins’s *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, p. 2. Both quotes are cited in the previous chapter. » [Back to text](#)
3. The source of the passages in the paragraph about the social dimension is *Rites of Spring*, p. 351. » [Back to text](#)
4. About adversarial behaviour, political or otherwise, see Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, especially Chapter III, “Adversary Proceedings.” » [Back to text](#)
5. Google Images has many versions of this celebrated cartoon (“We have met the enemy . . .”) by the great Walt Kelly (1913-1973). » [Back to text](#)
6. In his 2005 commencement address at Kenyon College, from which this quote is drawn, Wallace told students that “the so-called real world of men and money and power hums merrily along in a pool of fear and anger and frustration and craving and worship of self.” He said that the “really important kind of freedom involves attention and awareness and discipline, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them over and over in myriad petty, unsexy ways every day.” » [Back to text](#)
7. The reference is to David Brooks’s “High-Five Nation,” *The New York Times*, September 15, 2009, cited also in the Introduction. A more recent issue (April 7, 2014) has another piece by Brooks. Entitled “What Suffering Does,” it

includes: “People shoot for happiness but feel formed through suffering. . . . Think of the way Franklin Roosevelt came back deeper and more empathetic after being struck with polio. Often, physical or social suffering can give people an outsider’s perspective, an attuned awareness of what other outsiders are enduring.” One’s own suffering, in other words, can be the wellspring of empathy for others. Further, Brooks says, the right response to suffering is “seeing life as a moral drama, placing the hard experiences in a moral context and trying to redeem something bad by turning it into something sacred.”

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8. The quote about blowing one’s own horn is from “The Bodhisattva as Compassion Warrior” (Lewis Richmond, *The Huffington Post*, July 3, 2012). On a related note, British novelist James Runcie refers to our “shouty modern life in which people declare their most intimate secrets either on Facebook or over their second pint of lager.” Closer to home, David Brooks ridicules our “age of the selfie,” and, more harshly, James Parker scorns our modern self’s “centripetal black hole suck”: “to us, the great solipsists, . . . the recognition of another human being requires a galvanic imaginative act.” » [Back to text](#)
9. The source of Susan Cain’s remarks is a *Globe and Mail* article (“Giving introverts permission to be themselves”), January 26, 2012. The movement from morals to magnetism, she writes, has changed forever “who we are and whom we admire, how we act at job interviews and what we look for in an employee, how we court our mates and raise our children.” » [Back to text](#)
10. See Michael Valpy’s series on social cohesion in *The Toronto Star*. Comprising the “2013 Atkinson Series: Me, You, Us,” the first of Valpy’s articles appeared on December 5, 2013 (“What binds us together, what pulls us apart”) and the last on December 22 (“How to put Canada back together again”). In collaboration with Frank Graves of EKOS Research, Valpy, a 2013 Atkinson Fellow, focuses on Canada’s social issues and the need for economic and democratic reform. » [Back to text](#)

11. A social contract is a set of shared obligations undertaken for society's sake. Consciously or otherwise, individuals accept these obligations in order to live in the sort of society they want, even if a measure of personal sacrifice is required. In relation to Toronto, for example, Roger Keil of York University writes that in an era of globalization and neo-liberalism the city's leaders have broken the social contract "in which it is a human right not to be poor in this city." ("The Divided City," David Rider, *The Toronto Star*, November 28, 2014.) »

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12. The quotes about "social fragmentation and social exclusion" and, in the following paragraph, "globalization-and-technology assaults" are from Valpy's "How to put Canada back together again." Guy Standing, a British economist, coined the term *precarariat*: it "consists of those who feel their lives and identities are made up of disjointed bits, in which they cannot construct a desirable narrative or build a career, . . ." See also three other *Star* articles: "Precarious work further divides a divided city" (Sara Mojtehdzadeh, December 3, 2014); "Toronto is divided, but not as badly as other major cities" (Eric Andrew-Gee, December 7, 2014); and "New report warns of growing income gap in Toronto" (Alex Ballingall, October 6, 2015). The second article notes the impact of fiscal policies and budget cuts but pins much of the blame for income disparity on "macro-level trends," structural forces beyond the control of any city or country. According to this view, the loss of manufacturing jobs is key, and policies favouring a self-regulated free market are the source of a growing underclass, the purpose of which is to serve the interests of those wealthier and more privileged in an involuntary and class-based service on the grand scale. »

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13. *Valpy* writes that Ursula Franklin uses the term *excommunication* to describe social exclusion. » [Back to text](#)

14. The source of the quote about capitalist *devotion* is Ayn Rand. See the bizarre but prescient piece she wrote for *Parade* in 1980, two years before her death.

Excerpts are reprinted in *The New Yorker* for July 29, 2013. A sample: “. . . and I predict that by 2013 my influence will be profound, and a new generation of leaders will hallow my name, and devotion to self-interest and capitalism and the free market will not be the exception but the rule, and these leaders will naturally share my disapproval of religion, my support of abortion rights, and my love of Godiva chocolates.” » [Back to text](#)

15. Katharine Viner of *The Guardian* wrote about the digital revolution in a 2013 article entitled “The rise of the reader: journalism in the age of the open web”: “digital is a huge conceptual change, a sociological change, a cluster bomb blowing apart who we are and how our world is ordered, how we see ourselves, how we live. It’s a change we’re in the middle of, so close up that sometimes it’s hard to see. . . . and it is happening at an almost unbelievable speed.”

The following authors discuss the digital age. Many focus on the apparent link between social media, increased narcissism, and decreased empathy:

Jaron Lanier: see, for example, Janet Maslin’s interview with Lanier in *The New York Times* (“Fighting Words Against Big Data,” May 5, 2013), Scott Timberg’s interview with the author (“Jaron Lanier: The Internet destroyed the middle class,” salon.com, May 12, 2013), and Lanier’s 2010 *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*. Other sources include Larry Getlen’s review of *Gadget* in the *New York Post*, January 10, 2010, Michiko Kakutani’s review of *Gadget* in *The New York Times*, January 15, 2010 (“A Rebel in Cyberspace, Fighting Collectivism”), and Nora Young’s CBC Radio interview with Lanier, February 2010.

Zosia Bielski: the source here is an article entitled “Today’s college kids are 40-per-cent less empathetic, study finds,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 1, 2010. A related article – “What Me Care? Young Are Less Empathetic” – discusses decreased empathy and increased narcissism but without linking them to digital culture. Written by Jamil Zaki and published in *Scientific American*, January 19, 2011, the second article suggests that the source of diminished empathy could be increased social isolation and the kind of information young Americans “consume.”

Stephen Marche: see his 2012 article in *The Atlantic*, “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?”

Josh Tapper: Tapper published the following articles in *thestar.com* (*The Toronto Star*'s online edition): “Your brain online”; “‘Constant connectivity’ the norm for many, says study”; “Is the Internet bad for us?” and “Internet addicts face constant temptation, non-believers.” The first three articles were published on January 25, 2013, the fourth on February 1, 2013.

Giles Slade: the source in this case is Jian Ghomeshi's January 15, 2013 interview with Slade on CBC Radio's “Q” program. Slade is the author of *The Big Disconnect: The Story of Technology and Loneliness*, 2012.

Rafael Behr: see Behr's review of Sherry Turkel's *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (*The Observer*, January 30, 2011).

Camille Paglia: the reference is to a piece Paglia published in *Smithsonian* magazine, November 2012, entitled “Why Camille Paglia is Alarmed About the Future of Art: Is the rise of secularism behind the general malaise in the fine arts?”

Surely something deep – a fundamental source of art, poetry, sympathy, and intuitive perception – is lost when soul and body switch places as cultural priorities, and religious devotion, spiritual practice, or humanism give way to an emphasis on physical health, fitness, and “feeling good.” See Shad's April 22, 2015 CBC interview with Carl Cederström, co-author with Andre Spicer of *The Wellness Syndrome*. The cover copy for this book refers to health and happiness as “the new markers of ‘morality’ or ‘immorality’ in . . . a world where feeling good has become indistinguishable from being good.”

See also “God and Facebook: Is social networking changing religion?” available at Religionlink.com. » [Back to text](#)

16. Re “heroic narrative” and “digital evangelists,” see Behr's review of *Alone Together*, cited above. As for the impact of new media, one writer says: “anything as

epochal as a medium shift has complicated, unpredictable, multiform effects that reveal themselves over centuries.” (Source: Adam Hammond in his review of Michael Harris’s *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We’ve Lost in a World of Constant Connection* [the November 2014 issue of *Literary Review of Canada*.])

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17. On November 15, 2013 *The Toronto Star* published an article entitled “Mainstreaming of mean: Our age of nastiness, deceit and malice,” which reminds us that the dark side of digital culture is part of a broader cultural darkness. » [Back to text](#)

18. It is Scott Timberg who describes Lanier as a digital visionary. The source of Lanier’s remark that “technology will get to everybody eventually,” an echo of Yossarian’s “they’re after everybody,” is the Timberg interview. » [Back to text](#)

19. Janet Maslin refers to Lanier as the “father of virtual reality” and a “megawizard in futurist circles,” and notes his views on spying. » [Back to text](#)

20. Robert Graham of Errata Security in Atlanta, points to “a lack of outrage among U.S. citizens about NSA spying and says there is little support among U.S. politicians for limiting the NSA’s abilities.” (“Tech giants urge crackdown on Internet spying,” Michael Lewis, *The Toronto Star*, December 9, 2013. Lewis looks at a recent coalition of tech giants formed “to counter claims the companies voluntarily gave the government access to users’ personal information.” One thing we know for sure is that it’s common practice for companies to sell their customer’s personal data to other commercial interests.) » [Back to text](#)

21. The source of Drake’s remarks is an interview conducted by Michael Enright on CBC Radio’s “Sunday Edition,” December 8, 2013. » [Back to text](#)

22. See Jeremy Kinsman at <https://www.opencanada.org/features/kinsman-with-revelation-of-widespread-surveillance-of-canadian-communications-both-by-the-nsa-and-the-communications-security-establishment-canada-has-privacy-lost-out-to-security-concerns/> » [Back to text](#)

23. The source is Tony Burman's "Why Edward Snowden, NSA Whistleblower, is more hero than traitor," *The Toronto Star*, June 15, 2013. » [Back to text](#)
24. In April 2014, *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for public service journalism in recognition of their NSA coverage. The editor of *The Washington Post* acknowledged that without Snowden's leaks it wouldn't have been possible to know "how far this country had shifted away from the rights of the individual in favor of state power." Snowden called the Pulitzer "a vindication for everyone who believes the public has a role in government" and praised the winners' "extraordinary service to our society." (Source: Mitch Potter, *The Toronto Star*, April 14, 2014.) » [Back to text](#)
25. The Behr quote is from his review of Turkle's *Alone Together*, cited in note 15. For a cheerier take on "our fragmented world of endless choice" and the joy of disappearing into "a virtual reality where everything is possible," see Jack Jones in *The Guardian* ("Young people don't have tribes any more. We have smartphones," March 18, 2016). "I am liberated from the here and now," Jones writes, "and can't remember when I was last bored." » [Back to text](#)
26. Jeremy Kinsman: "Have excessively powerful U.S. agencies exaggerated the threats, oversold the remedies, and intimidated elected leaders into accepting the dilution of rights of citizens as well as the intrusion into the rights of foreigners?" See the note re Jeremy Kinsman above. » [Back to text](#)
27. From Behr's review of *Alone Together*: "Turkle's interviews debunk the myth that web-savvy kids don't care about privacy. Rather, they see it as a lost cause. The social obligation to be part of the network is too strong even for those who resent the endless exposure." » [Back to text](#)
28. See the note about Thomas Drake above. » [Back to text](#)
29. Re Lanier, the references are to *You Are Not a Gadget* and Nora Young's interview with Lanier. The quotes are from the latter. » [Back to text](#)

30. The phrases “incipient robotism” and “antidote to human frailty” are drawn from Behr’s review. » [Back to text](#)
31. About the notion that our tools reshape us, usually attributed to Marshall McLuhan, see:
<http://mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2013/04/01/we-shape-our-tools-and-thereafter-our-tools-shape-us> » [Back to text](#)
32. The source of Camille Paglia’s remarks is *Smithsonian* magazine, cited above. The phrase “dazzlingly designed forms of cognitive waste” is Lanier’s, quoted in the Maslin article. » [Back to text](#)
33. See Marche: “Nostalgia for the good old days of disconnection would not just be pointless, it would be hypocritical and ungrateful. But the very magic of the new machines, the efficiency and elegance with which they serve us, obscures what isn’t being served: everything that matters.” If empathy is something that *does* matter, so are curiosity, openness, and a sense of our place in the cosmos. The big question, I believe, is whether digital technology will, in the long run, suppress or stimulate existential inquiry, spiritual exploration, and the capacity for wonder and humility. » [Back to text](#)
34. The source of the statement about optimizing our brains is Nicholas Carr, quoted in Josh Tapper’s series on the brain and the Internet, cited above. It is Tapper who refers to our ability to focus, store memory, and so on. » [Back to text](#)
35. See Turkle, quoted in Behr’s article: “Millions of us appear to find simulations of life more alluring than life. We are training ourselves to fear a world unmediated by computers.” » [Back to text](#)
36. Perhaps the twenty-first century digital funhouse fills a vacuum left by the retreat of religious thought and practice among the many for whom religion or spirituality is at best unfashionable. In any case, it’s easy to see how

games and simulated reality – less demanding than religious inquiry or practice – might satisfy, to a degree, the desire for an alternative and transcendent reality. » [Back to text](#)

37. The source here is Michael Valpy’s “The new kids on the block,” *The Toronto Star*, December 8, 2013. The student quoted about Facebook is a young psychology graduate named Aftab Mirzaei. » [Back to text](#)

38. See Pauline Dakin, CBC News (cbc.ca). On February 24, 2014, Dakin presented two pieces on social media, young people, and the issues of intimacy, reflection, and empathy. In one piece, Matt Dixon, a researcher at the University of British Columbia, says that self-reflection is crucial to understanding the feelings of others. “Stepping back,” he says, is a prerequisite for the ability to feel empathy; stepping back and thinking about what is not immediately present in your environment.” The point, of course, is that continuous digital connectivity discourages the examined life and any kind of stepping back. If John Dewey was right and we learn not from experience but *reflecting* on experience, this can’t be a good thing. » [Back to text](#)

39. It’s the all-out, limitless nature of social media that makes the technology unique. “The relentlessness is what is so new,” Marche says, “so potentially transformative. Facebook never takes a break.” For more sobering stuff on Facebook, see Hossein Derakhshan’s “A blogfather’s lament for the Web,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 19, 2015. Facebook, he writes, “likes you to stay within it” and to that end discourages hyperlinks (“the basic law of the Web”): “this entertaining, passive, linear, and centralized space is not the Web I used to know. It is more like television.” » [Back to text](#)

40. On the subject of narcissism, see the publications listed in note 15, some of which discuss the University of Michigan’s research on narcissism and empathy. Zaki refers as well to Jean M. Twenge’s related work at San Diego State University. » [Back to text](#)

41. The quotations in this paragraph (“Studies conducted . . .”) are from Behr’s review of *Alone Together*. » [Back to text](#)
42. See Marche. The quotes about Facebook, the Australian study, and narcissism are from this source. » [Back to text](#)
43. This remark by Elias Aboujaoude is cited in Tapper’s “Is the Internet bad for us?” » [Back to text](#)
44. Again, see note 15 for the titles of relevant articles. Zaki, for example, states that in terms of empathy, “the American personality is shifting in an ominous direction.” » [Back to text](#)
45. Lanier: “I fear that we are beginning to design ourselves to suit digital models of us, and I worry about a leaching of empathy and humanity in that process.” (Source: *You Are Not a Gadget*, cited by Marche.) » [Back to text](#)
46. This refers, once again, to studies conducted at the University of Michigan. Related research is being conducted at the University of Indiana, the site of iPEAR (the Interdisciplinary Program on Empathy and Altruism Research). Sara Konrath, the program’s principal investigator, recently wrote: “The ability to empathize is like a muscle capable of growth, atrophy, disability, and even regeneration (think Scrooge). People have different innate capacities for building certain muscles, just as we have different incentives for being empathetic and experiences in honing our skills to empathize. For some people, empathy comes easily and naturally; for others, concerted effort is required to stretch our imaginations beyond ourselves.” » [Back to text](#)
47. Bielski presents alternative explanations for the apparent decline in empathy among young adults, such as increased materialism and a greater likelihood of living alone. She also notes the hypothesis that reduced empathy in the young is related to “the influx of callous reality TV shows and the astronomical growth of social networking and texting – technologies that allow people to

tune others out when they don't feel like engaging.” Sensational or to the point, the publisher's blurb on Giles Slade's *The Big Disconnect* summarizes our unease about the Internet and its impact: “Tablets, smart phones, and social networks all promise better opportunities to connect and stay connected. Yet what they really do is replace face-to-face interactions and disguise our growing inability to trust others.” » [Back to text](#)

48. Marche: “What Facebook has revealed about human nature . . . is that a connection is not the same thing as a bond, and that instant and total connection is no salvation, no ticket to a happier, better world or a more liberated version of humanity.” » [Back to text](#)

49. Something needs to be said about the Internet as a major source of pornography, some of it violent, dehumanizing, desensitizing, and criminal. If excessive Internet use diminishes respect for and a sense of duty to others, it will feed a culture in which vicious pornography thrives. » [Back to text](#)

50. Graves's remarks are from “Q&A with EKOS Research president Frank Graves,” another article in Valpy's Atkinson series. Graves says that EKOS research shows no correlation between immigration to Canada and a “corrosive impact on social cohesion.” “It really hasn't happened,” he says. “There are some issues, but we find that people are not withdrawing into their own communities.” » [Back to text](#)

51. The source with respect to Ursula Franklin is Valpy's “What binds us together, what pulls us apart.” » [Back to text](#)

52. Smart private sector companies encourage their staff's sense of “belonging, solidarity, and common purpose,” picking up the slack as traditional social bonds loosen. » [Back to text](#)

53. The Valpy series notes the apolitical, even anti-political, views of angry or indifferent young Canadians, and addresses the evolution of our gerontocracy. » [Back to text](#)

54. One of the Valpy articles focuses on the exploitation of the young through unpaid internships. In “Internships: educational opportunity or opportunistic scam?” Valpy places interning in a political context while noting young peoples’ declining interest in politics and public service. » [Back to text](#)
55. Valpy cites Yvonne Hébert in “The new kids on the block.” But perhaps the tide has turned, in North America at least. Youth support for Justin Trudeau in Canada in 2015 and Bernie Sanders in the U.S. election in 2016 may signal a new spirit of social concern and a renewed interest in progressive, civil, “hopeful” politics. Perhaps we’re just hungry for something new, better, and more positive, whatever our age. See note 57 below. » [Back to text](#)
56. See the references to fault-lines and advanced democracies in Valpy’s “Canada: it really is our home and native land,” part of the Atkinson series. » [Back to text](#)
57. In Canada, Graves writes, we have been moving from a collectivist to an individualistic ethic and a diminished role for the state. Recently, however, public opinion may have turned against this: “Just about everybody thinks we should be going for a more active rather than a less active state,” he says. There’s been “a general societal epiphany that the whole recipe of monetarism, minimal government, lower government, less taxes was a cruel hoax.” (Source: the Q&A article cited above.) Perhaps this sheds light on last year’s Conservative Party defeat. » [Back to text](#)
58. Guy Standing calls the precariat “the new dangerous class. . . . Chronically insecure people easily lose their altruism, tolerance and respect for non-conformity. If they have no alternative on offer, they can be led to attribute their plight to strangers in their midst. . . . It is a class in the making, approaching a consciousness of common vulnerability.” (Source: “You’ve served your purpose and now you’re trash,” part of the Atkinson series.) Standing’s remarks seem particularly chilling as I revise these pages in March 2016: right wing electoral demagoguery in the United States has hit a new low in its snake oil populism, racism, and xenophobia, and selecting a scapegoat or two seems an inevitable

part of this reactionary, populist package. Meanwhile, liberal, affluent America appears on the whole to have forgotten or discarded the disenfranchised, to its peril. » [Back to text](#)

59. See James Carroll's article on Pope Francis in the December 23, 2013 issue of *The New Yorker*: "Who Am I to Judge?" A year and a half later, the pontiff issued an encyclical (teaching document) on the environment in which he spoke of a "structurally perverse" economic system that exploits the poor and is turning the planet into an "immense pile of filth." (*The Toronto Star*, June 18, 2015: "Pope's bombshell climate change views could be a 'game-changer.'"). » [Back to text](#)
60. In this context, and bearing in mind the East's economic ascendancy, see Steve Paikin's March 17, 2014 TV Ontario interview with Daniel A. Bell of Beijing's Tsinghua University. Available on Youtube, this interview provides a succinct comparison of Western democracy and Chinese meritocracy. » [Back to text](#)
61. The source here is an excerpt from "Eichmann's Kant," Carsten Bagge Laustsen and Rasmus Ugilt, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Number 3, 2007. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines Kant's categorical imperative as "an unconditional moral obligation which is binding in all circumstances and is not dependent on a person's inclination or purpose." This moral obligation finds expression in a duty-based ethics. » [Back to text](#)
62. The remark about amnesia is from AL Kennedy's "It will take more than Peter Capaldi to repair the damage done to Britain," *The Observer*, August 11, 2013. » [Back to text](#)
63. See John Cassidy's review of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*. In "Forces of Divergence," published in the March 31, 2014 issue of *The New Yorker*, Cassidy summarizes Piketty's analysis of rising income inequality in the developed West and elsewhere. At the same time, he points to a global reduction in hunger and disease, quoting Angus Deaton's 2013 *The Great Escape*:

Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality: “More people are richer and fewer people live in dire poverty. Lives are longer and parents no longer watch a quarter of their children die.” Cassidy also acknowledges China’s success over the last three decades “in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of extreme poverty.” It’s easy to mark what’s gone wrong, essential to see what’s gone right. That said, as Scott Gilmore points out in *Macleans* magazine (December 31, 2014), though these are in many respects the best of times, many of us are nervous wrecks, tense and drained by distressing stories and images in the electronic media. Ironically, he says, media coverage tends to be about events unlikely to threaten us personally while distracting us from *real* dangers, such as climate change. If we don’t resist the stream of distractions and start focusing on real threats, he says, “the worst of times are coming.” » [Back to text](#)

64. In his 2012 interview with the CBC’s Paul Kennedy, Eksteins said:

. . . the potential for evil is great in human beings. Nevertheless, I think that, by and large, recent experience would say that the potential for survival, for positive creativity, is even greater. That’s as long as we remain aware of what happened. . . . I don’t doubt the need for history, for looking back on the past. History is a form of conscience. Without conscience there can be no humanity, and without humanity there can be no future. I think we need to look back on the horrors of the twentieth century and never forget them. As long as we do, I don’t think they’ll be repeated. » [Back to text](#)

65. In the same interview, Eksteins said that the twentieth century had been “a long introduction to our own age of doubt and uncertainty.” If, he said, “much of the eighteenth century and certainly the nineteenth century represented a period of certainty, enormous confidence, empire, industrialization, and science, the twentieth century was a period of deconstruction, of de-definition.” However: “doubt can lead to tolerance. Doubt can lead to humility. Doubt is certainly better than false certainty. . . . I would think and hope that this age of doubt will be with us for a very long time.” » [Back to text](#)

66. Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, refers to digital technology's evolving norms and practices in a Monocle 24 radio program first broadcast in 2013 and rebroadcast January 5, 2014. » [Back to text](#)
67. The quote about pushing meaning is from a short piece by Alexis Madrigal in *The Atlantic* magazine, January 23, 2013. The full quote: "It is these stories that remind me of the possibilities in today's communication tools. It's not that the Internet is superior or inferior or equal to or a replacement for face-to-face interaction, but all these services are there, and we sometimes can't be. Humans find ways to push meaning through the pipes." » [Back to text](#)
68. Francis's remarks are quoted in the article by James Carroll cited above. » [Back to text](#)
69. Rick Salutin's article, published in *The Toronto Star* on January 12, 2014, is entitled "The marriage of faith and activism in inner-city Chicago." On the subject of devotion, see David Brooks's remark, cited above, about redeeming something bad "by turning it into something sacred." Similar themes exist in the secular sphere, of course. Some successful men and women and a range of service organizations – Rotary's motto is "Service above Self" – dedicate themselves to making things better, helping others.
- Nor is it all about religious groups, service organizations, and the grateful. In his reply to a letter of apology, a real estate agent wrote: "No need to apologize, I'm here to help." A lot of people are here to help. » [Back to text](#)
70. If Francis scorns a "deified market," some Christians hold the opposite view and consider free enterprise divinely inspired. In an article on former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's religious agenda ("Understanding Harper's Evangelical Mission," *The Tyee*, March 26, 2012), Andrew Nikiforuk says that some fundamentalist Protestant churches, including Harper's Christian and Missionary Alliance, support libertarian economics on religious grounds. » [Back to text](#)

71. For a major study on religion, empathy, and the application of the Golden Rule, see Karen Armstrong's *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*, published in 2006. Armstrong introduces the religions of the Axial Age (approximately 900–200 BCE) and details their shared belief in empathy, the compassionate life, and “the practice of disciplined sympathy” (p. 391). She writes: “As far as the Axial sages were concerned, respect for the sacred rights of all beings – not orthodox belief – was religion. If people behaved with kindness and generosity to their fellows, they could save the world” (p. xiv). The quote about “a spirituality of empathy and compassion” is also on p. xiv.

In this connection, *sympathy* involves our feeling badly for someone else, *empathy* with putting ourselves in that person's shoes, and *compassion* with suffering with him or her. The last asks the most of us: the resolve to act on what we feel.

Joanna Macy, author and teacher: “Compassion literally means to feel with, to suffer with. Everyone is capable of compassion, and yet everyone tends to avoid it because it's uncomfortable. And the avoidance produces psychic numbing – resistance to experiencing our pain for the world and other human beings.” (*Spirit of Service: Your Daily Stimulus for Making a Difference*, 2009.)

In a timely use of the term *empathy* in 2006, future President Barack Obama referred to his nation's “empathy deficit.” And in Canada, Wab Kinew, author of *The Reason You Walk* and the son of Tobasonakwut, an Anishinaabe survivor of a residential school in Northwestern Ontario, wrote in 2015 that “empathy is the beginning of reconciliation.” Also that “true leadership is about service and sacrifice.”

As for altruism, it's about placing the interests of others ahead of one's own. A universal precept. » [Back to text](#)

72. See the following about Rabbi Heschel's social activism and the unity of his spiritual and political beliefs: <https://theshalomcenter.org/node/174>

In 1965, Heschel, who was active in the American civil rights movement, marched in the front row with Martin Luther King in Alabama. Later he said he'd felt his "legs were praying," reflecting his integration of the sacred and mundane. Heschel, publically and controversially opposed to the war in Vietnam, died in 1972 three days after greeting anti-war activist and former priest Philip Berrigan on his release from prison in Danby, Connecticut. (See *Spiritual Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel in America*, Edward K. Kaplan. Kaplan writes that Heschel, though frail, wanted to "bear witness" with Berrigan and his supporters.)

Professor Susannah Heschel, the theologian's daughter, says that for her father the march from Selma to Montgomery "reminded him of the message of the prophets, whose primary concern was social injustice, and of his Hasidic forebears, for whom compassion for the suffering of other people defined a religious person." ("Following in my father's footsteps: Selma 40 years later," published in *Vox of Dartmouth*, April 4, 2005.)

Dr. King said that "everyone can be great because everyone can serve." Gandhi, a major influence on King's thought, said that "the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

A sign outside a church in an affluent part of Toronto: "Don't just give – serve."

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73. The actor and raconteur David Niven had a characteristically jokey take on duty. Asked why he always seemed so cheerful, he said: "Well, old bean, life is really so bloody awful that I feel it's my absolute duty to be chirpy and try and make everybody else happy too." Source: *The Spectator*:

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/20678/its-being-so-cheerful-that-keeps-me-going> » [Back to text](#)

74. The source of Annabel Brett's remarks is the BBC Radio program "In Our Time," cited above. » [Back to text](#)

75. Nelson Mandela: “Death is something inevitable. When a man has done what he considers to be his duty to his people and his country, he can rest in peace. I believe I have made that effort and that is, therefore, why I will sleep for eternity.” (Source: The Nelson Mandela Foundation.) » [Back to text](#)
76. The source of this social interpretation of *tikkun olam* is a publication on the website of Temple Isaiah, a Reform congregation in Los Angeles: <http://templeisaiah.com/search.php?x=0&y=0&q=tikkun+olam>. A refutation of Temple Isaiah’s social rather than spiritual interpretation of *tikkun olam*, written by Grand Rabbi Y.A. Korff, is available online at JNS.org. » [Back to text](#)
77. See Roger Ebert’s *Life Itself*, p. 157. One of Ebert’s last reviews was of a 2012 film called “The Spectacular Now,” which in many ways is about goodness. Ebert gave it four stars out of four.
- The short story writer George Saunders is also drawn to good characters, which, in David Sedaris’s opinion, sets him apart. See Sedaris’s interview with Saunders at the end of the latter’s *Tenth of December*. » [Back to text](#)
78. This passage from *Middlemarch* appears near the novel’s end. » [Back to text](#)
79. Joshua Wolf Shenk’s grandfather was Rabbi Sidney Wolf of Corpus Christi, Texas. The superb article from which this quote was drawn (“The Things We Carry: Seeking Appraisal at the Antique Roads Show”) was originally published in *Harper’s Magazine*, June 2001, and is available at: <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/535ae376e4b0164422393cf1/t/537be11de4b054da48c7ea58/1400627485633/ThingsWeCarry.pdf> » [Back to text](#)
80. See “We May Be Born With an Urge to Help,” Nicholas Wade, *The New York Times*, December 1, 2009, and a related article: “Scientists find evidence that human beings are born with an innate desire to help others,” ReligiousLeftLaw.com, 2010.

The second piece mentions an article by Frans de Waal entitled “Putting the Altruism Back into Altruism: The Evolution of Empathy”). According to ReligiousLeftLaw, de Waal’s article, published in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, “asserts that altruism in apes and other species is a product of evolution.”

Scientists at University College London’s Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience report that greater liberalism appears to be “associated with increased gray matter volume in the anterior cingulate cortex,” while greater conservatism is “associated with increased volume of the right amygdala.” See:

[http://www.cell.com/current-biology/abstract/S0960-9822\(11\)00289-2](http://www.cell.com/current-biology/abstract/S0960-9822(11)00289-2)

The anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) is linked to emotion and empathy. In evolutionary terms, it is considered more recent and subtler than the older, more primitive right amygdala. It is tempting, therefore, to link the desire to serve others to the relatively abundant empathy that results from evolutionary progress in the form of a little extra gray matter in the ACC.

In June 2011, CBC Radio’s “As It Happens” interviewed Professor Geraint Rees of University College London on the Institute’s findings:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/colin-firth-co-authors-brain-study-1.985147>

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81. See “Solitude,” William Trevor’s short story about parental devotion, included in his 2004 collection, *A Bit on the Side*. » [Back to text](#)

82. This CBC “Sunday Edition” episode (“What do we owe the future?”) was first broadcast on December 29, 2013. In a January 2015 *Guardian* article entitled “All hail optimism, for nostalgia offers nothing but the dust of the dead,” Harry Leslie Smith writes: “Our waking moments have become tormented by a tsunami of images depicting tragedies, scandals, or greed, which threatens to drown our hopes. . . . rampant negativity is a pessimism that has grown feral. . . . It is our duty to ourselves, our family, our friends, and our society to use our intellectual, emotional, and financial resources to build the best country

we can with the talents we possess.” It is our duty, we would add, to future generations and the principles of universal well-being and *global* cohesion. »
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83. Madame Arbour’s article was published in *The Globe and Mail*, February 12, 2014. Referring to the Quebec government’s proposed Charter of Values, which, among other things, would have prohibited public sector employees from wearing “conspicuous” religious symbols, such as the Muslim hijab, the article was entitled “With the Charter, Quebec risks closing its mind.” It’s important to note that the proposed legislation never passed – it died with the next provincial election – and its drafting may have contributed to the government’s defeat. » [Back to text](#)

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