

Baptisms by Fire

Future Wars in Early Canadian Speculative Fiction

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Baptisms by Fire: Future Wars in Early Canadian Speculative Fiction

ALLAN WEISS

IN HIS ARTICLE on the history of the militia in Ontario, Mike O'Brien writes, "While the term 'warlike' hardly fits the Canadian self-image, military service was viewed by many Canadians in the early twentieth century as a vital part of male citizenship" (115). Indeed, it has often been said that the country had its true birth not in 1867 but during the First World War, when it experienced its "baptism by fire" in such battles as Vimy Ridge.¹ War has long been a major theme in Canada's literature (see, for example, Buitenhuis, Novak, Baetz, and Vance), including in some of the earliest texts of Canadian speculative fiction. In the decades immediately after Confederation, a number of novels and short stories appeared portraying future Canadas at war.² The authors seemed to assume that Canada's destiny would involve military conflict, particularly due to the belligerent behaviour of the great powers around it. Analyzing three of these texts — W.H.C. Lawrence's *The Storm of '92* (1889), Ralph Centennius's "The Dominion in 1983" (1883), and Ulric Barthe's *Similia similibus* (1916) — provides insights into how war was seen as an inevitable part of Canada's heritage and national development.³ Furthermore, it becomes clear that these texts were not merely reflecting assumptions about war, nor were they intended to be predictive; they were part of a broader effort among authors to further a nationalist agenda.

To understand the presence and role of war in Canada's early speculative fiction, it is necessary to review the meaning of war in late nineteenth-century European and North American culture, and also to see how Canadian literary depictions of imaginary wars fit into their generic context. The period from 1871 to the First World War was the heyday of what I.F. Clarke calls "future-war fiction," a subgenre of speculative fiction that served a number of political and social as well as literary purposes, and the Canadian texts were part of that trend.

War and Nationalism

Scholars of nationalism and war studies have analyzed how war has been seen as a nation-building exercise. Anthony D. Smith and John Hutchinson, for example, have studied the role of institutionalized war as a means of promoting nationalist sentiment. In “War and Ethnicity,” Smith argues that while other factors are necessary preconditions for the presence of national feeling, “war has been a powerful factor in shaping . . . certain crucial aspects of ethnic community and nationhood” (375). Hutchinson is particularly interested in the role of official war commemoration rituals and monuments; as he writes in *Nations as Zones of Conflict*, “the people and its blood sacrifices became the object of worship,” leading to the myth of the fallen soldier, “the romantic mystique of a national hero, willing to sacrifice himself for the nation” (70). For John Gillis, commemoration of past wars and their “heroes” is less a spontaneous expression of popular feeling than “a political process” by which elites inculcate nationalism in their populations (“Warfare” 48). According to John A. Hall and Siniša Malešević, nationalism contributes to the conduct of war, while war contributes to national feeling; they quote Charles Tilley as saying, “states make war, and war makes states” (11; see also Neiberg 49). Wars, they argue, have been “crucial for nationalism as their tragic experience creates shared collective meanings that bind diverse citizenry into a single nation” (5).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many political thinkers saw war as a necessary and even positive institution. In *Peace and War*, Kalevi J. Holsti, for example, discusses the late nineteenth-century Darwinian view of war as “an inevitable and constructive consequence of the eternal struggle between nations and civilizations” that had beneficial effects for the combatants (161), including

social cohesion and group solidarity, commitment to a cause greater than the self or family, patriotism, and moral-cultural improvement. . . . [M]any social Darwinists . . . argued that the survival of the fittest provides a justification for war [as] a means of social, cultural, and moral progress. (161)

Holsti says some European leaders believed that war prevented national degeneration caused by industrialization and other technological developments that made the social environment less physically demanding (161). Modern life, they claimed, discouraged and even sapped mas-

culine vigour in a nation's population, rendering men weaker and less able to defend the nation-state when war did come. Many military leaders, then, considered war not as a last resort in international relations, but as an actual social good, and they viewed "themselves as the vehicles of progress and regeneration" (Holsti 164).

Some English-Canadian nationalists during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shared this view of war as a nation-building and nation-saving exercise, although the Dominion's colonial status and other factors led to some noteworthy differences between their views and those of European thinkers. Whereas the major European powers had imperial structures already in place, Canada lacked such established national institutions and therefore did not quite emerge from colony to independent nation-state. Canada was still part of the British Empire and its nationalism and approach to war followed only some of the patterns scholars have observed elsewhere. In Canada, anglophone nationalists generally saw their national identity as being inextricably tied both to war and to the identity of the British Empire.

In *War and Society in Post-Confederation Canada*, Jeffrey A. Keshen and Serge Marc Durflinger argue that in the nineteenth century, modernization — that is, industrialization and urbanization — was as much a concern for English-Canadian nationalists as it was for thinkers elsewhere:

this modernization also promoted worry among prominent Canadians, particularly Anglo-Saxon community leaders, over men succumbing to too soft and too slothful a life. . . . "manly" qualities, such as physical strength, prowess, courage, duty, and honour, would be honed through military service and participation in imperial adventures. Imperialists also believed closer imperial defence arrangements would better enable Canada to protect itself against the United States and help spread the benefits of a "superior" Anglo-Saxon society to "lesser" peoples worldwide. (31)

Mark Moss writes, "The unhealthy living conditions in cities were seen as contributing to the decline of manly virtues" (15). The view of Canada as the home of a new, young, and northern (and therefore superior) "race" contributed to the belief that its people would be "natural" warriors; as Keshen and Durflinger put it, "the physical and intellectual vigour of its 'northern' people seemed to preordain a leadership role over the 'greatest Empire ever known to civilization'" (31).

For example, Samuel Hughes, in his address to Parliament on February 2, 1905, said that the establishment of a country-wide militia system would instil discipline in boys, defining discipline as “polish, education, the development of the spirit of individuality and of liberty; it means patriotism and loyalty to your country; it means development of the physical; it means manhood” (qtd. in Keshen and Durflinger 36). The militia, some believed, surpassed even the British Army in its ability to inculcate moral and patriotic principles in young men, since so many of its members, and especially the officers, came from the middle class and therefore were not subject to the supposed lack of self-control attributed to aristocrats and members of the working class, who constituted, respectively, the officers and enlisted men in the British military (O’Brien 120, 124). James L. Hughes asserted that military training offered “greater strength, greater agility, more activity . . . a better poise, a better bearing,” and so on (qtd. in Keshen and Durflinger 38). The benefits of militia training for the country and its people, he claimed, would be immense, reinforcing qualities of obedience and respect (38). O’Brien’s study of the militia system in Ontario describes the extent to which it sought to promote national and imperial loyalty, although it primarily served to reinforce certain concepts of masculinity (119-21).⁴

Thus, a combination of imperialism, nationalism, and Darwinism inspired the belief that wars were inevitable, necessary, and beneficial for the countries that fought them, and, indeed, for the human race as a whole. The British army, more specifically, was seen as a crusading force enriching the national character and bringing Christian truth to the heathen lesser races (Paris 15). The soldier was held up to be the epitome of masculinity, and when his physical strength and courage were combined with chivalric values — as each nation assumed was the case with its own soldiers — he was the ultimate hero and supreme role model for the nation’s youth (Norris 17). In Canada, the militia, the cadet system, and, indeed, war itself were seen as institutions that benefited the country and its people, contributing to personal development and loyalty to King and country (Fisher 16-18). War made a boy a man, and a population a nation.

Canadian Future-War Fiction: The Context and Tropes

These notions about the benefits of war for nations and their citizens found their way into the speculative fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Canadian texts. As Clarke demonstrates in his *Voices Prophesying War* (1966) and his later study, “Future-War Fiction” (1997), from 1871 to the First World War, hundreds of fictional works about future wars appeared in Europe and the United States (see *Voices* chapters 2-4). Clarke argues that these texts arose out of the views discussed above: that wars were a normal, acceptable, and even beneficial part of international relations in Europe — an opinion that could be maintained more easily before the advent of total war (see esp. *Voices* 2, 77)⁵ — and that war was a nation-building exercise, leading to the creation, preservation, and strengthening of nation-states (*Voices* 127). The subgenre also grew out of the evolutionary thinking of the period that led authors to write about the future and to engage in political, scientific, and technological extrapolation, as well as to see countries engaged in a kind of international “survival of the fittest” (*Voices* 132-33; see also Paris 8). American future-war stories reflected the emergence of the United States as an imperial power, especially in the 1890s (Franklin, *War Stars* 20-22; see also “How America’s Fictions” 34). Many authors, like their contemporaries among political and military thinkers and leaders, believed war connected present-day citizens to their heroic national heritage — consider the martial character of Sir Walter Scott’s historical romances — and acted as a corrective to racial degeneration and decadence (Paris 45-46).

Future-war fiction reflects current events as well as the assumption that wars would continue to be fought as they had been since time immemorial; as David Seed writes in his introduction to *Future Wars*, “The history of future-war fiction . . . becomes an account of the fears and expectations of a given historical moment” (2). Clarke shows in detail how political developments became mirrored in early future-war fiction; depending on circumstances, for example, the enemy du jour in Britain could be the French, Russians, Chinese, Mongolians, and — finally and for good — the Germans (*Voices* passim; “Future-War Fiction” 10). Authors depicted future wars for various reasons, in particular to stimulate nationalist sentiment (*Voices* 64, 122), to encourage knowledge of and interest in all things military among boys (Paris 49-82), and above all to warn of the dangers posed by possible foes.

Stories of national defeat were designed to provoke readers and politicians to work toward improving the country's military, through either more spending and/or better organization. The message of such texts was "Be prepared"; as Clarke puts it, "the whole aim was either to terrify the reader by a clear and merciless demonstration of the consequences to be expected from a country's shortcomings, or to prove the rightness of national policy by describing the course of a victorious war in the near future" (*Voices* 38).

These stories and novels were therefore propaganda pieces with a markedly nationalist, imperialist, and militarist agenda; technological innovations were of less interest than political questions. Thus, the nation more than any of the characters is the true protagonist of an early future-war text. Echevarria notes that the authors seldom did a good job of predicting what a future war would actually be like, and were not terribly interested in doing so. Instead, "they sought to persuade their readers to accept a specific argument; so, the future . . . was a means rather than an end" (xv). Also, these texts created what Graham Dawson calls the "pleasure culture of war": a sense of war as offering entertainment and aesthetic pleasure. Future-war fiction was part of a general vogue for war stories of all types, from H.A. Henty's adventure stories to H.G. Wells's account of nuclear war in *The World Set Free* (1914).

Clarke claims that future-war tales were produced only in powerful countries (*Voices* 44), but in Canada, too, a number of works appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dramatizing future military conflicts. As was the case elsewhere, the purpose of such texts was as much political as literary; during the decades immediately after Confederation, authors like Lawrence, Centennius, and Barthe sought to reinforce Canadians' national and imperial sentiments or warn of the consequences of complacency in the face of military threats. At first, the main source of danger, and therefore the most common antagonist, was the United States; "The Dominion in 1983" and *The Storm of '92* portray attempted or actual invasions of Canada by the Americans. Later, however, as Germany became the focus of speculation and then the enemy during the First World War, Canadian texts understandably shifted their own views, and so in *Similia similibus*, written during the war, the Germans are the invaders of Canada.

Certain specific tropes pervade the genre, and it is clear that in many of their details the Canadian texts were strongly influenced

by future-war stories published elsewhere. Despite the geographical proximity of the United States, Canadian future-war fiction appears to have been influenced far more by British and continental models than by American ones. Perhaps the most influential of all, and the one largely responsible for the outpouring and popularity of future-war stories during the period before the First World War, was Sir George Tomkyns Chesney's "The Battle of Dorking" (1871), about a successful German invasion of Great Britain. Chesney's novella established many of the genre's conventions; on the other hand, while Canadian stories follow those conventions, they also show marked differences. For instance, Canada has never been a world power, and so it is portrayed in Canadian future-war fiction as a marginal player in the power games of far bigger countries — in other words, as just one battleground in much larger conflicts. Canada is never a provoker of wars, but is always a victim of the geopolitical machinations and manoeuvrings of stronger countries. In Lawrence's *The Storm of '92*, for example, the Americans are pushed to invade Canada because of a hatred for Britain, not on the part of the "better" classes but of the "scum of Europe . . . in whose mind national honour was an incomprehensible idea" (8-9). When Britain and the United States declare war on one another, Canada becomes the front line and is therefore directly affected by international issues over which it has no control.

As Clarke shows (see *Voices* chapter 2), a future-war story of the period is typically set in the very near future and portrays an unprovoked invasion by an enemy — tropes that are certainly present in the Canadian tales. In "The Dominion in 1983," the American plans to invade Canada take shape in 1887, only four years from the author's present, while the invasion in *The Storm of '92* occurs a mere three years in the future. Also, a future-war tale of that period is commonly narrated by a veteran of the war, who may be telling the story to his grandchildren, as is the case with "The Battle of Dorking." The subtitle of Lawrence's text is *A Grandfather's Tale Told in 1932*; just as in Chesney's story, a veteran recounts the origins and progress of the war to his grandson.

The Storm of '92 is the text that most clearly reflects Chesney's influence, and much of the following analysis will focus on it. Lawrence's novella is almost certainly a response to an American story, Samuel Barton's *The Battle of the Swash and the Capture of Canada* (1888);

in fact, there are some clear parallels between the two that may suggest direct inspiration if not imitation on Lawrence's part.⁶ For example, both are narrated forty years after the events portrayed. Also, as noted above, future-war fiction is nearly always inspired by current crises, and the lingering dispute over the east- and west-coast fisheries between Britain and the United States during the 1880s is presented as a major source of friction in both stories (see Barton 39-48). Indeed, in Lawrence's tale, the war's trigger is a confrontation between a Canadian cruiser and an American fishing vessel, the *Blaine* (13, 16-20).⁷

That the story is a cautionary tale becomes clear in one character's account of the war's causes. The narrator's friend, Waller, speaks at length about Britain's preference for free trade over imperial preference and her refusal to pay attention when annexationist sentiments rose in the United States, asking, "Why was England so blind?" (44). On the other hand, unlike Chesney and other authors who sought to warn their people about a lack of preparedness caused by short-sighted military leaders, Lawrence presents his officers positively, particularly the narrator's general, "who had fought England's battles in three continents already. . . . He looked as jaunty and self-possessed as though passing down Whitehall" (49).

One of Lawrence's major themes is unity, both national and imperial. Thus, the narrator tells us early on that Canada's successful defence against an American invasion resulted from its statesmen's willingness to set aside their factional differences: "they forgot party bickerings and thought only of their country" (8). Canada benefited from being part of a benign empire: "Our people were loyal to that just power whose yoke was no heavier than a garland of roses, whose gentle sway we were proud to own" (9).⁸ Ideological differences play a key role in the conflict. Americans had long sought to spread their democracy to Canada, but that very democracy is what incites Canadian resistance to annexation: "we feared the result of democratic government where the reins of power had fallen from the hands of the educated, to be grasped by the ignorant, the worthless and the base" (10).

A common trope in future-war tales is the drawing of a sharp contrast between the period of peace before hostilities begin and the storm that later erupts. Like Chesney and others, Lawrence sets up a recurring contrast between the peaceful life before the invasion and the turmoil and violence of war. The narrator describes his tranquil Toronto street

before the war (23), and the quiet night before the battle as the narrator contemplates the stars and his surroundings (40).

In North American future-war stories, Irish or other immigrants who import “strange” ideas (anarchism, socialism, etc.) and fifth columnists foment the war. In Lawrence’s story, American politicians curry favour with Irish-American voters by taking a belligerent stand over the *Blaine* incident. Helping the American cause are “pestilent little gnats” — annexationist politicians — and “disloyal newspapers published in our own country” (13). Accounts of severed intercontinental and inter-provincial communication lines reflect a distinctly Canadian feature of the conflict: the vastness of the country and the challenge of maintaining transportation and communication links among its parts and with the imperial centre (29-30). Pro-annexationist saboteurs are suspected or found to be responsible for causing the damage and are lynched (30).

The enemy in future-war fiction is usually depicted as remorseless, cunning, and fully prepared for battle, attacking the homeland with as much certainty of purpose as skill (see, for example, the depiction of the French in Horace Francis Lester’s “The Taking of Dover” [1888] and the British in “The Stricken Nation” [1890]); the invaded country’s own soldiers, meanwhile, are brave and virtuous. But in Lawrence’s story, the invading Americans are portrayed as half-hearted combatants, owing to the reluctance of the “better class” of politicians and journalists to fight and the close economic ties between the United States and Canada (31). More importantly, the Americans, Canadians, and British share a racial heritage that makes any struggle between them “a civil and fratricidal war” (31).⁹ This nuanced view of the invaders represents a marked difference between the Canadian and other examples of the genre. Another is the especially important role that the militia plays in Canada’s defence, reflecting the ideas about the value of the Canadian militia discussed earlier. Lawrence presents scenes of men joining the “city volunteer regiments” of Toronto (26); in fact, the narrator says, “although no bounties were offered, or impressment system adopted by Parliament, I believe almost every man of suitable age belonged to some corps or other” (30).

Other elements of Lawrence’s tale are more conventional. The concern among British authors that city life was causing the degeneration of the British race and its ability to fight wars (see above) is reflected here, the narrator commenting that “most of our men were city bred, and were pretty well fagged out by the heat, dust, excitement and march-

ing of the day” (39). A stock character in future-war fiction is the son of a famous officer now making his own mark in the military, thereby representing the continuation of the nation’s military heritage. In *The Storm of ’92*, that character is Lieutenant Elliott; he is the son of an honoured officer and engaged to the narrator’s daughter, and thus heir to the British military tradition. The progress of the war is very much in line with the events depicted in European, particularly British, stories. In the latter, the outcome of the war is often determined by the fate of the Royal Navy; British defeat inevitably results when the navy is neutralized, as in “The Battle of Dorking.” Here, the fleet arrives and bombards New York, then lands British and imperial troops on both coasts (32). The arrival of those soldiers boosts morale; as the narrator says, “The idea that we would fight side by side with the historic regiments of the Imperial army made the younger men almost exult that war had come” (33).

The narrator’s unit moves down to Niagara and fights a second Battle of Queenston Heights in the shadow of Brock’s Monument (46). The real Battle of Queenston Heights, waged during the War of 1812, had achieved mythic status among nationalists as a “glorious” victory over the invading Americans, rendered even more meaningful by the death of the British commander, Sir Isaac Brock, during the battle. Lawrence’s allusions to the battle and Brock are a clear example of the way propagandists use commemoration of the nation’s military history, and especially of “blood sacrifice,” to promote nationalist sentiment. The narrator says,

For the first time in eighty years a Canadian army was crossing that old field in the footsteps of those led by the gallant Brock upon his last march, and towards the spot where he found his grave; and, while upon our left the ruined and grass-grown mounds, which marked the site of Fort George, in his day a powerful earthwork, bore testimony to the lapse of time, I do not believe that the sentiments of patriotism which inspired his men, burned less warmly in the breasts of this army of a later day. (51)

Another allusion to Canadian military history is the reference to Irish-Americans as being among the first enemy soldiers encountered, recalling the Fenian raids (46). Thus, the story hearkens back to Canada’s own military heritage as much as Britain’s.

As is so often the case in such tales, the future battle looks very much like one from the past, with infantry using linear tactics, even in an era of rifles and Gatling guns (53-61). The narrator's unit (along with Brock's Monument) is saved by the Black Watch (57), one of the Empire's best-known and most storied regiments. Later, the narrator is knocked unconscious when a makeshift hospital he visits is shelled, and when he regains consciousness, he learns that the tide of the war was turned, and the country saved, when imperial troops from all over the world joined the fight at last. British ironclads proved too powerful for the American ships. The United States was no match for the united Empire and its navy (63).

Lawrence's nationalist agenda is clear throughout the tale. Early in the text is a line that will remind modern readers of the myth of Vimy Ridge: the war, the narrator says, "made Canada what she is today" (5). Indeed, he begins his account of "how we became a nation" with Confederation but makes it clear that the political act was only the first, and not necessarily the most important, step (6). Later, on the eve of the battle, he thinks about

the fate of this little nation which had drawn the sword against the mighty power of its attacking enemy. What had the coming years in store? Were we, with all our pride in Canada, with all our affection for the land of our fathers and our wish to remain part of its Empire, to become another Poland — conquered, disgraced? Was it already Fate's decree that we should witness our flag torn down, beaten back and banished from this continent, that we should live to listen with burning cheeks to the scarce-concealed sneers of our conquerors? Or would the fire and endurance of a race enured to danger bring us in safety through this trial. (41)

The passage is a nationalist and imperialist cry designed to stir those same passions in the reader. Waller expresses a familiar sentiment — war as a nation-building, and therefore positive, exercise:

"I believe this war in the inscrutable providence of the Almighty is for the best, and though it may seem cruel that it will desolate many homes and put many a poor fellow under the sod, it is yet for the best, because it is permitted to be. Is mere life — even human life — of such paramount value, that there is nothing to be desired by men in comparison with it? . . . The war will build up Canada.

There is no bond between human hearts like that brought about by a common danger and a common grief — and our Provinces, but lately such strangers to one another, now face the one, and will shortly, God help us, share the other. So with ourselves, England and the Empire.” (42)

Peace finally comes when an “influential peace party of both nations, moved by the terrible injuries the two branches of the English speaking race were inflicting on each other, were successful in bringing about a cessation of hostilities” (66); thus, racial kinship overrides economic, political, and national differences. Canada has demonstrated that the twentieth century does indeed belong to it: “There is peace to-day in Canada, and happiness among her twenty millions of prosperous people, forming the new nation of the Western world. Knit together as one nation, old differences silenced and forgotten, we have become heirs to a goodly heritage” (69). More importantly, thanks to the war, Canada has become a nation able to stand alongside its imperial brothers with pride:

Not in vain, in the fresh morning of their young life did these first-born of our nation’s heroes pass into darkness. Still over them, upon that tall staff, floats the flag for love of which they died. Here in this sacred spot, let us resolve that Canada, preserved by their sacrifice, shall be a nation great, just and renowned; great in the great hearts, the high aims, the noble courage of her people; progressing ever onward in all that is worthy, beneficent and good, until nation shall no longer rise against nation, and men shall learn war no more. (71)

Canada’s nationhood is forged in the fires of war, and Canada has emerged triumphant and prosperous, thanks to Providence and the Royal Navy.

In “The Dominion in 1983,” war is mentioned more briefly as a contributing factor in Canada’s national development. The narrator is a Canadian living in 1983 and looking back at the past century of the nation’s history. Once again, Canada faces a possible invasion by the Americans because the United States is too welcoming of immigrants: “The Americans for years had been too careless about receiving upon their shores all the firebrands and irreconcilables from European cities, and the consequence was that these undesirable gentry increased in numbers, and the infection of their opinions spread” (298). America’s wealth leads to corruption in its politics and inspires annexationist senti-

ments among the greedier and more envious Canadians (298-99). Also, Americans believe it is “their duty to mankind . . . to convert all the world — by force if necessary — to republican principles” (299).

The immediate trigger for the attempted invasion is a series of economic crises that lead to revolutions and wars in Europe; as a result, British military might is needed at home to defend the mother country. Poor harvests and economic turmoil produce a similar crisis in North America (299-300), while annexationists in Canada led by Reformers, and Fenians in the United States influenced similarly by “politicians of a low order” (300), threaten Canada’s sovereignty. Canadians from one end of the country to the other — even Quebecers and Manitobans, despite the presence of many Irishmen in Manitoba — rally to the nation’s defence (300-01). Canadians living in the United States, now disillusioned with republicanism, also return ready to defend their homeland (300).

Various disasters in the United States, including the assassination of the president, delay an invasion. Even nature, acting on behalf of Providence, thwarts the American plans, as storms detain an invasion force gathered in San Francisco harbour (301). Meanwhile, the British Empire adds new territories and friends, gaining a degree of power and prestige no foe would dare challenge. Once again, events outside of Canada or its control determine its fate in the face of war. As in *The Storm of '92*, the threat of invasion brings an end to political and sectional strife at home: “Henceforth there was but one party with but one object in view — the welfare of the Dominion” (303). When Great Britain feels secure enough, it sends 12,000 soldiers, and the American government arrests the invasion plotters. While war is averted, the significance of the crisis lies in how the threat has fostered the growth of Canadian nationalism:

Of course the benefit to Canada of having had the national feeling so deeply stirred was incalculable, for all classes of men in all the provinces had been animated by the profoundest sentiments and the strongest determination possible, and it was the opinion of leading military men of the time that the Canadians under arms, though outnumbered trebly by the intending invaders, would have held their own gallantly and have come off victorious. (303)

Later, during the twentieth century, a world war breaks out, but that conflict is also conveniently negated by random events.

In some European future-war stories, and many American ones, authors speculate that new weapons might be developed that are so terrible civilized nations would refrain from using them. That prediction appears in Centennius's tale: "war has ceased all the world over. It became, at last, too destructive to be indulged in at all" (311). The last great war occurs in 1932, but it is quickly ended when "a monster oxyhydrogen shell" (Centennius does not explain this weapon) kills the combatants' leaders. War is now impossible because the "armies hardly had a chance of getting near each other, so fearful was the execution of the shells. Since then, the world has been free from war, and, but for gathering clouds in Asia, would seem likely to remain so" (311). While Northern Europeans are too civilized to embark on a war, the same cannot be said of militaristic "lesser races" like those in the southern part of the continent, and the "Slavs," we are told, have become the greatest threat to world peace (312-13). Meanwhile, thanks to their national evolution, the Americans are now too advanced a people to attempt another invasion; "even if Americans coveted our possessions they are not likely to resort to such an old-fashioned expedient as warfare to gain them" (311-12).

Ulric Barthe's *Similia similibus* was published during, and is an alternative history of, the First World War; in Barthe's version, the war does not begin until the Germans attack North America. Cast as a dream vision, the tale concerns a successful German invasion of Québec. Once more, fifth columnists play a prominent role in what happens, as the Germans are able to move artillery and troops into the province due to some foolish farmers who, a decade before the war, sold their land to Germans pretending to be innocent immigrants. Indeed, we can read the novel in the context of the *roman de la terre*, a form expressing the conservative nationalist view that the survival of the French Canadians is intimately tied to continued possession of, and work on, the land. In any case, like the "enemy aliens" who assist foreign forces to invade England in many stories during the 1880s and 1890s, these Germans immigrate solely to facilitate a takeover, a detail reflecting the xenophobia often seen in this sort of fiction (Clarke, *Voices* 63). Throughout Canada, moreover, secret anarchist German associations try unsuccessfully to help the German invaders expand their conquest.

Tropes discussed earlier appear throughout, such as the depiction of the peaceful world before disaster strikes, in this case a pleasant evening

just before the Germans bombard Québec: “Cette petite scène intime se passait par une belle soirée d’été dans un de ces calmes intérieurs, employons plutôt le mot du terroir, dans une de ces ‘maisons d’habitants’ à l’aise qui bordent la rive gauche du fleuve Saint-Laurent” (19-20). Friends and family have gathered to celebrate the engagement of Paul Belmond and Marie-Anne Meunier, but the party is halted by a powerful explosion; thus, once again, an upcoming marriage is horribly interrupted by the enemy attack. Because the invaders are members of the German “race,” they display their barbarity and moral turpitude by committing atrocities against the people they have conquered (182-91). The Germans, especially the novel’s chief villain, Biebenheim, are stereotypical Prussians: thickset, militaristic, and arrogant. General von Goelinger tells the Québec premier, “Moi, je vous demanderai tout simplement de voir dans ce fait stupéfiant la démonstration de la force irresistible, surhumaine, de la *Kulture* allemande. Avec nous, vouloir c’est pouvoir” (92). He further declares, revealingly, “La guerre est l’une de nos industries nationales.” Biebenheim has designs on Marie-Anne, and, when he sees his supposed romantic rival on the street not long after the capture of Québec, he tries to shoot Paul, having no compunction about firing his pistol into a crowd of civilians. Paul ducks, but the bullet strikes and kills a mother holding her baby (59). At that point, someone cries out, “Ce ne sont pas des Allemands, ce sont des Sauvages!” (59).

Indeed, since Barthe’s text is intended as propaganda to inspire support for the war effort, it is full of anti-German racism (80-81, 92); for example, we are told that “Le pillage . . . ils ont cela dans le sang” and “Ce sont encore des barbares” (150). Barthe’s story, like Lawrence’s, draws parallels to historical events: in this case, the Germans’ march through Québec City and their ensuing proclamation (61-69) recall the British Conquest of 1759-60. Collaborators are said to have helped “à la troisième prise de Québec. Depuis plus de cent cinquante ans, pareil événement ne s’était pas vu” (61). The Germans, like the Americans in 1812, assume the French Canadians will welcome them as liberators from British rule (90). Some villagers are complacent, feeling the province is simply being passed from one colonial master to another, but most resist, enthusiastically joining the anti-German forces. The most direct parallels Barthe draws, however, are between what happens in Québec and what had, supposedly, happened to the Belgians and French

in Europe. Biebenheim's Proclamation, for example, is identical to the one the Germans issued in Lunéville, France, in August 1914 (69 n. 1). In fact, the title refers to that parallel, as Jimmy says in the epilogue:

Une chose certain, c'est que ce qui est arrivé à la Belgique pourrait bien nous arriver, à nous aussi, si par malheur la digue qui retient le torrent prussien, de la Mer du Nord à la frontier Suisse, allait se briser faute de bras pour le soutenir. *Similia similibus*, comme vous dites en latin, monsieur le curé. (242)

What happened *there* not only could but also inevitably would happen *here*, if the Québécois people remained unprepared. Paul recounts his dream vision to his visitors, and is urged by one of them to turn his vision into a book. He says, "Si cela pouvait nous tirer de notre lethargie! Il y a encore tant d'indifférents qui s'imaginent supprimer les fléaux en se bouchant les yeux et les oreilles, en se renfermant dans leur étroit égoïsme!" (241).

Like the other texts I have discussed, *Similia similibus* offers a nationalist message: the benefits of war in uniting the country and providing a foundation for its growth and development. Here, the unity involves the two founding races, represented by the journalists Paul Belmont and Jimmy Smythe. Despite a brief disagreement over the races in Canada and their qualities (209-11), they work together to subvert the Germans. As we learn, "Un feu nouveau sembla couler dans leur veines avec le bon vieux sang gaulois et celtique dont les plus nobles races du Vieux Monde ont fécondé le sol de la Jeune Amérique" (63) and "Jamais le sentiment de solidarité nationale ne s'était aussi spontanément imposé à tous les esprits" (201). At this point, the "solidarité" refers only to that of the French Canadians, but as the novel progresses, it is clear that Barthe is talking about the whole country's unity. Only by working together and overcoming their differences can French and English Canadians prevent Paul's drug-induced nightmare from coming true. Barthe's novel is about not so much a future war as a future battle; he predicts that the First World War could come to Canada's shores if people are not very careful.

Like authors in Great Britain and the United States, then, Canadian writers found the portrayal of imaginary wars to be a dramatic and effective means by which to rouse their readers' patriotism and stoke their fears, presenting the dangers that the country faced while at the

same time reassuring their audience that united effort and prudent policies would lead to inevitable victory. In that sense, military themes in early Canadian speculative fiction are very much part of a more general trend — the rise of the future-war story — but with key differences shaped by local political factors, evidenced in the nature of the enemy depicted and the manner in which that enemy would need to be fought. At the same time, the works served a purpose that many critics have detected in the fiction, drama, and poetry of the period: not just the expression but, in fact, the creation of a national identity (see Coleman 36-37). These tales of imaginary wars were part of that process, as they featured voices prophesying war with a distinctly Canadian accent.

NOTES

¹ As Pierre Berton writes in *Vimy*, “It has become commonplace to say that Canada came of age at Vimy Ridge” (294), and he describes the spread of what he calls “Vimy fever” in the aftermath of the war (295). Similarly, in his introduction to *We Wasn't Pals*, Bruce Meyer observes that “Vimy is always cited as the apotheosis of Canadian participation in the First World War” (xxii). See McKay and Swift for a discussion of the myth and reality of the battle (65-79).

² Narratives of relatively peaceful future Canadas from the period include Jules-Paul Tardivel's *Pour la patrie* (1895), John Galbraith's *In the New Capital* (1897), Frederick Nelson's *Toronto in 1928 A.D.* (1908), and Hugh Pedley's *Looking Forward* (1913). It should be noted, however, that boys in Galbraith's twentieth-century Canada are given cadet training and that the narrator is told that “in the time of danger or peril to our country, every man, old and young, is a drilled soldier, with the glorious motto in his patriotic bosom: ‘Death before retreat!’” (124).

³ See also Ubald Paquin's *La cité dans les fers* (1925) about the violent suppression of Québec's bid for independence by Canadian and Imperial troops.

⁴ See also Baetz 10, and, on the continuing view of war as a nation-building exercise after the First World War, Vance, *Death So Noble*, especially 10-11.

⁵ On the tropes and forms of realist war fiction written during and after World War I, see Fussell and Copley.

⁶ Some of the story's dialogue suggests that the narrator's name is William Lawrence. Since we know nothing about W.H.C. Lawrence, the presumed author, it is possible that the name on the cover belongs to the narrator rather than the author, who would then be anonymous. That is pure speculation, however, so, for the sake of clarity, I use “Lawrence” to refer to the author and “the narrator” to refer to the narrator.

⁷ For much of the nineteenth century, Great Britain and the United States disagreed over the rights of American fishermen to fish in Canadian waters. The two sides, with some Canadian participation, attempted to settle the dispute with the Treaty of Washington (1871). When the fisheries provisions of that treaty terminated in 1885, the Canadian government asserted its sovereignty over Canadian waters and even seized an American ship in 1887. A new fisheries treaty was negotiated in 1887 but not ratified by the Republican-

dominated Congress; however, an administrative agreement involving Canadian licensing of American vessels was finally reached the following year. The *Blaine* is named after James G. Blaine, secretary of state under newly elected (1888) Republican president Benjamin Harrison; Blaine was supported by Irish-American voters and was quite anti-Britain.

It is worth noting that the same dispute is the spark for the war depicted in American author Hugh Gratton Donnelly's "The Stricken Nation" (1890). In Donnelly's story, Canada becomes a powerful staging ground for the British Navy and thereby contributes greatly to Britain's wanton destruction of American coastal cities. The image of Canada as a serious military threat to the United States contrasts starkly with the self-image we see in the Canadian texts.

⁸ By contrast, in Barton's novella, after a brief war, Britain happily surrenders Canada, which it considers an imperial burden, in order to secure a peace treaty with the United States. Also, Barton's tale includes examples of new weapons, the products of "Yankee ingenuity," that are a distinctive feature of American future-war fiction.

⁹ Barton is at pains to point out in his preface to the Canadian edition of his novella that he harbours no ill feelings toward Great Britain or Canada; he is seeking only to provoke his countrymen into rebuilding and renewing their merchant marine and navy (iv-v). As he says, it is

his earnest hope that the commercial and political union of the English-speaking peoples of the North American Continent, which he believes to be inevitable in the not distant future, may be accomplished — not by war, nor by force, but by the united and intelligent popular sentiment of two great communities, whose territories are contiguous, whose language is the same, whose institutions are similar, and whose interests are — or should be — identical. (v)

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