

A Casualty of Genre

The War Short Stories of Will R. Bird

Dubbed “the unofficial bard of the CEF” by Jonathan Vance (“Soldier” 27), Will R. Bird (1891-1984) enlisted in 1916 and served as a sniper and then as a rifleman with the 42nd Battalion; he saw fighting at Passchendaele, Amiens, Arras, and Cambrai, and was awarded a Military Medal for bravery for actions at Mons, Belgium, on the last day of the First World War. Furthermore, unlike many of his fellow combat veterans, Bird decided to write about his battlefield experiences soon after being demobbed. Over the next few decades he would publish a host of articles and a handful of non-fiction books about the Great War, his most celebrated work being the soldier-memoir *And We Go On* (1930). Yet Bird was more than a war memoirist: he was also a war novelist and short-story writer, and over a two-decade period beginning in the late 1920s he published at least fifty war short stories, the first ones appearing in 1927 (possibly earlier), as well as a novel, *Private Timothy Fergus Clancy* (1930). Indeed, as Ian McKay and Robin Bates have noted, “The war gave Bird a vast fund of stories and a constituency of veterans eager to hear them” (133).

Criticism on Bird’s war fiction, however, is practically non-existent, with glosses by Vance in *Death So Noble* (1999) and a handful of lines in a 1953 MA thesis by Lillian Hunter Matthews representing the bulk of the scholarship.¹ One reason for this lack of critical focus on Bird’s war fiction can be attributed to the fact that many of his stories were published in short-lived pulp magazines and official government publications, and so quickly fell out of print.² A second contributing factor may be the historical favouring of the novel among scholars of Canadian war literature.³ But with

the recent reissue of his primary works, such as David Williams' edition of *And We Go On* (McGill-Queen's UP, 2014) as well as my own anthology *A Soldier's Place: The War Stories of Will R. Bird* (Nimbus, 2018), scholars are invited to reconsider Bird's contributions to Canada's war literature. As I hope to demonstrate, the stories he published during the interwar period are especially deserving of critical attention, since they offer readers a compelling portrayal of the Canadian soldier's First World War experience that is neither uniquely romantic nor realist in treatment. Instead, Bird navigated a middle way between these two aesthetic poles by offering short stories that privileged the humanity and brotherhood of soldiers over their combat deeds. What's more, his stories arguably served as a form of literary catharsis for the thousands of veterans who read and responded to his work.

It is instructive to consider first where Bird published his short stories. Reaching across the publication spectrum, his war fiction appeared in both mainstream as well as specialty magazines, including *Maclean's*, *Canadian Magazine*, *Busy East of Canada*, the *Toronto Star Weekly*, and *Collier's*, among others. But of the three main outlets for his work, the first two were pulp magazines, one of which was fairly short-lived: *Canadian War Stories*, for instance, was started in 1929, but ceased production in February 1930 as a result of the stock market crash (Vance, *Death* 178); it had advertised itself as "an alert Canadian magazine depicting romance, fact and fiction, gallant acts and deeds of war heroes" (qtd. in Vance, *Death* 177). An examination of Bird's publication credits through various bibliographical sources suggests he published eight war stories in this magazine. Comparatively, the US periodical *War Stories* ran from 1926 to 1936 (Tennyson 440), and largely "glorified the military engagements of the Great War and cashed in on a sense of nostalgia . . . for the first war" (Drowne and Huber 180); not surprisingly, because of the magazine's longevity, Bird succeeded in placing at least sixteen of his combat narratives in *War Stories*.⁴ Equally important is the fact that the intended readership for both of these pulp magazines was primarily the working class. As Erin Smith describes in her study of readership in pulp magazines in the early twentieth century:

Scholars concur that pulp magazines targeted those who were in some way marginal readers—adolescents, the poorly educated, immigrants, and laborers. . . . Pulp publisher Harold Hersey maintained that most readers were office or factory girls . . . , soldiers, sailors, miners, dock-workers, ranchers, rangers, and others who worked with their hands. (205)

Bird's third main publishing outlet for his war short stories was *The Legionary*. Launched in May 1926 to replace the *Canadian Veteran*, it was self-styled as the "official national magazine of the Canadian Legion." It has enjoyed a long publishing life, continuing as *Legion Magazine* after 1968. As for Bird, his popularity with *The Legionary* is readily apparent: in addition to his non-fiction pieces that appeared regularly in the magazine's pages, Bird published more than a dozen war short stories in *The Legionary* between 1927 and 1936. What's more, *The Legionary's* readership was almost exclusively Canadian veterans, and so the stories in this journal were ultimately meant to serve a more experienced and knowledgeable audience than that of *War Stories* and *Canadian War Stories*—although as noted above, soldiers were considered a main reading consumer of pulp magazines.

This short survey of Bird's publication history reveals that he was not only able to produce stories over a sustained period of time, but was also able to produce a considerably large number of them—the majority of which were intended for the soldierly reader. But Bird's prodigious output cannot be explained solely as that of a fledgling writer needing quick financial turnaround, particularly given the fact that his stories were immensely popular during the interwar period. On the contrary, I would argue that the main reason Bird was able to write so many publishable war short stories is because the form readily lends itself to articulating the soldier experience. Mary Louise Pratt argued in 1981 that "if the short story is not a 'full-length' narrative [like the novel] it cannot narrate a full-length life; it can narrate a fragment or excerpt of a life" (183)—a concept alluded to earlier by Norman Friedman (1958), who contends that "a major change [in a character], because it includes perforce more aspects of the protagonist's life, tends to be longer [in length] than a minor change" (111, emphasis mine). This idea of the short story as a "fragment" rather than the "complete life" of a protagonist is well suited to the war writer of the interwar period, not just because it functions as a metaphor for postwar life (one recalls T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"), but also because the "fragment or excerpt of a life" reflects well the soldier experience: daily life is not a single narrative, but a series of actions (march here, attack there, rest here, dig here, wait there) which, among the non-commissioned ranks, is often not explained in terms of the big picture. For obvious reasons, regular soldier-writers tended

not to see or experience or study the war in sweeping terms of *le grand récit*, but in short, fragmented, life-and-death moments. It is perhaps no coincidence that many of Canada's popular Great War soldier-novelists—Ralph Connor (Charles Gordon), Philip Child, Leslie Roberts, George Godwin, and Peregrine Acland—came from the officer class, whereas war short-story writers like Bird, Harold Fraser Cruickshank, and W. Redvers Dent were from the non-commissioned ranks.⁵

Related to this notion of the short story as a literary “fragment” is the form's displacement of time in comparison to the novel. Ian Watt suggests in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) that the genre's early evolution was influenced by Locke's defining of individual identity as “an identity of consciousness through duration in time,” and that “many novelists . . . have made their subject the exploration of the personality as it is defined in the interpenetration of its past and present self-awareness,” leaving Watt to espouse “the novel's insistence on the time process” (21, 22). Lukács also includes time as one of the genre's central pillars, arguing that “[o]nly in the novel, whose very matter is seeking and failing to find the essence, is time posited together with the form” (122). Yet the short story's shorter page length (and hence its ability to be consumed in one sitting), as well as its frequent portrayal of a small handful of characters operating in a tightly defined social arena, makes the passage of time of lesser importance to the writer than to the articulation of the protagonist's epiphany—as evidenced by James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), for instance. As Michael Trussler notes, “The short story's inclination for hovering over one specific temporal horizon affects the ways in which the genre positions itself against the movement of historical progression” (560-61). Trussler also observes that

[s]hort stories, through brevity, and their tendency to depict a single temporal horizon, often create a special dynamic that invites the reader to project . . . his or her [*sic*] ‘prejudices’ against a given text; but at the same time, such a text contains an unknowable element. The short story does not so much create the vast, interconnected cosmology that writers such as Barth associate with the novel, as it presents a hermeneutic condition of crisis. (575)

These ideas of the “unknowable element” as well as the “condition of crisis” implicit within the genre reflect as well the conditions experienced by soldiers in a theatre of war, who are not only tasked with attacking an unknowable Other but also engaged in intelligence gathering in order to succeed.

As to the stories themselves, a cursory examination of Bird's narratives reveals that he seldom portrayed epic battles, and that time was of secondary or even tertiary importance to his literary objectives. Instead, the short story form afforded him the ability to depict the smaller events that made up the bulk of the real war experience: a nighttime trench raid; the taking of a machine gun nest; the watching of the line; the discovery of an occupied building. Even when larger battles are described, as for example in one episode of "White Collars: A Tale of the 'Princess Pats,'" published across the February and March issues of *The Legionary* in 1932, the narrative is not omniscient or broad in scope. Instead, the reader's perspective is always connected to the soldier-protagonist:

Renforth was standing by McCann when a single gun fired from some point ahead. With a jarring crash that seemed to lift him, the barrage opened. It was indescribable. The deafening clamor reverberated in a mighty unison, and it seemed as if a cataract of rushing things were pouring overhead. Far ahead Renforth saw a continuous play of flashes, and twin red lights, breaking high. He tried to ask Bull their meaning but could not hear his own voice. ("White Collars," February 1932, 13)

What's more, many of Bird's stories follow a format whereby the protagonist is named in the first paragraph and is soon tasked—or chooses by his own will—to undergo a mission. The mission, brief as it is and singularly focused, is already cognate to the short story form. Sometimes the missions are straightforward: investigate a crater or go on a raid. At other times the mission is more personal, such as wanting to avenge a friend's death or needing to escape from a German tunnel. Furthermore, the majority of stories are told from the perspective of the enlisted man, so officers are regularly painted in a negative light: in the story "Sunshine," for example, which appeared in the July 1929 issue of *The Legionary*, a bossy officer obsessed with rank and order is revealed as a coward on the battlefield; similarly, in "Strike Me Pink!," published in the June 1930 issue of *War Stories*, an acting sergeant is berated by a major for going on patrols and life-saving missions instead of writing reports about them for the major to submit to his superior. Yet a handful of Bird's tales also depict the soldier learning to trust his officer. One sees this, for instance, in Bird's first story in *The Legionary*, appearing in July 1927, titled "His Deputy."⁶ "Red" McLean is a tough, wiry soldier from the 2nd Battalion of the Nova Scotia Highlanders who keeps finding himself in situations where he is

subjected to the orders of a commanding officer who shares his name, Murdock Malcolm McLean. “Red” spends much of his time avoiding his perceived doppelgänger, thinking he is “going to outdo him in courage” (“His Deputy” 14). But in the end, the officer saves Red’s life and Red finally accepts their shared fate—in effect, they become brothers in valour.

Reinforcing this notion of brotherhood-in-arms, or learned social levelling, is Bird’s diversity of soldier-protagonists. Rather than keeping to Canadian protagonists, Bird portrayed characters who were Irish, Canadian, Newfoundlander, American, Australian, British, even German. Such an observation may be easily dismissed as a marketing tool, since it allowed Bird to tailor the nationality of his soldiers to the nationality of the publication he was targeting (such as including US soldiers in stories pitched to American magazines like *Collier’s* or *War Stories*). However, this decision may also reflect Bird’s belief in the universality of the soldier experience—that is, while the locations of assaults or offensives can be linked to specific historical events and battalions, the activities and experiences of the soldiers were invariably similar. Moreover, while Bird dismissed Charles Yale Harrison’s *Generals Die in Bed* (1930) and other anti-war books for being “putrid with so-called ‘realism’” (qtd. in Vance, “Soldier” 28), it is telling that such an international list of portrayals of characters from different nation-states is reminiscent of Harrison’s own dedication to *Generals Die in Bed*: “To the bewildered youths—British, Australian, Canadian, and German—who were killed.” But Harrison, who dedicated his novella to all fallen soldiers, portrayed only one type of soldier-protagonist; namely, the disillusioned fighter-turned-pacifist. Bird, however, portrayed those who lived as well as died; those who succeeded as well as failed; those who fought and those who fled; those who believed in and those who opposed the war.

Bird’s soldier-protagonists also tended to be outsiders or marginal figures, such as the Irishman, the French Canadian, the American embedded in a Canadian battalion, and the sergeant who grew up in the outback. One poignant example of this outsider trope is Gerald Marrack, the protagonist of “Boots!”, which appeared in the November 1929 issue of *Canadian War Stories*. Assigned to the “Warwicks” (Britain’s Royal Warwick Regiment), Marrack is a “newcomer” to the regiment as they push towards Passchendaele. More importantly, the four men with whom he becomes friendly are

portrayed as being broadly representative of the soldierly situation: Chicken is the nervous soldier, unsure about going into battle; Fitzherbert is the pacifist, declaring that “[t]he whole sordid game is rotten and we’re fools to stand for it. I don’t want to kill any man—I’ve no hatred for anyone” (“Boots!” 40); Skinner, the corporal, is the eager soldier, who looks forward to battle because “it’ll give us a chance to get our bayonets into some of them squareheads” (40); and Matthews is the level-headed soldier who keeps to himself and just does his job. As for Gerald, he rejects early on the vehement pacifist attitude of Fitzherbert as well as the bloodlust of Skinner, whose hunger to kill is reinforced by a nearby woman:

Gerald was startled by [Fitzherbert’s] vehemence. . . . His words were well-chosen and his argument disturbed Gerald, yet stirred him to resentment. . . . The old woman hovered near them, waiting for her pay. “Hate?” she quavered. “Hate Boche. Kill-kill-kill.” Gerald shuddered and arose. He didn’t want to talk. In a way he despised them both. (40)

In other words, Gerald is sympathetic to neither the pro-war nor anti-war camp; instead, he gravitates towards the quiet, reasonable, and pragmatic soldier: “[Gerald] wanted to get back to Matthews” (40).

Much of the narrative revolves around Gerald’s complaints about his ill-fitting boots. But this image quickly becomes part of the universal symbolism of suffering soldiers. As his company gets closer to the front, for example, Gerald stops at a prisoner’s cage and initially looks at the Germans with contempt: “He spat disgustedly. They stank of stale perspiration, they seemed stoic, calloused parts of a system” (41). Yet a bit later, Gerald realizes he and his mates are part of the same system: “Then he remembered the top boots the Germans wore. War was hell on both sides” (41). This statement demonstrates another aspect of the story’s narrative strategy: it is presented as a third-person limited point of view, though at several key points the reader is provided with Gerald’s thoughts and reflections on what he sees and experiences. Functionally speaking, then, the narrative’s indirect discourse not only enables the reader to “see” the story as Gerald sees it, but asks the reader to consider and/or weigh ethical issues confronted by the soldier as they are presented. In fact, as Gerald moves closer to the front he sees more instances of death, causing him to briefly rethink his position: “He looked for Fitzherbert, he wanted to talk with him, perhaps only to agree that war was murder” (41). But when

Fitzherbert appears, and reminds him they will have to “crawl through this swamp after other men, who happen to wear a different uniform, and kill them or get killed” (41), Gerald becomes conscious once more of the “same resentment he had felt before” about Fitzherbert’s position, and decides instead that “he should pity the fellow” (41). Dramatically, Matthews later reveals that Fitzherbert is also a “newcomer,” thus complicating Gerald’s attitude towards Fitzherbert’s anti-war platitudes.

When they go over the top, Gerald loses Chicken in the rush, and finds himself confronted by three Germans. He survives the fight, although he is “sickened” for having killed a man with a bayonet (42). Furthermore, when he glances over to another melee, he briefly “considered avoiding [it]” before “the urge that was part of his conscience drove him on” (42). In other words, Gerald’s brief moments of doubt and self-repugnance are quashed as he allows his “conscience” to dictate his actions. Significantly, Gerald soon learns from Matthews that the bloodthirsty, pro-war Skinner is dead. The next day, Chicken is also killed when the stretcher party trying to bring him back from the line is blown up; their new defensive position is also attacked, but the heroics of Matthews, Gerald, and Fitzherbert help repel the attack. The experience of war has not only affected Gerald, but it has also shaken Fitzherbert’s anti-war position: “Fitzherbert stared at the sprawled figures that marked the limit of the Hun advance, then tore rags from the half-buried great-coats with which to clean his rifle. ‘I hope they come again,’ he said hoarsely. ‘We got them sweet that time’” (44). As for Gerald, he finds himself shifting towards the anti-war position Fitzherbert had previously occupied, conscious of how “[h]is finer instincts, his inner self, had been dulled as if the spell of the Salient had drugged him” (43). Equally powerful and symbolic is the moment when Gerald decides to look in a mirror after the German attack is over:

Gerald sank in his corner, resolved that he would not leave it again. He was too tired, could never go back now if they were relieved, away back on those tortuous winding duckwalks. The torn haversack was at his feet and he saw that a steel mirror was wrapped in the towel. He picked it up and gazed into it. The reflection shocked him. He saw gray-green features, like those of a dead man, eyes fixed and staring. He hurled the thing from him. (44)

This symbolic dehumanizing, his transformation from new soldier to “gray-green features, like those of a dead man,” is startling and repulsive

to Gerald. Such self-loathing, however, is fleeting, for shortly after a relief party arrives, Gerald unleashes sudden anger: “Searing, lightning-swift rage galvanized Gerald into surprising swiftness. At a single moment he swung his gun from the parapet and as it came pressed the release. The stream of bullets struck the relief party” (44). The moment is a surprise to both his comrades and the reader. But we soon learn that the reason for Gerald’s rage is not some new-found pro-war sentiment, but instead a sense of conscience and truthfulness/fairness: when he and Fitzherbert are lying on stretchers after the fight, Gerald reveals that the members of the relief party were Germans in disguise, and that he had recognized them by their boots. More importantly, at this moment the narrator is close to Gerald as he confesses to the reader his pleasure—not so much for having killed the enemy, but for having saved his comrades: “Gerald glowed with pride. He was proud of the part he had played, glad that he could rest indefinitely” (45). Fittingly, at the end of the story Gerald gains the courage to publicly ask Fitzherbert about his change in attitude about the war:

So Fitzherbert had fought to the last. “The whole sordid game is rotten.” The words echoed in Gerald’s ears. “I thought you—you didn’t like fighting, that sort of thing,” he said slowly. “I heard a lot at some Objectors’ meetings I attended,” said the weak voice. “Now I know it was all rot. I’m glad I was with you and Matthews.” (45)

Thus, while “Boots!” begins with soldiers taking rigid ethical positions on the war, the ongoing psychological and emotional questioning as a result of battle forces some to adapt or even abandon their previously held beliefs. The seemingly “pro-war” stance of Gerald Marrack and Fitzherbert at the end of “Boots!” is less about the “fight is right” mentality and more about an acknowledgement of the courage required to fight a war at all.

Another concept key to Bird’s understanding of the psychological make-up of the soldier is his “finer instincts.” An idea first introduced in “Boots!”, this notion is examined more fully in one of Bird’s later stories. Aptly titled “The Finer Instincts,” this story appeared in the December 1931 issue of *The Legionary*, and it overtly challenges the propagandistic belief of Allied superiority in morals as well as arms, and the notion that the Germans are “mechanically clever and systematic, but they’re totally devoid of the finer instincts of the white race” (“Finer Instincts” 6). This story recounts the experience of Sergeant John Keene, whose belief in the war machine is

challenged by one of his men, Corporal Ashley. But soon Ashley is killed in battle and Keene is wounded, and the loss of Ashley affects Keene deeply, shaking his preconceived notions about war as an act of glory and courage; instead, while waiting to be bandaged up, “the biggest thing” he desired was to “get across the channel. To get away from the war” (10). What soothes and heals Keene’s psychological wounds, though, is the sound of a violin whose notes are transformative: “The music that evening began on a sadder strain. It seemed as if the player were tired, perplexed, lonely, but after a time courage crept in, courage that was contagious. It was penetrating. Keene was a soldier again” (11). Moreover, what Keene (and the reader) learn at the end of the story is that the music—assumed by Keene to be that of a fellow Allied soldier—is played by a German soldier also being treated in the field hospital, one whom Keene had seen at the moment he was wounded. This story, then, is a poignant message about empathy and universal brotherhood, as well as an emblem of Bird’s belief in the capacity of art to heal.

A related, equally poignant tale of the German as soldierly brother is “If You Were Me,” a thinly veiled version of Bird’s own war experience. Published in two instalments in October and November 1929 in *The Legionary*, it tells the story of a group of Canadian Highlanders fighting in Mons at the end of the war. As members of the group are killed, the narrative focuses increasingly on Corporal Morton and his internal turmoil relating to his desire for revenge and his suspicions of war’s futility: “Morton . . . cursed so luridly that he had been ashamed of himself. The war over. Who cared? He hated everything” (“If You Were Me,” November 1929, 16). Moreover, Bird’s story resists the demonization of the enemy so frequently used in earlier, more propagandistic fictions about the war (see Webb, “A Righteous Cause”). Rather than being depicted as the “evil Other,” the German is, at the end of this story, portrayed in a sympathetic fashion, almost as a brotherly “self.” Instead of killing him as revenge for his friend’s death, Morton provides the German with a disguise so he can escape. This selfless act, along with Morton’s shaking of the German soldier’s outstretched hand, is a moment of both recognition and healing which brings about a kind of catharsis for Morton, allowing him to “lay down to sleep without a dread of the morrow” (November 1929, 33).

Both the portrayal of the vengeful soldier’s catharsis as well as the image of “artistic” healing in “The Finer Instincts” speak to another possible

reason for the popularity of Bird's war short stories: namely, they served as a form of bibliotherapy for veterans. This concept, first introduced in 1916 by Samuel McChord Crothers in "A Literary Clinic," was considered a fairly straightforward form of therapy, in which the book acted as "a literary prescription put up for the benefit of some one who needs it" (293), and where, as Crothers suggests, "[e]ach generation produces some writer who exerts a powerfully stimulating influence on his contemporaries, stirring emotion and leading to action" (294). More importantly, bibliotherapy appears to have been embraced by the military early on in the war, as evidenced by Theodore Wesley Koch's *Books in Camp, Trench and Hospital* (1917)—which discusses how "[b]ooks and magazines are being supplied in great numbers to the British troops" and that the four branches of libraries supplying these materials are "of a common work for the wholesome entertainment and mental well-being of the troops" (5). One could posit that Bird's war stories served a similar function. Indeed, Vance ("Soldier"), Tim Cook, and more recently Monique Dumontet have all suggested that Bird's balanced depictions of both the good and the bad in the soldierly experience contributed to the "immense popularity of Bird's works among veterans" (Vance, "Soldier" 28). But matching this balanced approach to his material was Bird's further attempt to portray the soldier as an inherently human figure, whose struggles are real and universal—regardless of nationality. Bird also attempted to depict, in several of his stories, the effects of trench warfare on the psyche of a soldier. In short, if there is a mimetic-realistic element to Bird's war short stories, as critics have suggested, it is by and large a form of psychological realism which his fellow veterans would have had little trouble relating to, even if they could not voice those feelings themselves. What's more, understanding Bird's short stories as bibliotherapy would be in keeping with Cook's observation of how memoirs of the Great War operated "[l]ike some of the poignant trench-inspired poetry that helped soldiers cope with the suffering in the trenches, or at least provided a more robust language or 'grammar' in which to express suppressed feelings" (75). Indeed, as Ian McKay and Robin Bates note, "Just as Bird personally found that writing gave him a form of occupational therapy as a wounded soldier, his stories take on the dimensions of communal therapy for an entire generation wounded by the Great War" (156).

Ann-Marie Einhaus argues in *The Short Story and the First World War* (2013) that war short stories “helped contemporary readers reflect on, evaluate and come to terms with their own experience of the war by offering a wide range of different fictional interpretations to choose from” (6). But in Will R. Bird’s case, this “coming to terms” was intended specifically for the soldier. Indeed, Bird’s war stories were propelled forward by the actions of his soldier-protagonists; but those actions were inseparable from their psychological consequences. Bird engages in what one might call aesthetic therapeutics for the thousands of veteran readers who identified with not only the material situations he described, but also with the emotional and psychological turmoil each one of his soldier protagonists exhibits. Furthermore, I would contend that Bird’s war short stories performed this function to an even greater extent than his memoir, since the stories were cheaper to purchase and more accessible to less-educated soldiers in terms of length as well as language; they also offered a more diverse set of psychological and emotional situations and thus could speak to a wider soldierly audience—supported by Bird’s own efforts to consistently offer relatable portrayals of the soldier as Everyman. Or as his daughter Betty Murray acutely observed only a few months after her father’s death: “Writing about [the Great War] undoubtedly provided a therapy, just as reading those same stories must have helped so many” (qtd. in Sullivan 13).

At the beginning of *And We Go On*, Bird tells the story of a new recruit who foresaw his own death, suggesting that part of his reason for writing his memoir is to “reveal a side of the war that has not been given much attention, the psychic effect it had on its participants” (4). If true, then his war short stories act as a kind of literary corollary to his soldier memoir. While *And We Go On* was a crucial accounting of his First World War experience and, until quite late in the memoir, a description of collective soldierly experience, in his short stories Bird continually depicted the consequences of those experiences, giving voice not so much to the politics of war as to the emotional and psychological effects it had on the individuals who participated in the conflict.

It must also be remembered that Will R. Bird was not alone in his short-story endeavours. Many other Canadians published war short stories in a host of popular and pulp magazines as well as newspapers during the

interwar period, including Frank Miell, Harold Bengé Atlee, J. G. Sime, Harold Fraser Cruickshank, and W. Redvers Dent, to name a few.⁷ But like Bird, almost all of their stories are long out of print, and exist only within institutional archives as part of a vast “cultural reservoir” (Einhaus 20). Hopefully this essay will stir scholars to undertake additional literary recovery efforts and critical discussions about Canada’s war short stories to better understand how this underserved genre of war writing fits into our understanding of Canadian war literature during the interwar period.

NOTES

- 1 Surprisingly, Zachary Abram offers no commentary on Bird’s fiction in his doctoral dissertation on Great War narratives. Likewise, Peter Webb, in his 2007 doctoral dissertation *Occupants of Memory: War in Twentieth-Century Canadian Fiction*, only addresses Bird’s *And We Go On* and *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*.
- 2 This lack of accessible copies of Bird’s war stories for reprint purposes is compounded by the fact that Bird never published a selected or collected edition of his war short stories, although his collection *Sunrise for Peter and Other Stories* (1946) includes several stories set during the First World War. Consequently, anthologies that include war stories by Bird are infrequent and often include only one example of his work. See, for example, Alice Hale and Sheila Brooks’ *Nearly an Island: A Nova Scotian Anthology* (1979); Fred Cogswell’s *Atlantic Anthology: Volume 1, Prose* (1984); Jane Dewar’s *True Canadian War Stories* (1989); and Muriel Whitaker’s *Great Canadian War Stories* (2001).
- 3 The past thirty years have witnessed a growing critical discourse dedicated to the Canadian war novel, a growth that has followed two main trajectories. The first trajectory examines novels that were produced during and immediately following the First World War, a body of scholarship that includes Eric Thompson’s “Canadian Fiction of the Great War” (1981), Donna Coates’ “The Best Soldiers of All: Unsung Heroines in Canadian Women’s Great War Fictions” (1996), Dagmar Novak’s *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel* (2000), Jonathan Vance’s “The Soldier as Novelist: Literature, History, and the Great War” (2003), Colin Hill’s “Generic Experiment and Confusion in the Early Canadian Novels of the Great War” (2009), and Zachary Abram’s “The Comforts of Home: Sex Workers and the Canadian War Novel” (2016). The second critical trajectory involves examinations of contemporary responses to the Great War, such as Sherrill Grace’s *Landscapes of War and Memory: The Two World Wars in Canadian Literature and the Arts, 1977-2007* (2014), Neta Gordon’s *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I* (2014), and Alicia Fahey’s doctoral dissertation, *Remediating the First World War: Literary and Visual Constructions of English-Canadian Cultural Memory* (UBC, 2017). Joel Baetz’s recent *Battle Lines: Canadian Poetry in English and the First World War* (2018) represents the only book-length treatment of Canadian poetry of the Great War period.
- 4 It is difficult to verify how many short stories Bird published in these pulp magazines, since there is no complete holding of either *War Stories* or *Canadian War Stories* at any library or institution. Another problem with the identification of Bird’s fiction is

that Brian Douglas Tennyson's terminological usage varies in his description of entries, sometimes "story," other times "fictional story" as well as "short story." A third challenge is that there are a number of discrepancies between Tennyson's bibliography and Phil Stephensen-Payne's massive, although by all appearances comprehensive, online magazine index (www.philsp.com/), particularly for *War Stories*.

- 5 One exception to this correlation between novel writing and the officer class is Harold Bengé Atlee, who was a medical officer but who wrote mostly war short stories; see Tennyson 22-23. Arguably, Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed*, because of its fragmentary and episodic nature, as well as its shorter length, could be classified as a long short story rather than a novella—and thus in keeping with my correlation, since Harrison served as a non-commissioned member in the Canadian army.
- 6 "His Deputy" first appeared in the April 1927 issue of *The Busy East of Canada*. Bird reprinted several of his war stories, sometimes under different titles.
- 7 Atlee was born in Pictou, Nova Scotia, and became a medical officer with the Irish Fusiliers; Miell emigrated to Alberta from Stratford, England, in 1911 and enlisted in the 50th Battalion in 1915; Dent was born in Toronto and served in the 74th Battalion. For a full description of these soldier-writers, see their entries in Tennyson's *The Canadian Experience of the Great War: A Guide to Memoirs* (2013). Born and raised in Alberta, Cruickshank was perhaps best known for his air war stories; see Don Hutchinson's biographical entry on Cruickshank at *Age of Aces Books*.

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