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Tsawalk: Rupturing Canada's First World War Origin Story in *Redpatch*

Alicia Fahey

In an early scene in Raes Calvert and Sean Harris Oliver's play *Redpatch* (2019), the protagonist's Naniiqsu (grandmother), She Rides Between, reproaches her grandson for enlisting in the First World War: "This is the mamaałni [white people] war, Rock Head. You want to leave your home — go over to some piece of land you've never even seen before — to what? To fight for the whites?" (25). Later, when Kʷísat insists on fighting for his country, She Rides Between retorts, "Country? When did we all of a sudden become part of the whole country?" (26). She Rides Between is the primary proponent of a counternarrative that displaces the settler-centred mythology of heroic sacrifice and birth of a nation that traditionally dominates narratives of the First World War in Canada. Contemporary Canadian literature has increasingly questioned the significance of the war, emphasizing instead its atrocities and traumas. Within this context of dissenting war narratives, She Rides Between asserts an under-represented perspective of Indigenous peoples and reveals how war is antithetical to the Nuučaaṅuł (Nuu-chah-nulth) worldview.

Read as a work that centres the overlooked perspectives of Indigenous soldiers, *Redpatch* underscores the harmful effects of patriarchal, heteronormative conceptions of masculinity endorsed by Western, colonial worldviews. This message is most acutely conveyed through the representation of the battle of Vimy Ridge as a moment of rupture, which suspends the celebratory moment of capturing the ridge and refuses to endorse the dominant mythology of the battle. In so doing, *Redpatch* expands the scope of the First World War by locating it within the broader context of settler colonialism in Canada, echoing Patrick Wolfe's oft-cited assertion that settler colonialism is "a structure not an event."[1] Given the play's effort to reframe the war within the "logic of elimination" (Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism" 387) and to dispel the "warrior ethic" (Winegard 48), I examine how *Redpatch*'s rupturing of the Vimy Ridge mythology brings to light the links between elite

Indigenous masculinities (Hokowhitu) and settler-colonial violence. Commensurate with the play's critical reading of the war's impact on Indigenous soldiers and their kin, my reading of *Redpatch* calls attention to the incorporation of Nuučaan̓uł origin stories, which provide alternative paradigms to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Kʷísat's psychological break at the battle of Vimy Ridge, combined with the displacement of the Vimy Ridge narrative by the Nuučaan̓uł origin stories, brings into relief Indigenous resilience in the conditions of rupture, underlining the power of live performance as an act of reclamation.

Indigenous Presence in the First World War

In *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War*, Timothy Winegard critiques the "warrior ethic," the default paradigm through which Indigenous peoples in Canada have been represented in the context of the First World War. Using examples of well-known figures such as Francis Pegahmagabow, a highly decorated Ojibwe soldier known for his sniper abilities, and Mike "Miistatisomitai" Mountain Horse of the Kainai tribe, recipient of the Distinguished Conduct Medal, Winegard asserts that singling out individuals implies that Indigenous enlistment was an extraordinary occurrence when, in reality, nearly four thousand Indigenous men served in the Canadian forces during the First World War.[2] According to Winegard, this enlistment number represents thirty-five percent of the population of military-aged Indigenous men and is "roughly equal to the percentage of European-Canadians who enlisted" (6). Although the enlistment numbers are relatively equal, "Paternalistic and authoritative policies prevailed and the recognition of [Indigenous] military contributions was fast forgotten. War service, both on and off the battlefield, did not alter their socio-economic or political realities within Canada, nor did it hasten the attainment of equal rights or enfranchisement. Following the war, veterans were also denied access to most veteran programs" (Winegard 168-69). In short, the colonial policies and attitudes that exploited Indigenous peoples in Canada prior to the "Great War" persisted after it ended.

There are limitations to Winegard's text, some of which Winegard himself points out. In particular, his study does not include Métis soldiers because in 1914 Métis peoples were not legally bound by the Indian Act, and they enlisted in the war in the same manner as European Canadians (xviii). His study also excludes Inuit soldiers, large-

ly because their remote locations and small populations exempted them from policies such as the Indian Act and conscription, so Inuit peoples were "wholly ignored in both policy and practice" by both the Ministry of Militia and Indian Affairs (xviii). The fact that these numbers do not exist is further evidence of the racist and exclusionary policies that have characterized settler-colonial relationships with Indigenous peoples since first contact. Despite these limits, Winegard importantly situates Indigenous participation in the First World War within a broader framework of war in Canada that both precedes and follows the 1914-18 conflict. He notes that the inclusion of Indigenous soldiers was "not a departure from, *but rather a continuation of*, the pragmatic tradition of imperial and Canadian governments to use [Indigenous peoples] in a military capacity only when it suited British Canadian interests" (8; emphasis added). This panoramic view of Indigenous peoples' involvement in Canadian conflicts underscores the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism in Canada and identifies war as one of the means through which assimilative and genocidal enterprises have been deployed to undermine Indigenous sovereignty and rights.

In what follows, I examine Calvert and Oliver's representation of an Indigenous experience of the First World War in *Redpatch*. To get to the play, I first connect Winegard's broadened framework of Indigenous involvement in Canadian conflicts to Wolfe's assertion that settler colonialism is "a structure not an event." This reframing of the temporality of the First World War radically decentres Canada's origin story, which traditionally has touted the war as a formative event for the nation. *Redpatch* reiterates this decentring by representing the battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917 as a moment of rupture, making the play an important contribution to the oeuvre of contemporary Canadian First World War dramas.

Settler Colonialism as a Structure, not an Event

In "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Wolfe argues that settler colonialism, at its foundation, is a struggle over land. To summarize, when settler-invaders depend on stealing land from Indigenous inhabitants in order to build their country, they subscribe to the "logic of elimination" in order to obtain their territory (387). Wolfe explains how assimilation is a mode of elimination by tracing its relation to frontier killing:

> When invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop — or, more to the point, become relatively trivial — when it moves on from the era of frontier homicide. Rather, narrating that history involves charting the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures whereby a logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses, and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development and complexification of settler society. This is not a hierarchical procedure. (402)

In other words, assimilative measures are part of the same logic used in frontier killing for the purpose of stealing land. Because "[s]ettler colonialism destroys to replace," the attempted erasure of Indigenous cultural identity can be better understood as one of several stages in the process of settler colonialism (388). From contact to the present day, the process of colonization relies on the elimination of Indigenous peoples in order to access their territory. This is not a moment of rupture (i.e., an isolated event) but part of an ongoing agenda to assert ownership of Indigenous land and dominance over Indigenous bodies.

In a Canadian context, Wolfe's argument reveals that enlisting Indigenous soldiers in the First World War was another form of assimilation motivated by the settler-colonial state's desire to steal Indigenous land. Put differently, the First World War was a different modality of the logic of frontier killing. In the early years of the war, there was fierce resistance to the creation of all-Indigenous units, with Canada and Britain using enlistment in the war as another form of assimilation into Euro-Canadian society (Winegard 10). After the war, Indigenous land that had been allocated to Indigenous nations through formal treaty agreements was handed over to war veterans, yet veterans of Indigenous ancestry were not afforded access to veterans' programs or their resources. Through their participation in the war, the logic of elimination thus continued, both for those who died in the war and for those who survived it, the latter experiencing that logic in material ways, including but not limited to land dispossession, racism, denied access to resources, residential schools, and the Indian Act.[3] As Wolfe puts it, "Here, in essence, is assimilation's Faustian bargain — have our settler world, but lose your Indigenous soul. Beyond any doubt, this is a kind of death" ("Settler Colonialism" 397). In Canada, some of the numerous effects of assimilation that result in this "kind of death" include loss of language,

land, sovereignty, and community and family structures. Assimilation and the logic of elimination thus intersect with the hegemonic ideals of masculinity that compel Kʷísat to enlist in the war in the first place. As Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson note in their study of Indigenous men and masculinities, "The racialized and gendered perceptions of Indigenous peoples globally are used, in part, as justification for both the access to Indigenous lands and resources and the subordination of Indigenous peoples by white men and, to a lesser extent but in significant ways, by white women in support of white male power structures" (10). Relatedly, they note, "the performance of Indigenous masculinities has been profoundly impacted by colonization and the imposition of a white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy that has left a lasting and negative legacy for Indigenous women, children, Elders, men and their communities as a whole" (4). With this in mind, building upon the conceptual framework provided by Winegard and Wolfe, in the remainder of this essay I examine how *Redpatch* participates in this reframing of the First World War by depicting it not as an exceptional event but as part of the ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Remembering Vimy Ridge

Redpatch was first produced by Hardline Productions in North Vancouver, with support from Presentation House Theatre, in March and April 2017, to commemorate the hundred-year anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge. It was later relaunched by Arts Theatre Company in Vancouver in March 2019. The protagonist of *Redpatch* is named Halfblood or, in the Nuučaanuł language, Kʷísat, which means "mixed-blood or from mixed places" (Calvert and Oliver xiii). The setting of the one-act play oscillates between the Western Front of the First World War and Kʷísat's home on Nootka Island, a small island off the northwest coast of Vancouver Island.[4] The temporal structure of the play incorporates past, present, and future, the last of which is represented through visions and premonitions. The shift among these temporal realms is often indicated by the presence of Raven, cross-cast with Kʷísat's Naniiqsu. She Rides Between gives Kʷísat a medicine bag that contains, among other things, "Smooth pebbles. Wet stones carved from the sky," a refrain that Kʷísat repeats when he is in need of grounding (22). This gift from his Naniiqsu protects him in battle and facilitates his movement through time and space.

Kʷísat enlists in the war because he wants to be a "warrior" (24). This desire derives from two significant colonial influences. First is his white father, who, Kʷísat tells his best friend, Jonathan, "was a warrior" (50). Second is Kʷísat's residential school experience. During that time, Kʷísat and Jonathan surreptitiously take a canoe out into the ocean to prove that they are warrior heroes. Sam McKegney identifies residential schools as one of the many "colonial technologies" that complicate Indigenous identities "by the layering of racialized, patriarchal gender systems over pre-existing, tribally specific cosmologies" (2). Certainly, the colonial influences operate in direct opposition to the "tribally specific cosmologies" enacted by Kʷísat's grandmother. Kʷísat's and Jonathan's version of masculinity, characterized by individuality and competition, will later be revealed not only as toxic but also as fatal for Jonathan and near fatal (or fatal) for Kʷísat, depending on how one interprets the ending of the play. Both Kʷísat and Jonathan have internalized what Brendan Hokowhitu refers to as "elite Indigenous masculinities," which constitute "a particular form of masculinity that has developed since colonisation, in part at least mimicking dominant forms of invader/settler masculinity" (32). Hokowhitu's definition further elucidates the romanticization of the warrior/hero figure that propels Kʷísat to enlist. According to Hokowhitu, "the disordering of indigenous epistemologies that proceeded from the colonial complex compelled indigenous masculinities to interweave with the colonial beliefs about indigenous men, and with the patriarchy and hetero-normativity of dominant forms of invader/settler masculinity . . . inherently tied to European humanism" (34). Kʷísat is deeply affected by the violent and destructive behaviours of this particular brand of masculinity; he implores his sergeant for rest leave but is denied. During the Christmas Day armistice in 1914, he encounters Jonathan at a tavern on the Western Front. The reunited childhood friends become inseparable and rely on each other for support as they try to survive the war — although a twist at the climax of the play complicates this reunion.

At first glance, there are some similarities between *Redpatch* and other Canadian First World War plays. The strongest similarity occurs between *Redpatch* and Vern Thiessen's *Vimy*, unsurprising considering that Calvert and Oliver came up with the idea for *Redpatch* while Oliver was performing in *Vimy* (Jones). Like *Vimy*, *Redpatch* represents stereotypical characters from various regions of Canada. In *Redpatch*, the military unit consists of Dickie, a private from Manitoba; Howard Thomas,

a medical student from Ontario; and Bam-Bam, a private from Quebec. The stereotypes also reveal the racist attitudes underlying the Canadian "multicultural" milieu. Sergeant MacGuinty says to the platoon, "I don't like Indians! But the truth is I don't like any of you either. I don't like Indians, I don't like Frenchmen, I don't like . . . smart people, and I certainly don't like no pimply faced farm boys from Saskatchewan" (34). These sorts of comments also occur in *Vimy* but are abated by the play's broader message of unity. *Redpatch* is slightly more critical of the multicultural agenda than the majority of Canadian First World War dramas.

There is a direct correlation between the message of unity in *Vimy* and a reluctance to critique explicitly the Canadian nation. In many contemporary Canadian First World War plays, there is a tendency to critique war in general while paradoxically celebrating the First World War. Neta Gordon refers to this contradiction as a "double narrative" in her exhaustive study *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Literary Responses to World War I* and notes that "despite various efforts to depict the material horrors of warfare — which include both the familiar degradations of the trenches and the overwhelming fact of death — the larger event of war is often portrayed as a site of cultural progression" (14).[5] Indeed, Canadian First World War plays align with Jonathan Vance's observation that the need to find a "use value" in the war supplements the need to justify the tremendous losses that Canadians endured (9). However, often overlooked is that this idea of "cultural progression" is deployed at the expense of Indigenous nations, a fact that becomes apparent when the war is viewed not as an event but as part of the broader structure of settler colonialism. For this reason, *Redpatch* offers a much-needed alternative to the unifying narratives of war seen in other Canadian plays.[6]

The medium of theatre is especially apt for conveying this alternative narrative. Although one aspires to influence an audience's understanding of an event through the affects of live performance, Jill Carter makes the important observation that Indigenous theatre can make "performative interventions on the colonial project through potent articulations of reclamation" (33). Relatedly, Jason Woodman Simmonds describes the reclamation of "Aboriginal performance traditions" as a kind of land claim that is "not only about claiming artistic territory in a predominantly non-Native-run theatre industry that has either ignored Aboriginal performers or perpetuated typecast roles, it is also a reminder that Canada was and is on Native ground" (169). *Redpatch*'s resistance

to and restorying of the battle of Vimy Ridge is one of the primary ways in which the play participates in this act of reclamation.

I was fortunate to see *Redpatch* in 2019 at the Arts Club Theatre in Vancouver. The small theatre created an intimate setting and emphasized the physical theatre influence, made evident by actors jumping on and off the stage, moving to music and drumbeats in dance, and running up and down the theatre aisles. In the "Playwrights' Note," the authors indicate that "We wanted to make the audience feel as though they were inside the war, like they were huddled inside the trench right beside the characters" (xii). In my experience, the playwrights accomplished this goal. Additionally, the minimalist set design served an important function: it permitted the audience to imagine the frequent transitions between Europe and Canada; sandbags on the front lines also functioned as rocks along the water in British Columbia. The theatre was quite dark. The light cast shadows, making it difficult to see at times, adding to the chaotic atmosphere of the battle scenes. Dry ice also obscured the stage for both scenes on the Western Front and scenes back on Nootka Island, located in a fog zone and often surrounded by heavy clouds (xii). The opportunity to experience the live performance brought to light Lauri Scheyer's assertion that performances of war "convey the admittedly incommensurate nature of war as a means of illuminating its fundamentally inhumane decimation" (1). Indeed, the irony of witnessing live bodies perform death reveals the limit to which war can be represented, yet Scheyer insists (and I agree) that "theatre and performance, as modes of creating community and empathy, play a special and ineradicable role in human history to overcome obstacles" (2). I believe in live theatre's potential to evoke what Dominick LaCapra calls "empathic unsettlement" through the embodied act of witnessing (41). The generative potential of this kind of witnessing is described by Jesse Rae Archibald-Barber, Kathleen Irwin, and Moira J. Day in their introduction to *Performing Turtle Island: Indigenous Theatre on the World Stage*. They assert that "public, live interaction produces a space of equanimity and empowerment through an embodied mutual call to action in which situations and relations are made palpable and transformative for all present" (xvii). In *Redpatch*, then, restorying the Vimy Ridge narrative is a performative act of intervention in the colonial project.

For the most part, plays about Canada and the First World War have echoed historical accounts that represent Vimy Ridge as a formative moment for the Canadian nation. This version of the war is widely

celebrated in popular histories and commemorative events including, but not limited to, newspaper articles, the Veterans Affairs Canada website, and Remembrance Day ceremonies. As Pierre Berton puts it in his popular history of the battle,

> It has become commonplace to say that Canada came of age at Vimy Ridge. For seventy years it has been said so often — in Parliament, at hundreds of Vimy dinners and in thousands of Remembrance Day addresses, in newspaper editorials, school texts, magazine articles, and more than a score of books about Vimy and Canada's role in the Great War — that it is almost an article of faith. (294-95)

The phenomenon that Berton describes has continued since his book was published in 1986.[7] On the one hand, the First World War marked an important turning point in Canadian cultural history because it accelerated the dominion's transition to an independent nation-state. Commemorative performances such as the ones that Berton describes reinforce the power of the state and attempt to justify the atrocities of the war in the name of Canadian sovereignty. On the other hand, an increasing number of scholars, artists, and writers question the importance of the war. Among them is Michael Valpy, who, in his *Globe and Mail* article "Vimy Ridge: The Making of a Myth," attests to the relative insignificance of the battle in the broader context of the war. According to Valpy, "Canadians, and only Canadians, call it the battle of Vimy Ridge. . . . [I]n everyone else's historical lexicon, it was a limited tactical victory in the First World War's horrendous Battle of Arras, which the British and their allies lost."[8] Valpy's skepticism is reiterated by Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, who derisively summarize the popular version of the battle of Vimy Ridge:

> The four days at Vimy Ridge not only showed the world what Canadians could do, but showed Canadians themselves what they could accomplish if they all worked together. . . . They used to laugh at Canadians. They said Vimy Ridge could not be taken. But after the great Battle of Vimy Ridge, they stopped laughing. The Canadians had arrived. Canada rejoiced. And every year on 11 November, every true Canadian honours the memory of Vimy and our veterans. There it was, on the record: 5:30 a.m., 9 April 1917. Vimy 1917. Turning point in the war. Birth of a nation. (7)[9]

McKay and Swift encapsulate the master narrative of Vimy Ridge that has dominated the Canadian imagination for over a century, yet they reproduce it only to draw attention to its fallibility. Following this description, they write that "This standard version of Vimy is a highly dubious, mythologized narrative. It is akin to a fairy tale for overaged boys who want their history to be as heart-thumping and simplistic as a video game" (7). Whether one supports it or not, Vimy Ridge has become entrenched as a "coming-of-age story" for the Canadian nation.

Yet, as Jerry Wasserman points out in his review of the production of *Redpatch* in 2019, the play is "a powerful addition and corrective to the mythology around Canada's involvement in the Great War." Importantly, he also comments that the play is about Kʷísat's coming of age. Wasserman does not explicitly supplant Kʷísat's story with the Canadian nation's *bildungsroman*, but the distinction is noteworthy because it moves away from the national narrative and instead draws attention to how Kʷísat's coming of age is framed within the precarious contexts of settler colonialism and colonial war. This is another way in which *Redpatch* undermines the celebratory mythology of Vimy Ridge, providing the "corrective" lens to which Wasserman alludes. Thus, *Redpatch* participates in telling a different kind of war story. It does so by shifting the focus of the coming-of-age story and critiquing the unifying narrative of the war, replacing it with a story of the war as part of a broader structure of colonialism rather than an exceptional event. In addition to the tactics already described, there are two primary ways in which *Redpatch* effectively ruptures the formative mythology of the First World War in general and the battle of Vimy Ridge in particular. One is through the inclusion of Indigenous creation stories that challenge the temporality and mythology of the colonial narrative. The second is through Kʷísat's psychological break at the battle of Vimy Ridge.

Heeshook-ish Tsawalk: "Everything Is One"

In the paratextual materials in *Redpatch*, Calvert and Oliver identify Umeek/E. Richard Atleo's book *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview* as an influential text. Umeek is a hereditary chief of the Ahousaht First Nation and recognized as the first Indigenous person in British Columbia to earn a doctoral degree (Laskaris). In the introduction to his book, Umeek writes that

> In the Nuu-chah-nulth language, *heshook-ish tsawalk* means "everything is one." *Heshook-ish tsawalk* is a Nuu-chah-nulth perspective that is inclusive of all reality, both physical and metaphysical. It is the thesis of this book and consequently the basis for the development of an Indigenous theory. . . . The notion that all things are one stems directly from assumptions found in Nuu-chah-nulth origin stories that *predate the conscious historical notion of civilization and scientific progress. This theory provides another interpretation about the nature of existence suggested by origin stories that are evolution-based*. (xi; emphasis added)

Umeek's expansion of time beyond the settler-colonial framework reinforces the separation of Indigenous epistemologies from colonial epistemologies. In contrast to the Canadian origin story of Vimy Ridge (just over a century old), Umeek shares origin stories from time immemorial, passed down through story, song, and practice for generations. As Carter explains, creation stories of the original peoples "could be viewed as a means to active resistance against the onslaughts of famine, natural disaster, and intertribal warfare that decimated populations and sometimes threatened to eradicate tribal nations, or as expressions of passive resistance against the agents of colonization and assimilation who came after them" (33-34). This aspect of resistance is important within the context of Vimy Ridge, which, in its claim to the "birth of a nation," performs an erasure of Indigenous peoples on their traditional, ancestral homelands since before colonial contact.

Umeek explains that Nuučaan̓uł stories ask the grand questions of life and that the answers to these questions "provide an orientation to life and reality that, prior to colonialism, allowed the Nuu-chah-nulth to manage their lives and communities for millennia" (5). The stories that Umeek shares were collected in "the original language from the house of [his] grandmother Margaret Atleo in 1972" (4). These stories are incorporated into *Redpatch*, thus providing a counterpoint to the origin story of Canada. Whereas Canada's story is saturated in toxic masculinities that purport domination and conquest, Nuučaan̓uł origin stories explore ways of living life harmoniously; they complicate easy distinctions between good and evil, cowardice and bravery, life and death, physical and spiritual. Positioning these stories against the colonial narrative reveals the negative impacts of colonialism on Nuučaan̓uł ways of life by showing what is at risk of being lost in colonial encounters.

The prologue of *Tsawalk* tells the story of Umeek's great-grandfather Keesta, a whaling chief, whose whaling expedition goes awry when the whale harpooned (in accordance with protocol) begins to tow him and the paddlers away from the shore. To ensure the safety of himself and his crew, Keesta begins cutting the rope that holds the whale, when Ah-up-wha-eek (Wren) appears, lands on the whale, and advises him to send the whale back to where it was harpooned. Keesta agrees, and the whale returns to the scene and dies, as per the regular process of the hunting ritual. When Keesta returns to land to investigate why the hunt was disrupted, he discovers that a series of misunderstandings occurred at his home at the same moment that the whale was harpooned, thus disrupting the harmony of the whaling ritual (x). That the events on land affected the expedition at sea exemplifies the interconnection of *Tsawalk*. The story's message is that all of nature, including humans and non-humans, exists in a state of balance; thus, when harmony is lost, it affects the entire system. In short, a healthy interrelationship of all living things depends on a mutual appreciation of *heshook-ish tsawalk*.

Redpatch's adaptation of Umeek's story is central to the play's plot, character development, and theme. In *Redpatch*, Qu?usin (Raven) replaces Wren and lands on K'aka'win ("King of the Ocean. Orca Whale. Protector") (xiii). The story is delivered by She Rides Between but not revealed in its entirety until nearly the end of the play. Blinded by his objective to become a warrior, Kʷísat interrupts his grandmother's telling because he fails to recognize the lesson of the story. While on the front, through acts of recall, fragments of the story return to him to show him how to survive the war. The origin story also becomes conflated with his traumatic memory of the day that he and Jonathan took the canoe out into the ocean. On that day, Jonathan harpoons K'aka'win, and the whale pulls him under the water. After the boys resurface, Raven lands on the rope and delivers a message. Kʷísat is unable to remember the message until nearly the end of the play. This partial erasure of the story, along with the fragmented state in which it returns to him, reflects the cultural erasure inflicted by the assimilative agenda of the residential school system and by the war.

The story of Raven and Orca in *Redpatch* functions as an act of intervention by actively disrupting the narrative of the Western Front. Every time Kʷísat recollects part of the story, the plot shifts and returns to Nootka Island. Effectively, the adapted version of the Nuučaanuł

origin story disrupts the progression of the Western Front insofar as it delays the culminating moment at Vimy Ridge. The belated revelation of the origin story is symptomatic of traumatic events that have caused Kʷísat to repress the memory: namely, the trauma of residential schools, Jonathan's death, and the war. Near the end of the play, Kʷísat finally remembers Raven's words: "Let go of the rope, warrior. Return home," followed by "Let go of this war, young one" (116). When he finally remembers the ending, he concludes that war "doesn't make us heroes"; rather, "It drowns us" (117). This adaptation of the Nuučaanuł creation story explicitly critiques the narrative of heroic sacrifice that dominates colonial accounts of the war. The Nuučaanuł story forges a clear connection between the trauma of residential schools and the trauma of the First World War, illustrating that settler colonialism is a structure, not an event. In order for Kʷísat to survive the war, he has to eschew the toxic ideals of elite Indigenous masculinities and return to "soft power" found in the creation stories of his ancestors, which provide a "form of resilience that finds sovereignty through love instead of adversarial force" (Carter 35-36). Put differently, he has to "let go of the rope," both literally and metaphorically. Calvert and Oliver's version of the origin story has an explicit connection to Umeek's prologue. Through this connection, it becomes apparent that the message of the war represented in *Redpatch* is one of extreme *disharmony* as opposed to the colonial narrative of unity.

The rupturing of the colonial narrative of the First World War is further compounded by the play's re-enactment of the battle of Vimy Ridge. In addition to the intentional delay of the traditionally climactic moment of "victory," the message of rupture is reinforced when Kʷísat finally arrives at the ridge. The play begins and ends at Vimy Ridge, repeating the same lines for approximately two pages. In this beginning and ending, the audience witnesses the Canadian 1st Division in creeping barrage formation, preparing to go over the top. When Sergeant MacGuinty delivers the order to his troops, Kʷísat responds with a resounding "No!" (6). Significantly, this is his first line in the play. The play thus begins with both an act and a declaration of resistance. His "no" is a refusal to fulfill the well-known narrative of capturing the ridge. Moreover, this moment of refusal demonstrates the failure of the troops to work together. War is antithetical to the harmony of *Tsawalk*. The creeping barrage is a strategy used to bombard the enemy with heavy artillery. It involves the artillery fire moving forward in stages,

just ahead of the advancing infantry, and it requires precise timing in order to work. Failure to time the advances of the artillery and infantry accurately would result in the artillery killing the platoon's own soldiers. The version of Vimy Ridge presented at this moment in the play contradicts the narrative of unity when, literally, the troops are unable to work in unison. After Kʷísat proclaims "No!" he yells "Wait!" (6), followed by "We're going too fast" (7). The stage directions that follow describe "*An explosion. Half-Blood is thrown through the air. Sound distorts, as if under water*" (7). After the explosion, there are several abrupt shifts back and forth between the story of Raven and Orca and the battle of Vimy Ridge, using the message of disharmony communicated by the Nuučaanuł origin story to underscore the disharmony of the war, a message solidified by the failure of the platoon to enact the creeping barrage successfully. Vimy Ridge has been celebrated as the first time that Canadian troops fought together *as Canadians*, and for this reason it has been represented as a moment of national unity. The disunity represented in *Redpatch* firmly contradicts this message and refuses to celebrate the battle as a formative moment of the Canadian nation.

When this opening scene at Vimy Ridge is repeated later in the play, it is followed by a premonition in which Kʷísat and Jonathan revisit the canoe event at the residential school. Kʷísat says to Jonathan that "My grandmother once told me a story about a whale and a raven . . . but I can't remember how it goes" (107). The oscillation between the Western Front and Nootka Island creates tension as the play builds to its climactic moment, eventually revealing the plot twist: on the day that the boys stole the canoe, Jonathan refused to let go of the rope and drowned. Kʷísat believes that Jonathan has been fighting alongside him during the war when, in reality, Jonathan died when they were boys. When he enlisted in the war, Kʷísat signed Jonathan's name on the enrolment papers. The rest of the soldiers believe that Kʷísat *is* Jonathan. This moment of revelation causes Kʷísat to experience what is described in the play as a "psychological break" (113). He "*loses consciousness and collapses*" (113). When he awakens, he is back with his Naniiqsu on Nootka Island, and for the first time the audience is privy to the entirety of the origin story. Like Jonathan and Kʷísat, the great warrior sets out to sea, harpoons K'aka'win, and is pulled from his boat. She Rides Between says that "The cold water crushed the warrior's lungs as they descended, but the warrior would not let go of the rope" (115). The whale surfaces, Raven lands on the rope, and, just before the whale takes a second dive,

Raven's words are revealed: "Let go of the rope, warrior. Return home" (116). Thus, instead of a moment of unity in which Canadians work together to capture the ridge, the version of Vimy Ridge in *Redpatch* is a moment of rupture in which everything falls apart psychologically, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Kʷísat's psychological break is a moment of rupture as Kʷísat struggles to understand the reality that his friend is dead and that he has dissociated to cope with the traumas of war and grief. Instead of celebrating his "accomplishments" during the war, the psychological break ruptures romantic notions of war and bravery, making visible the violence of elite Indigenous masculinity.

The battle of Vimy Ridge never achieves its celebratory moment in *Redpatch.* Howard Thomas dies in battle, a tragic misunderstanding between Kʷísat and Dickie results in the murder of Sergeant MacGuinty, and Kʷísat experiences a splitting of self when he realizes that his reality is based on an illusion. This moment of unravelling takes place *at the battle of Vimy Ridge*. The trauma of residential schools when Jonathan and Kʷísat steal the canoe coalesces with the trauma of the First World War, thereby locating the war in general and Vimy Ridge in particular in an ongoing series of systemic attempts to eliminate or assimilate Indigenous peoples. *Redpatch* reminds its audience that the war is part of a larger structural history of colonial violence and undermines the importance that Canadians have attributed to the "Great War" for over a century.

The broader message of the play is that "war doesn't make us heroes"; rather, "It drowns us" (117, 129). In *Redpatch*, there is no celebratory victory at Vimy Ridge. There is no unity in disunity. The goal of the war in Kʷísat's mind shifts from being a warrior hero to coming home. Kʷísat does make it home by the end of the play, but it is unclear whether or not he resides in the physical world or the spiritual world. In the final face-off between Jonathan and Kʷísat, the two soldiers kneel on the ground, "as though they are mirroring each other" (132). Kʷísat removes his gas mask and inhales the chlorine gas. The stage directions indicate that "*HALF-BLOOD continues to breathe in; as he inhales, so must JONATHAN. HALF-BLOOD fills his lungs with a final breath; so does JONATHAN. JONATHAN releases the trench shovel and the medicine bag, and collapses. HALF-BLOOD reaches down and picks up the medicine bag*" (132). This act of exterminating the voice of elite Indigenous masculinities, followed by the retrieval of his medicine bag, is a powerful act of reclamation. Kʷísat then disappears into the smoke and re-

emerges at home. His Naniiqsu embraces him and prepares to tell him another story (134). This time Kʷísat is ready to listen. This readiness to hear his grandmother's story is a pivotal moment in his coming of age. As Hokowhitu concludes, "there is nothing biologically determined nor culturally essentialist about masculine oppression" (42). This means that it is possible to undercut the power of elite Indigenous masculinities. Hokowhitu proceeds to explain that, "to envisage new forms of resistance, self-critical awareness is key" (44). By the end of the play, Kʷísat has achieved this self-critical awareness. The return to his home, to his land, to story, to his Naniiqsu, and to the place where the whale was first harpooned represents a readiness to receive this intergenerational transfer of knowledge and wisdom — a bond that was, and continues to be, heavily threatened by colonial intervention. In order to return to the theory of *Tsawalk*, Kʷísat needs to destroy his manifestation of Jonathan, who represents the persistence of colonial ideals that he has inherited from residential school. One cannot help but wonder if Jonathan ever existed or if he was simply a figment of Kʷísat's imagination: an asymmetrical twin of sorts who acts as a foil to reveal the truth to Kʷísat. Regardless, the truth is that he needs to cut the rope and let go of the harmful ideologies that indoctrinated him in the first place, including the red patch that identifies him as a Canadian infantry soldier and acts as an assimilative signifier by subsuming the wearer's identity under the identity of the Canadian corps. The return home is echoed by the structure of the play, which also returns to the beginning. The repetition is now contextualized with the rest of the play and thus brings clarity to its prologue:

> *RAVEN appears in human form*
> RAVEN
> What is life? It is the flash of the firefly in the night. It is the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.
> *RAVEN transforms into animal form, and takes flight toward the battlefield*.
> *SHIFT*. (3)

The prologue frames the play with broader questions about the human condition — questions central to Nuučaanuł origin stories — and presents the theme of transformation, a central tenet of the Nuučaanuł worldview (Umeek 10). The prologue also alludes to the story "How Son of Raven Captured the Day," shared by Umeek in *Tsawalk*, which describes how Son of Raven brought light to the world. The references

to light in the prologue of *Redpatch*, spoken by Raven, draw connections to this story, in which Son of Raven transforms into many different forms in order to capture the sun. As Umeek puts it, "In one sense, this story about Son of Raven is completely concerned with communication and travel between the physical and spiritual worlds," but he also asserts that the story is about the human condition, and he equates the "natural desire for light" with a "natural desire to do great deeds" (11). Notably, Umeek explains that Son of Raven's ego impedes his ability to succeed on his journey and that these multiple failures preceding his success are reminders to value cooperation and community; great deeds are not accomplished in isolation (12). *Redpatch* thus begins with an origin story but not the one familiar to a colonial audience. Instead, it begins with a story about reciprocity, communal responsibility, ambition, ego, and a flawed but likeable trickster protagonist that predates colonial contact. Like Son of Raven, Kʷísat will also experience various transformations as he comes to terms with his identity, his past, and his culture. In essence, *Redpatch* begins with a gesture to the theory of *Tsawalk*.

In the end, does the medicine bag save Kʷísat? Does he let go of the rope in time to save himself? Umeek explains that the Nuučaanuł see the physical and spiritual realms as united. The origin stories

> [do] not differentiate between the physical and spiritual worlds because, unlike the contemporary division between the two, the Nuu-chah-nulth saw the physical world as a manifestation of the spiritual. More important, for all life forms, the two worlds were experientially one, which is the meaning of the Nuu-chah-nulth phrase *heshook-ish tsawalk* (everything is one). (10)

Umeek's explanation sheds light on the structure of the play as well as its ambiguous ending. The Nuučaanuł stories are not bound by rigid divisions between the physical and spiritual realms, which is why Kʷísat can travel between the two. Moreover, the Nuučaanuł stories resist elite Indigenous masculinities propagated by the colonial agenda. By supplanting Canada's coming-of-age story with Kʷísat's own coming-of-age narrative, *Redpatch* performs a critical intervention in the trajectory of Canadian First World War plays and ruptures the powerful force that has mythologized Vimy Ridge for over a century. All in all, whatever the nature of his homecoming, Kʷísat's return at the end of the play is an act of reclamation that reinforces the notion that Kʷísat does not need

to build a nation or define a nation — he already has a home, and his ancestors have been living there for millennia.

Notes

[1] "[S]ettler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism" 388). See also Wolfe, "Nation."

[2] Both men have also been recognized in Canadian literature. Francis Pegahmagabow inspired Xavier, the protagonist of Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2005), and Mike Mountain Horse inspired the character of Mike in Vern Thiessen's *Vimy* (2008).

[3] Unfair enlistment practices continued in the Second World War, and "Many status Indian soldiers had to become enfranchised before they could sign up to fight in the Second World War, which meant that when they returned to their home communities, they no longer had Indian status" (Joseph).

[4] The name of the island originates from a miscommunication. When newcomers first arrived, the beach keepers greeted them and instructed them to anchor their ships around the bend. The instructions sounded like "nootka," which led the settlers to believe that this was the name of the people whom they had encountered (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council 8:37-8:48).

[5] See also Zacharias.

[6] Other Canadian First World War plays that complicate romantic notions of the war while not doing away with them entirely include John Gray and Eric Peterson's *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1981), Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Dancock's Dance* (1996), R.H. Thomson's *The Lost Boys* (2002), Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding* (2002), and Kevin Kerr's *Unity (1918)* (2002).

[7] See, for example, Dyer; and Jin. Yet another example is Brian Bethune's observation in *Maclean's*: "Vimy Ridge was hailed by observers then, and by historians ever since, as Canada's giant step on the road from colony to nation" (30).

[8] Valpy's skepticism is warranted. Ultimately, independence from Britain was not fully achieved in the First World War. It was not until 1926 that the Balfour Report declared Canada's autonomy from Britain and not until 1931 that the Statute of Westminster granted Canada full legal freedoms. Subsequent developments on the road to independence include the Canadian Citizenship Act (1946), instituted so that a Canadian citizen did not first have to be classified as a British subject, and, later still, the creation of a Canadian flag in 1965 (until that point, the Canadian Red Ensign was the unofficial national flag).

[9] Another full-length study that complicates the heroic and celebratory narrative of Vimy is *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* (Hayes et al.).

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