



4-2009

## Among the Missing: Mass Death & Canadian Nationalism at the Vimy Memorial

Dennis Duffy  
*University of Toronto*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.18.10>

Follow this and additional works at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#).



---

### Recommended Citation

Duffy, Dennis (2009) "Among the Missing: Mass Death & Canadian Nationalism at the Vimy Memorial," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. Vol. 18 , Article 10.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.18.10>

Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol18/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. Questions about the journal can be sent to [disclosurejournal@gmail.com](mailto:disclosurejournal@gmail.com)





**SHARON D. RAYNOR** is currently the Interim Director of the Honors College and an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina. She also served three years as Department Chair. She completed her doctorate degree in Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2003. From 1997-2004, she worked as a Lecturer in the English Department at East Carolina University. She received both her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and her Master of Arts degree in Multicultural Literature from East Carolina University in Greenville, NC. Her doctoral dissertation is entitled, "Shattered Silence and Restored Souls: Bearing Witness and Testifying to Trauma and 'Truth' in the Narratives of Black Vietnam Veterans." Since 1999, she has written and directed two oral history projects sponsored by the North Carolina Humanities Council entitled "Breaking the Silence: The Unspoken Brotherhood of Vietnam Veterans," and "Soldier-to-Soldier: Men and Women Share Their Legacy of War." She teaches and publishes in the areas of African American Literature, Contemporary and Multicultural Literature, Women's Literature, and Black Vietnam War Literary Studies.

**DENNIS DUFFY**

**AMONG THE MISSING:  
Mass Death and Canadian Nationalism at the Vimy Memorial**

"In monuments we frequently confront a combination of figurative, symbolic, cultural, institutional, historical *presences*, each of which plays its part in loading the overall significance—or 'subjectivity'—of the place. The gravity of a place, its overall resonance, is multiplied and extended in this way, haunted, occupied with the consciousness of a regime" (Hook 2005: 700).

**PROLOGUE**

The years following World War I saw an upsurge in Canadian nationalism. Canada's evolution from colony to nation—the subject and title of A.R.M. Lower's well-known history (Lower 1977)—during those years has become a staple of Canadian historiography.<sup>1</sup> The centrality of the 1931 Statute of Westminster—establishing legislative equality between the dominions and Great Britain—to national development is now enough of a staple of Canadian political discourse to merit inclusion within the pages of the *Canadian Encyclopedia* (Hillmer 2008). Twinned to this as an artistic example of the nationalist surge—and again the sort of generally-held belief that an encyclopedia article includes—is the work of such painters as the Group of Seven, who in the 1920s appeared to embody a spirit of innovative Canadianism in their choice of subject-matter (Varley 2008). These events have been transformed into a teleology of Canadian independence, milestones in an evolutionary progression. That fixation on politics and painting has neglected the sculptural and monumental. Yet the vast war memorial to the Canadian World War I dead that looms above the battlefield of Vimy Ridge is part of the same progress. Again, a glance at the encyclopedia discloses the popular conviction of the significance of military prowess in the

<sup>1</sup> For example, Brebner 1970 413-22; Lower 1977 474-86; Morton, W.L. 1969, 423-34, 437-38; McNaught 1988 213-14, 219-20; Riendeau 2000 188-203; Morton, Desmond 2001 150-189-92; Nelles 2004 180-84; Bothwell 2006 308-21. Post-war Canadian nationalism in consumer culture: Hastings 2007; in the arts: Campbell 2007.



growth of a nationalist spirit. (Roy 2008).<sup>2</sup> Enacting the enshrinement of the military struggle, the Vimy memorial enlists the dead within that triumphant progress of national development. Very much a product of its time, the memorial persists in its relevance to Canada's sense of self.



**Figure 1:** The Vimy memorial at its dedication, 26 July 1936.  
Photo: Veterans' Affairs Canada

<sup>2</sup> This conviction has been pushed to its furthest limit by the recent film *Passchendaele* (2008), which unfurls what has often been viewed as a monstrous slaughter into yet another banner instilling pride in Canada's role in the Great War.

## I

The Vimy Ridge memorial to Canada's 65 thousand World War I dead (out of a population of 7.2 million) looms from a height of 110 metres over the chalk plain that lies below. It rests on a bed of 15000+ tonnes of steel-reinforced concrete, adorned with twenty allegorical figures, each twice life-size and carved from single blocks of an especially durable and white Croatian limestone (Veterans' Affairs Canada 2008, "Design and Construction of the Vimy Ridge Memorial").<sup>3</sup> Its base and twin pylons wrested from 6000 tonnes of that same stone, the memorial's sheer size and extent postpones any esthetic response to a later moment. A veiled female figure—she has been called "Canada Mourning" and "The Spirit of Canada"—occupies the focal position. We know the name both of the dancer who modeled her (Edna Moynihan) and the stone carver (Luigi Rigamonti) who worked from a pantograph diagram supplied to him by the memorial's sculptor and designer Walter S. Allward.<sup>4</sup> We even know that Rigamonti's carving skills fetched him £850 (Chapman; "Surprise" 1974; Allward to Hughes, July 28, 1928, Allward Papers). We also know Allward's fee for his completed work: roughly, \$25,000, plus \$12,000 *per annum* (Contract, Allward Papers). These bare numbers, these monumental trivia nonetheless guide us toward understanding how the materiality of a construct—resembling an ornate geological outcropping—forms a stage for the recital of a national/nationalist narrative epic in its scope.

Our search for a meaning that goes beyond factoids tells us something about the tectonic forces thrusting that monument into view. That emergence pushes us toward reflecting on how a colonial society deals with its losses in an imperial war, and how it reinvents itself in response to trauma. A testimonial to a burgeoning civic religion, the stone tablets of the memorial proclaim a humanist response to the fact of mortality. They also offer a specifically Canadian testimony to national mourning. Through the memorial, a machinery of consolation cushions post-Christian society's loss of a vision of personal immortality, subsuming personal loss within a rhetoric of communal deliverance. Ironically, this attempt at

<sup>3</sup> Veterans' Affairs Canada's website contains two extensive repositories of information and statistics about the memorial.

<sup>4</sup> No substantial biography of Allward exists. See Borstad 1990, Mosquin 2001 and Perry 1922 for brief accounts of his life. Information on model, carver and fee: Chapman; Allward Papers.



transcendence most easily displays itself in the phenomenon of absence. Beckett-like, the fact of absence plays a generative role in both the memorial's genesis and execution. Absence, in fact, preserves whatever relevance the memorial exerts over viewers today. Finally, and this remains the greatest irony of all, the Vimy memorial captures within its structure a set of contradictions and puzzlements defining the Canadian nationalism of the present era.

## II

The government of Canada had a problem with the Canadian dead, a problem intrinsic to its colonial relationship to the metropolitan interests that had led it into the Great War. Where—one might ask—were the dead to be found? Where slept the brave? Not at home. Except in a few exceptional cases, the bodies of the dead were never repatriated (Cusack 2004). Their absence necessitated the memorial's presence. On this cultural/political foundation—rather than on the tonnes of reinforced concrete—rests the monument's allegorized superstructure. The emotional equivalent to a geological rift thrust atop it a memorial arresting in scale and national in scope.

It seems difficult now to understand how easily Canadians resigned themselves to the absence of the bodies of their dead. Three aspects of Canadian culture at that time help us realize the forces behind that mute consent. The hard facts of Imperial necessity that had shipped the live bodies overseas, kept the dead ones there. The authorities invoked logistics. The burden that the bodies of the dead imposed on supply and transport lines necessitated burying them near where they had been slaughtered (Longworth 1967: 10-14). The argument now appears facile, glossing over what may have been stronger motives. Yet it worked, both in Canada and in Australia. The prospect of hometowns reeling beneath the arrival of boxcars of sons and lovers—common sense asserts—had to have played some role in the Imperial authorities' decision to bury the dead in France. That distanced burial had long been the fate of common soldiers in times past. A change had, however, come about by the time of this war. Modern mass societies, reducing their citizenry to components of mass armies, sought to occlude this aim, a process ironizing the veiling of the statue of a mourning nation. Could a modern state with representative institutions and powered by individualist ideologies countenance a policy of anonymous mass burial for its citizen-soldiers? Therefore Canada followed the burial customs that began

in the U.S. Civil War, that first of industrialized national combats. "The Fallen" (as the dead came to be euphemized, a term that our current involvement in Afghanistan has thrust back into public mourning) would rest in park-like cemeteries adorned with notable memorials. In the case of Canada's World War I dead, that meant resting in *overseas* park-like cemeteries with notable memorials. The sheer fact of a workingman's income barred those sites from all but the well-to-do. Grandeur in public memorializing could seek to reassure the distant mourners that those they wept over were venerated by the system that had shipped abroad the once-living bodies of their sons and lovers, and then transformed them into corpses.

Nor can we overlook the force of a vast psychic numbing at home, a mentality that would not have welcomed the actual presence of those battlefield remains. Consider: here lay a culture that had witnessed the beginnings of scientific medicine's success in alleviating human suffering. Sir William Osler, the greatest physician of his time, and a Canadian as well, could assure the Canadian Medical Association in 1902 that "[t]he average sum of human suffering has been reduced in a way to make the angels rejoice" (quoted in Bliss 1999: 299). The death machine struck dumb those angelic assurances, a fact that stunned those who had witnessed it, even vicariously. That war machine's version of perpetual motion had to have taken its toll on the sensibilities not only of the participants, but on those of the passive observers left at home, and now left behind.

Finally, the pre-Great War civilian culture had grown used to delegating death. The clergy in an overwhelmingly Protestant Anglophone Canada had begun downplaying death's awful finality and disruption. No longer in enlightened circles a necessarily first-hand experience, death and its attendant demands could now be farmed out to secondary contractors. The rise in scientific medicine, its speedy enshrinement within a newly-professionalized medical system, meant that people were living longer. More were dying in hospitals rather than at home, more were being buried by professional morticians and in professionally-maintained, purchased locations rather than in weed-choked churchyards (Connor 2000: 81-161; Gagan and Gagan 2002: ix, 3; Gidney and Miller 1994: 101-04; Habenstein and Lammers 1955: 389-444; Howell 1984: 107;



Laderman 2003: 47-53; Marshall 1998).<sup>5</sup> Hygienic and curative practices that began as a trickle would flood the developed countries that fought the War. Those modes of healthcare are now the norm. Their very existence back then indicates that death and disposal were evolving into second-hand ritual and experience. A political formation whose members—or at least its ruling elite—had grown accustomed to these novel ways of handling death could acquiesce to the expatriation of much of its onetime body politic, even in the face of the discomfort that this exile would inflict upon the home front survivors.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever reasoning compelled the decision to bury overseas the bodies of the war dead, the age demanded an image, and Canada would furnish one that emphasized valor, sacrifice and national evolution as a consolation to those left behind. We can observe how an articulate participant/observer of the War enfolded the memorial within a teleology of Canadian nationalism. Canon Frederick G. Scott had produced widely-read accounts of his frontline chaplaincy experiences; later, he became an untiring advocate for veterans' causes (Scott 1922). His remarks to Toronto's Empire Club about the memorial's July 26, 1936 unveiling equate the monument's mass with that of the pain of loss. Scott then assuages some of that grief by including it within a national narrative of progress:

"I feel that the unveiling of that monument and all that was connected with it was really something more than the simple display of a great memorial. It has a tremendous bearing on our whole national development" (Scott 1936).

At the root of the memorial lay the logistical and emotional logic of Imperial war, itself compelling overseas burial. The impact of the finished structure that Canon Scott witnessed, however, sprang from a set of local and increasingly nationalist convictions. The earliest

---

<sup>5</sup> Gagan and Gagan refer to "the wholesale transfer of the care and treatment of the sick from the home to the hospital, which took place between 1890 and 1920" (3). While Marshall is my central authority here, the others fill in the sense of delegated death as a growing trend in North America. In the absence of authoritative Canadian sources on what is now termed the "deathcare" industry, I have extrapolated from U.S. accounts of an industry's growth.

<sup>6</sup> Surely the residual guilt from this expatriation led the government to subsidize the overseas trip—now a "pilgrimage," in the terminology of the civic religion increasingly defining the response to the Great War dead—to the Memorial's unveiling in 1936 (Lloyd 1998 and Murray 1936).

parliamentary record of the memorial's inception shows us the politicians outflanking the soldiers in their intuition that Vimy Ridge could be made to play a central role in the formation of a post-war, eventual post-colonial Canadian identity. During a committee hearing of May 4, 1920, Canadian Corps commander Sir Arthur Currie dismissed Vimy's claims to pre-eminence among the army's wartime exploits. Vimy had not been the Corps' "most outstanding battle, or had the greatest material or moral effect on the winning of the war." General Currie and Professor Percy Nobbs, a McGill architectural historian retained by the government had returned from a survey of the battlefields in France. Currie, commander at Vimy insisted to his politician audience that *all* of the eight sites selected for memorialization deserved equal embellishment.

General Mewburn (Chair): [Y]ou would prefer see eight memorials erected [?].

Currie: Yes, all of the same kind: no one more outstanding than the others.

It was politicians like Sir Oliver Mowat and C.W. Peck, a wartime Unionist government member who insisted that there was something special about Vimy. They sought a structure that "would embody a war museum, memorial chapel, record offices and an observation tower" (Canadian Battlefields Memorials Commission 1929).<sup>7</sup> They had locked on to what we have seen as one of the mainstay myths of Canadian nationalism: that Canada's success on the Ridge demonstrated its emergence from colony to nation. What popular historians see now as a nationalist milestone was then a small, roadside marker (Berton 1986 and Granatstein 2004).<sup>8</sup> But the politicians spotted it first.

A battle-based nationalist mythology of the kind that Canon Scott articulated lay in the making. Canadian nationalism in the 1920s discovered what one theorist terms "a wartime nationalism that derives not from the law's ability to maintain order or implement justice but from the willingness of citizens to sacrifice themselves in the name of the state" (Nudelman 2004: 39). As Colonel H.C. Osborne, the soldier who served as the go-between for Allward and the Canadian Battlefields Memorial Commission later observed, the

---

<sup>7</sup> This kind of complex was in fact what the French would build to commemorate Verdun.

<sup>8</sup> Inevitably revisionism has sharply questioned and qualified both the extent and the exclusivity of the Canadian victory. See Hayes *et al.* 2007.



memorial had morphed into Canada's chief mnemonic in its memory of the war, "not intended merely to commemorate the taking of Vimy ridge but the whole effort of Canada ... our main memorial of the War [which] stands for all that we accomplished" (Osborne to Allward, 20/xii/1927. Allward Papers).

### III

The Vimy memorial embodies this version of Canadian nationalism, enshrining it through spatial positioning and the use of allegory. Toronto's Walter S. Allward created a temple rather than a shrine, a temple telling a story of heroism and endurance. By 1921, the Vimy site had sufficiently captured the public's attention to allow a Toronto *Globe* headline to mention Vimy Day as if it were a matter of common knowledge ("Flag Unfurled" 1921). In 1922, Prime Minister Mackenzie King could refer to Vimy as "one of the world's great altars ... consecrated and hallowed ground." In that same moment General Mewburn of the Battlefields Memorial Commission announced "that there is something distinctive regarding Vimy that comes very close to the hearts of Canadians" (House of Commons Canada).

Allward's design that had beaten out 160 rivals, sought to configure that combination of pride and heartache. It burst upon the general public in the February 13, 1923 edition of the *Globe*. Its twin soaring double pylons and no less than twenty allegorical figures, resembled nothing so much as the pillars of a Gothic cathedral and the profusion of statues assembled there ("The News in Pictures" 1923; Duffy 2005).

A present-day critic evaluates the Memorial as a structure "majestic and arguably un-Canadian in its grandiosity, allegorical thrust, and captivating mix of neoclassical and abstract form" (Picard 2006: 75). Such a critique seems convincing only if we view the memorial as a glorified gravestone. Viewed as an altar in a civil cult, however, the memorial's grandiosity appears appropriate. In the manner of pilgrims, viewers ascend a set of steps on their way upward to the neck-wrenching view of the pylons thrusting heavenward. The devotees find themselves flanked by sets of figures who reside within a national hagiography, rendering support for the defenseless as a hallmark of Canada's role as a nation. The mourning female figure casts her gaze *downward* to a funereal entablature. The ascending viewers are compelled to progress *upward* until they behold the structure's centerpiece: a version of a crucified Christ

without a cross. Above that figure loom other allegorical figures representing peace, justice and other idealized virtues. Again, the intensity of the attempt to create a post-Christian shrine displays itself in two readily apparent ways: the provision of a disassembled pieta-like figuration (the sorrowful Mother in the person of Canada Mourning, the crucified Son in the contorted pose below), and the assemblage of statues who lack traditional iconographic reference points but whose sacral nature remains clear.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 2. Defending the Helpless, with Canada Mourning in background. Photo: Archives Ontario.

<sup>9</sup> As we might expect, Canon Scott immediately caught the displaced religious doctrine, the crucifixion-without-a-cross motif, at work: "There is no visible cross but the position and the attitude of this dead or dying man between the two pylons suggest crucifixion with extraordinary dramatic effect ... That monument, with its crucified soldier, lying there, linking the two great pylons, with the statue of Faith pointing upwards high above, the mourning Canada will stand for all time as an uplifting symbol in our national life and in our national memory" (Scott 1936). For a learned account of the statues' meanings: Brandon 2008.



Nothing better indicates the reverential nature of the structure than the artist's excision of a planned victorious taunt. He had originally drawn a figure triumphantly crushing with his foot a German *pickelhaube* (the spiked helmet that had become a trademark of German infantry in dress uniform), but Allward's final intention sought the enthronement of peace rather than the boasting of victory (Accruals file 1927, Allward Papers; "Study for War Memorial #7" National Gallery of Canada). His nationalist temple includes a distinctively Canadian motif, an allusion to the war's best-known poem, written by Canadian John McRae. A press release on the memorial cleared by Allward emphasized that the Spirit of Sacrifice "giving all, throws the torch to his Comrade" (Osborne to Allward, December 6, 1928. Allward Papers). "In Flanders' Fields" is an occasional verse warning against the prospect of a negotiated peace. Its dead speaker urges his hearers to raise high the torch that he flings their way. It is the sort of militant poem that a Modernist commentator like Paul Fussell scorns as "vicious and "stupid" (Fussell 1975: 250). Yet a romantic, idealist and moralizing reader of that poem—a reader attempting to express a nation's grief—can be pardoned for transforming it into a gentle elegy, a monitory gesture from the dead to the living to fight the good fight as defined by St. Paul rather than by General Haig. Certainly this is the way in which the poem is still read or sung at Remembrance Day ceremonies in Canada. Whatever reading Allward gave the poem, "In Flanders' Fields" seems of lesser importance than the very fact of Allward's sculptural allusion to its best-known passage. Allusive sculpture freezes poetic imperative into nationalist scripture, branding the monument in a specifically Canadian way.

From the start, Allward had been aware of victory's hideous cost. How was a monument to deal with that cost? A dream that Allward later recounted to a sympathetic journalist set out what he claimed was the visionary origin of his design.

"When things were at their blackest in France, during the war, I went to sleep one night after dwelling on all the muck and misery over there. My spirit was like a thing tormented. So I dreamed. In my dream I was on a great battlefield. I saw our men going by in thousands, and being mowed down by the sickles of death, regiment after regiment, division after division. Suffering beyond endurance at the sight, I turned my eyes and found myself looking down an avenue of poplars. Suddenly through this 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. So I have tried to show, in this monument to Canada's fallen, what we owed them and will forever owe them" (Perry 1922: 122-23).

Several aspects of this dream provoke comment. First, the dream contains nothing in it of the actual form that the structure would assume. It is a dream about a *feeling* that the artist later decided that his design had to convey, rather than any architectonic or spatial principle at play. Secondly, the very recounting of the dream places it within a framework of willed optimism. After all, the two armies could as easily appear to be advancing within a vast *totentanz*, a progress toward death and dissolution. Certainly Allward's final version of the monument had for its subject the dead rather than the living. A monument emphasizing consolation rather than triumph seems a darker realization of that dream than the victorious meaning that the artist wrenches from the dream itself.

Of course, my twenty-first century interpretation of a Great War memorial, with its emphasis on contradiction and unintended irony, risks becoming presentist. Yet it is this very cultural complexity—this disconnect between what was felt then and what hurts now—that gives such consolatory monuments their continuing relevance. Consider the Canadian-born Robert Tait McKenzie's Edinburgh memorial to the Scottish-American dead. Its left-to-right bas-relief that backgrounds a conventional seated figure displays a march led by an exultant regimental pipes-and-drums. That brave show is trailed by a set of civilians metamorphosing into soldiers as they advance. But where is that joyous procession headed? In a memorial to the dead, their final destination appears fairly inescapable. We are dealing here with stylized, public registrations of jagged anguish and grief, public and private. Yet they seek to radiate the consolatory as well. No wonder that World War I memorialists utilized to the fullest the vocabulary at hand: the long 19<sup>th</sup> century's traditional funerary motifs within the comforting setting of that particularly Romantic invention, the park cemetery. As Jay Winter points out, a public's understandable obsession with seeing the war in "traditional modes ... provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind" (Winter 1995: 5).<sup>10</sup> Only allegory could work this charm. But it could not

<sup>10</sup> See also Curl 1980, Ragon 1983.



cover every scar, and here is where the law of unexpected consequences takes over.

Allward's dream could have resulted in a grander version of the kind of military monument that his culture had presented to him: a combination of the architectural column or obelisk (in this case, two columns), a figure (in this case, a score of them) and a testamentary relief (in this case the dedicatory inscription). Such had been a war memorial's components throughout the long 19th century; they recur throughout any catalogue of Great War memorials. Yet where the vast majority of monuments used as their figure an idealized combatant, Allward instead presented what became in effect a tableau, a pageant. Here groupings of figures re-enacted a counter-narrative to that of battle, an upward motion countervailing the subterranean thrust of the trenches. The Madonna gazes downward, the Spirit of Sacrifice upward. In this way, the memorial rehearses an allegorized, hygienic and uplifting sanctification of the process it seeks to commemorate and symbolically re-enact.

Yet the comforting vision had lost its edge. Allward's exclusion of the triumphal from his figures (see above), King Edward VIII's sober remarks at the unveiling—coloured by the prospect of an oncoming war—stressing sacrifice and remembrance, Allward's admission to a news reporter shortly before the unveiling that the monument was "really about the Missing," all show just how greatly the transcendental balloon of his dream had deflated ("The King at Vimy Ridge" 1936). In fact, a new and starker absence had left its mark on the memorial.

#### IV

[F]or our unconscious, there is one case in which the two opposing attitudes towards death, the one which acknowledges it as the annihilation of life and the other which denies it as unreal, collide and come into conflict (Freud 1957 198).

Monuments by their very nature attempt wrestle with that Freudian dichotomy by trying to pin annihilation to the mat. In effect, they state that "Yes, our subjects lie dead, but not really. You our audience will always remember them. This mnemonic structure you behold attests to our dead's immortality." So the logic goes. In line with this urge, Allward's allegorical figures presented what an acute observer has termed "complete monumental bodies which symbolically replaced the many absent, fragmented corpses"

(Moriarity 1995: 159). Allward moulded those idealized bodies into a pageant of suffering and triumph, an allegory squeezing the last full measure of Christian reassurance from what is essentially a post-Christian imaginative statement.<sup>11</sup> But a group of the Fallen had shown up for the reveille that the Vimy memorial sounds. If many of the survivors back in Canada proved to be one set of absentees from the audience, there was a second set as well. Mute at roll call, lacking all record of individuated identity, they needed a monument to give them voice. How would *they*, the Missing, be commemorated?

Those untraceable bodies—the names that 11,285 went by inscribed on the memorial—exercised a hypnotic hold over their culture.<sup>12</sup> They made up an absence even greater than that imposed by distant burial, an absence of corporeality itself. The Empire would erect two enormous structures to commemorate the Missing. Sir Edwin Lutyens' Thiepval memorial (unveiled July 1932), imaginatively realizes the concept of vacuity in as striking a manner as *Waiting for Godot* would more than a decade later.<sup>13</sup> Sir Reginald Bromfield's Menin Gate (Ypres; 1927) remains a heavily-visited site, where "Last Post" and "Reveille" are still blown daily ("Menin Gate Memorial"). Both structures bear on their surfaces the names of the missing. Nonetheless, as Allward pointed out, the CBMC had not included that feature on the monument in their original contract ("Memorandum to the Imperial War Graves Commission," November 8, 1927. Allward papers). What seems to have been an afterthought on everyone's part—which the patrons then opportunistically imposed upon their artist—has over the years swelled into the memorial's most prominent feature.<sup>14</sup> A present-day government

<sup>11</sup> Duffy 2008 190-91, discusses one of the sculptural sources of Allward's death-narrative.

<sup>12</sup> Field Marshal Lord Plumer expressed this heartache at the 1927 opening of the Menin Gate, "To their relatives [of the missing] there must have been added to their grief a tinge of bitterness and a feeling that everything possible had not been done to recover their loved ones' bodies and give them reverent burial....But when peace came and the last ray of hope had been extinguished the void seemed deeper and the outlook more forlorn for those who had no grave to visit, no place where they could lay tokens of loving remembrance...." This in turn necessitated erecting "a memorial worthy of them which should give expression to the nation's gratitude for their sacrifice and its sympathy with those who mourned them" (quoted in Duffy 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Thiepval and its significance: Gradidge 1981: 79-81; The Work of the English Architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) 1981: 153; Butler: 41-42.

<sup>14</sup> Colonel Osborne first mentioned the matter to Allward after the 1924 completion of University of Toronto's Soldiers' Tower's listing of the dead on inscribed stone. This



website now downplays the memorial's allegorical figures, concentrating instead on the names of the Missing (Veterans' Affairs Canada 2005).



**Figure 3:** A sandblaster inscribes the names of the Missing on the Vimy memorial. Photo: Veterans' Affairs Canada.

The Veterans' Affairs' ministry's standard printed brochure is sprinkled with shots of the allegorical figures; yet its entire final page images a portion of the monument that bears the inscriptions. An inset zooms in on a group of those chiseled names (Veterans' Affairs Canada. *The Canadian National Vimy Memorial*). Public memory today foregrounds the names without hesitation. We like lists. Lists have become so prominent a feature of public memorializing now—think for example of the Vietnam War monument in Washington, D.C. and the Jewish Quarter Museum in Prague—that we assume that the

---

follows by at least two years the drafting of the original contract (Osborne to Allward, September 7, 1926. Allward papers).

inclusion of the names of the Missing had been planned from the Memorial's inception. Not so. Carving the names presented a host of technical difficulties: planning the spacing required for inclusion proved a nightmare. Then the properties of his building materials compelled Allward to employ a cement wash atop his limestone in order to provide a ground for the inscriptions. This in turn made the names vulnerable to erosion. Yet that very erosion proved the chief factor compelling Canada's government to undertake an extensive repair and restoration of the memorial, thus preserving it and bringing it back into public attention (Hucker 2007: 283-88; Valpy 2007; Veterans Affairs Canada *Design and Construction*). Even the artist himself, despite his initial reluctance, despite his suggestion (shocking to his patrons) that the names appear on the pavement that visitors use as a walkway, had gotten the point by the time of Vimy's unveiling (CBMC Minutes, Nov. 8, 1927). He stated then that his memorial was primarily *about* the Missing ("The King at Vimy Ridge"). I contend however, that Allward was right the first time, for a deep rift looms between the idealism of the allegorical, nationalist agenda and the stark positivism of the naked names. That dilemma haunts us still.

The political insiders who understood that Vimy had to serve as the site for Canada's chief war memorial surely shared Plumer's grasp of public urgency over the Missing. Grief's sharp gnawings, and a culture's century-long funereal practices necessitated a location for their mourning of the Missing. Well then, Canada was building a worthy memorial indeed, one whose scale dwarfed most other aids to memory. Inscribing the names of the Missing there placed Canada on a plane with the other grievers, and offered the bereaved a lightning rod for their suffering. Yet this political logic did not include the imaginative aims of Walter Allward.

No other submission to the competition for the memorial made as extensive a use of statuary as Allward's.<sup>15</sup> The idealized and the allegorical lay at the centre of his artistic imagination. A list of names belongs to another ontological order. Including that list resembles footnoting a poem with a telephone book. A very Modernist gesture,

---

<sup>15</sup> Duffy 2005, and the informative slide show at Veterans Affairs Canada, "Story Galleries" [http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=memorials/ww1mem/vimy/sg/04\\_monument/01\\_competition](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=memorials/ww1mem/vimy/sg/04_monument/01_competition).



we might observe, but a gesture discordant with the rest of the memorial.

Allward's dream—the vision that he claimed furnished him with the inspiration for his greatest project—included nothing as prosaic and positivist as a list of names. Small wonder that a sculptor-architect-designer intent on scaling heaven resisted being kicked earthwards! Is there a starker antonym to allegorical soaring than deadpan taxonomy? Against the deliberative, noble providentialism of the triumph over death, juxtapose the chanciness of obliteration and dispersal. For twenty idealized, significantly posed representations of the striving, yearning, aspirational human body, outlined in glorious curvilinear, substitute the spiky inscription of 11, 285 names. Those inscriptions represent nothing less than the totality of what is now known about the bodies that those names once denoted. Of course Allward resisted the profanation of his dream of a ghostly army coming to the assistance of the actual corporeal one. How could he have welcomed such a reminder of the fragility and time-bound nature of actuality? Is anything more sobering than the compression of memory into sets of letters graven in stone and assembled haphazardly by death? Of course Allward initially saw nothing untoward in lining his walkways with those literal indicators of an actuality that his allegorical figures spurn. His remark that his memorial was all about the Missing seems, upon examination, more of a plea than a protocol. Yet through the irony that remains so firmly embedded in the Modernist consciousness, this inclusion of the names—suiting as it does the memorializing preferences of our own era—gives the memorial an appeal and a relevance that it would otherwise lack. What the builder shied from, has become the keystone of the structure's current "draw." That fact however, should not blind us to the thematic dissonance that the inclusion sounds.

Ignoring for a moment the artist's initial vision, how do the names qualify the memorial's role as a nationalist document? An ecclesiastical analogy clarifies the cultural negotiation that has taken place. Before the names, the nationalist temple that Allward planned resembled a splendid Unitarian chapel, a monument to a "higher" spirit asserting that somehow another order of existence enables the viewer to take comfort amid his tribulation. The names instead position us within an Anglican cathedral, decked with commemorative plaques of the dead. No amount of comforting can remove the simplicity of their fate. Pushing the analogy no further,

we find that the sharply qualified—even undermined—idealized statement of national identity positions the Vimy memorial at the centre of Canadian nationalism's current dilemma. What exactly is that "national development" that Canon Scott assumed that the Vimy memorial enshrined? What constitutes the nation celebrated there? Is there an essential aspect of Canadianness that is somehow present in the nation state known as Canada? Or does the label designate nothing more than a randomly assembled collection of individuals within a set of geographical boundaries? The discussion reels on and on, until it grows apparent that a Canadian Benedict Anderson would have had to entitle his seminal work, *Imaginary Communities*.

A recent essay collection's title says it all: *Canadas of the Mind. The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century* (Hillmer and Chapnick 2007). That (pluralizing) letter at the end of "Nationalisms" telegraphs what the concluding sentences of the Introduction state. "Canadians' sense of what it takes to belong keeps evolving as they attempt to incorporate their contradictions into visions of a national identity. ... The Canadas of the mind habitually reside in the future" (Hillmer and Chapnick 2007: 12). Within that structure of time loop/time warp that post-modernity has accustomed us to spotting, Allward's Vimy memorial speaks to us still. The memorial reluctantly yet prophetically sets in stone a discussion that engages us still: the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in the idealized nationalism it at once proclaims, celebrates and mourns.

---

Born and raised in Louisville, KY, **DENNIS DUFFY** is a Professor of English (Emeritus) at the University of Toronto. Author of numerous books and articles on Canadian literature and culture, he has taught Canadian Studies in India, Spain and Ireland, where he inaugurated the Craig Dobbin (Visiting) Chair of Canadian Studies at University College Dublin. Recently, he has taught courses in public memory and culture in VIC ONE, a foundations programme at the U. of T.



## SOURCES

- Allward, Walter S. Allward papers. Queen's University Archives, Kingston ON.
- . "Study for War Memorial #7" National Gallery of Canada Artist's File. NGC 30531.
- Berton, Pierre 2001. *VIMY*. Toronto: Random House Canada.
- Bliss, Michael. 1999. *William Osler. A Life in Medicine*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Borstad, Lane F. 1990. A Catalogue of Drawings and Sculpture of Walter Seymour Allward (1876-1955). M.A. thesis. Queen's University.
- Bothwell, Robert 2006. *Penguin History of Canada*. Toronto: Penguin Canada.
- Brandon, Laura 2008. "History as Monument. The Sculptures on the Vimy Memorial." Dispatches, Canadian War Museum.  
<[http://www.museedelaguerre.ca/cwm/index\\_e.aspx?detailid=18481](http://www.museedelaguerre.ca/cwm/index_e.aspx?detailid=18481)>.
- Brebner, J.B. 1970. *Canada. A Modern History*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Butler, A.S.G. 1950. *The Architecture of Sir Edwin Lutyens*. Vol. III. London: Country Life, 1950.
- Campbell, Sandra 2007. "The Real Discoverers and Master-Builders of This Nation": Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press and Nationalism in Canadian Art, 1920-1950." Ed. Norman Hillmer and Adam Chapnick. *Canadas of the Mind. The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens' University Press. 175-90.
- Canadian Battlefields Memorials Commission 1929. *Canadian Battlefield Memorials*. Ottawa: King's Printer. 79-85.
- . Minutes. Meeting of November 8, 1927. Library and Archives Canada. RG38 vol. 419.
- Chapman, Paul. [n.d.] "Members' Research (1) The Spirit of Canada - Uncloaked," *Stand To: the Journal of the Western Front Association* #51:31-32.
- Connor, J.T.H. 2000. *Doing Good. The Life of Toronto's General Hospital*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Conrad, Margaret 2003. *Canada: a National History*. Toronto: Longman Canada.

- Curl, James Stevens. 1980. *A Celebration of Death. An introduction to some of the buildings, monuments, and settings of funerary architecture in the Western European tradition*. London: Constable.
- Cusack, Veronica 2004, *The Invisible Soldier. Captain W.A.P. Durie, His Life and Afterlife*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- Duffy, Dennis 2005. "Memorial as Expression of National Consciousness. Canada's VIMY World War I Memorial," *Competitions* (Fall): 53-59.
- . 2008. "Complexity and Contradiction in Canadian Public Sculpture: The Case of Walter Allward" *American Review of Canadian Studies* 38 (2 Summer 2008). 189-206.
- Duffy, Michael 2001. "The Inauguration of the Menin Gate, 1927," <<http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/meningate.htm>>.
- "Flag Unfurled on Vimy Day." 1921. (Toronto) *Globe*. April 11. 6.
- Freud, Sigmund 1957 "Thoughts on War and Death," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol 14. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis. 273-300.
- Fussell, Paul 1975. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Toronto: Oxford Canada.
- Gagan, David and Gagan, Rosemary 2002. *For Patients of Moderate Means. A Social History of the Voluntary Public General Hospital in Canada, 1890-1950*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens' University Press.
- Gidney, R. D. and W.P.J Millar 1994. *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*. Ontario Historical Studies Series. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Gradidge, Roderick 1981. *Edwin Lutyens Architect Laureate*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Granatstein, J.L. 2004. *Hell's Corner. An Illustrated History of Canada's Great War 1914-1918*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre.
- Habenstein, Robert W. and Lammers, William M. 1955. *The History of American Funeral Directing*. Milwaukee, WI: Bulfin Printers.
- Hastings, Paula 2007. "Branding Canada: Consumer Culture and the Development of Popular Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century." Eds. Norman Hillmer, and Adam Chapnick. *Canadas of the Mind. The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens' University Press. 175-90.



- Hayes, Geoffrey, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold Eds. 2007. *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*. Waterloo Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Hillmer, Norman 2008. "Statute of Westminster," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*. <<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0007675>>.
- Hillmer, Norman and Adam Chapnick, eds. 2007. "Introduction." *Canadas of the Mind. The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens' University Press. 3-12.
- Hook, Derek 2005. "Monumental space and the uncanny," *Geoforum* 36 #6 (Nov.). 688-704.
- House of Commons Canada Debates 1922. May 22. 2099, 2100
- Howell, Colin D. 1984. "Elite doctors and the Development of Scientific Medicine: The Halifax Medical Establishment and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Medical Professionalism," *Health, Disease and Medicine. Essays in Canadian History*. Ed. Charles G. Roland. Toronto: Clarke Irwin. 105-22.
- Hucker, Jacqueline 2007. "'After the Agony in Stony Places' The Meaning and Significance of the Vimy Monument," in Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, Mike Bechthold Eds. *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*. Waterloo Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 279-90.
- "The King at Vimy Ridge," 1936. *Observer* May 31. 8.
- Laderman, Gary. 2003. *Rest in Peace. A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lloyd, David W. 1998. *Battlefield Tourism. Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939*. Oxford: Berg.
- Longworth, Philip 1967. *The Unending Vigil. A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission 1917-1967*. London: Constable.
- Lower, A.R.M. 1977. *Colony to Nation. A History of Canada*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Marshall, David 1998. "'Death Abolished': Changing Attitudes to Death and the Afterlife in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Protestantism," in Norman Knowles ed., *Age of Transition. Readings in Canadian Social History, 1800-1900*. Toronto: Harcourt, Brace. 370-87.

- McNaught, Kenneth 1988. *Penguin History of Canada*. Rev ed. Toronto: Penguin Canada.
- "Menin Gate Memorial, Design and Construction," *The Great War 1914-1918*. <<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/westfront/ypsalient/meningate/meningate1418.htm>>.
- Moriarty, Catherine 1995. *Narrative and the Absent Body. Mechanisms of Meaning in First World War Memorials*. Ph. D. dissertation. Sussex University.
- Morton, Desmond 2001. *A Short History of Canada*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Morton, W.L. 1969. *The Kingdom of Canada: a general history from earliest times* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Mosquin, Alexandra 2001. "Walter Seymour Allward," Submission Report, National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. 5.
- Murray, W.W. 1936. "The Vimy Pilgrimage," *Canadian Geographical Journal*, 13 #8 (Dec.): 406-67.
- Nelles, H.V. 2004. *A Little History of Canada*. Toronto: Oxford Canada.
- "News in Pictures" 1923. *Globe*. Feb. 13. 8.
- Nudelman, Franny 2004. *John Brown's body: slavery, violence & the culture of war*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Perry, Anne Anderson 1922. "Walter Allward - Canada's Sculptor," *International Studio* # 75 (April): 120-24.
- Picard Andréa 2006. "Restoring Loss at Vimy" *Canadian Architect* 51 #5 (May): 74-78.
- Ragon, Michel. 1983. *The Space of Death. A Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Riendeau, Roger E. 2000. *A Brief History of Canada*. New York: Facts on File.
- Roy, R.H. 2008. "Vimy Ridge," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.
- Scott, Canon F.G. 1922. *The Great War as I Saw It*. Toronto: F.D. Goodchild, 1922.
- 1936. "The Significance of Vimy," Empire Club (Toronto) Addresses, October 22, 1936. <<http://www.empireclubfoundation.com/details.asp?SpeechID=169&FT=yes>>.
- Valpy, Michael 2007. "Setting Legend in Stone" *Globe and Mail*. April 7. F5.
- Varley, Christopher 2008. "Group of Seven," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*. <<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0003476>>.



Veterans' Affairs Canada 2008. "Design and Construction of the Vimy Ridge Memorial," <<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=memorials/ww1mem/vimy/vmemory>>.

[----] "Story Galleries A Brief History of Vimy" <<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=memorials/ww1mem/vimy/sg>>.

[----] *The Canadian National Vimy Memorial*. [Brochure].

Winter, Jay. 1995. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[anon.] 1981. *The Work of the English Architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944)*. London: Hayward Gallery.



## *disClosure* a journal of social theory

### Consuming Cultures forthcoming in spring, 2010

The ideologies, politics, and practices of consumption all occur in widely divergent cultural contexts with varying and uneven implications. The term culture simultaneously marks an object to be consumed and a basis of consumption practices themselves. *disClosure* 19 will explore the potential social, political, and cultural implications of consumption practices. Topics will range from the consumption of food, art, ideologies and identity and will be addressed in the journal in scholarly essays, creative writing and visual art.

*disClosure* is an annual thematic publication dedicated to investigating and stimulating interest in new directions in contemporary social theory. By encouraging submissions from a variety of disciplinary, geographical, and theoretical perspectives and genres, the journal seeks to expand the nature of what is studied by the academy and how it is studied. In an effort to construct new approaches to form and content, we encourage submissions that employ innovative writing styles as well as formal scholarly work. *disClosure* annually publishes articles, art, creative writing, interviews, and book reviews.

Now in its nineteenth year, *disClosure* has interviewed some of the most well-known figures in the field of social theory, including bell hooks, Peter Jackson, David Harvey, and Gloria Anzaldúa. We have also published articles, artwork, and creative writing from an array of international contributors.

**Inquiries/Subscriptions:  
[disclosurejournal@gmail.com](mailto:disclosurejournal@gmail.com)**

For more information about *disClosure* (including subscription information, back issues, submission guidelines), as well as about the University of Kentucky's Committee on Social Theory, please visit:  
<http://web.as.uky.edu/SocialTheory/>